LOOKING AT PICTURES

S. C. KAINES SMITH

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REMBRANDT
WOMAN BATHING (HENDRIKJE STOEFFELS, 1654)
National Gallery

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BY

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WITH ELEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THIS little book is an attempt to lift from the minds of people who like pictures in theory and who want to enjoy them in practice the burdensome superstition that to enjoy pictures it is necessary to be a judge of painting. I discovered, while lecturing daily at the National Gallery, that the majority of visitors there were afraid to form, and much more afraid to express, a preference for any picture, for fear of exposing themselves to ridicule, or to the accusation of being "inartistic." The bogey of Art with a capital A stood between them and their natural enjoyment of beauty.

That was one obstacle. Another, more difficult to overcome, was that most of them believed that incapacity to like, *at sight,* any notable picture, of any period or nationality, was evidence of something wrong in themselves. They felt,

and often said, that no doubt such and such a picture was very wonderful, but that they could not for the life of them see why, and if that was "Art," "Art" was beyond them. That fatal phrase, "I know nothing about Art, but I know what I like," was brought out with a kind of complacent despair, and they went away and bought a print of the "Soul's Awakening."

Half the trouble lies at the door of the coiner of that phrase. Most people who go to a picture gallery have just enough interest in "Art" to be aware of its existence, but not enough to induce them really to make up their minds what they do like. Consequently, they either abandon all interest, however feeble, in pictures, or else fall back upon a lazy toleration of such pictures as evoke no thought or effort of the intelligence. Careless appreciation breeds careless production, and the enormous output of fairly efficiently painted but uninteresting pictures produced by modern painters is the response to the public demand for pictures which "know their place" with the rest of the furniture.

Another cause of the lack of interest displayed by the public in the National collections is absence of the sense of possession, present or potential. I will even admit that part of the keen pleasure I derived from lecturing at the

National Gallery arose from the subconscious sense of ownership with which I showed my friends, the public, the treasures of "my" collection; and I shall never forget the startled faces in my audience when once I said to them, "You didn't know you possessed anything so interesting and so beautiful as this picture, did you?" The access of interest in Titian's "Bacchus and Ariadne" was comic, and pathetic as well. It was their very own picture, and therefore worth looking at. I think that was a right spirit, for though perhaps each individual in that group had only a 45-millionth share in the possession of that picture, each one felt that he thereby gained the absolute right to possess it wholly—in heart and understanding—and to know it for his own.

I ask readers of these pages to accept the point of view that the true possessor of a picture is he who can feel that he holds in his mind and in his heart the painter's secret, that he not only knows but also understands why it was painted, and is glad that it was painted. Thus, I hope, they may find in themselves and in the few main principles which I have tried to lay down, the means to become "collectors" not of all and sundry kinds of pictures, but of just those few pictures which give them the joy of

complete, personal, and secret possession by the understanding which is next to creation itself.

S. C. KAINES SMITH

Note.—Reference is given in the text to the catalogue numbers of pictures in the National Gallery, London. (N.G.=National Gallery.)

LOOKING AT PICTURES

CHAPTER I

TASTE AND REASON

"I KNOW what I like." Do you? Think of other arts. What do you like to read? Light novels always? Do you care about good English, or are you interested *only* in the story? Do you like vivid character-drawing, or scenery, or incident, or dialogue? Have you a fancy for epigram, or do you like slowly built-up detail? Apply the same test to painting. You cannot expect to enjoy all pictures equally simply because they are said to be great. If you like "Pickwick Papers," it does not follow that you will enjoy "Vanity Fair." If Tennyson pleases you, it is a thousand to one that you will be bored or annoyed by Masefield. If you delight in Shakespeare, does that mean that you will be quite safe in going away for a holiday with nothing but Milton's "Paradise Lost" in your bag in the way of reading? Obviously not. Why, then, if you

can pore for hours over Wilkie and Frith, should you expect to find equal pleasure in Turner? If Gainsborough gives you something that you can love, why expect to be in equal accord with Holman Hunt? And if Velasquez grips you, it is unreasonable—is it not?—to be annoyed with yourself or with Michelangelo because you do not understand him so surely.

Look at it in this way. The artist has said what he had to say—with a paint brush. You are not obliged to listen to him with your eyes. But if you do so, without attention, you will miss his meaning, and you will not know whether you sympathize with him or not. Consequently he will not interest you. You can no more "skim" and "skip" a picture than you can a book, without losing the fine shades of its meaning. But there are many books that you will not care to read at all, and, also, there are many pictures at which you will never care to look. Count them out for the time being, and set to work on the pictures that *naturally* attract you.

Let us suppose that you like Frith and Wilkie. You are laughed at by your "artistic" friends for liking these "commonplace" pictures, with their laboured detail and plain representation of ordinary things. Be unabashed, and look at them again. Take Frith's "Railway Station,"

for instance. Don't rush at it. Don't take it for granted that you like it because it shows you what a railway station was like at such and such a date, or because the old-fashioned dresses amuse you. Those points were not what made it a great picture when it was new. Frith was not an antiquarian.

Here is the bridal couple being seen off by their friends—all fuss and kisses and congratulations and first class. Here is the forger, with his foot on the footboard of freedom, and the hand of the law on his shoulder—his wife crouching, in tears, in the corner of a third class carriage—all fear and stealth and misery. Here is the schoolboy, off to school, rather resenting the fond attentions of his mamma, and here beside him, sheepish and half-defiant, half-regretful, the lad who has taken the Queen's shilling, with his parents tearful and upbraiding. Here are all the emotions, all the incidents, all the human reactions that have left their crowding ghosts to fill the spaces of all railway stations since railways ran, and to make a railway station what it is to *you*, if you stop to think for a moment. Look at this picture, which you have liked without knowing why, and then go and stand " under the clock " at Charing Cross for a quarter of an hour and *feel* it as Frith felt it, and you will realize

that the reason why you like his picture is because he is saying something about railway stations which has always been at the back of your own mind, and because he is saying it uncommonly well: and what he is saying is that there is no place in the world in which one can be more completely shut off from one's fellow-men than in a railway station. Joy, sorrow, excitement, apathy, routine, adventure—there they are all round you, and you have no clue to them, and you yourself are a secret to every one else—a secret that does not interest them to discover.

That is why the "Railway Station" is a great picture, and it was for that greatness, all the time, that you liked it, whether you knew it or not.

People who do not like Frith will tell you that the picture is overcrowded with incident—that it is artificial in its juxtaposition of sharp contrasts. What they are looking for is a picture of *a* railway station. What Frith painted is a picture of the spirit of all railway stations. They have not understood him. You have. The advantage is on your side.

It is a pity that the better-known "Derby Day" (N.G. 615) does not justify its greater popularity. But approach this picture in the hope of finding in it the peculiar singleness of

purpose that marks the " Railway Station," and you will come away unsatisfied. What is the difference? It lies, I think, in the impression left that in the " Derby Day " the artist is fitting his subject to his art, and displaying his skill as a composer and draughtsman. He is letting you into the secrets of his craft, rather than using his craft to satisfy either your curiosity or your sense of beauty. The way that the masses of this picture open and close, and climb to the culminating point, the distant grand-stand; the cleverness with which the curving line between the central and left-hand groups rises to the same point, pushing forward as it does so, the disappointed punter, and the kneeling acrobat whose arms point the way across a broad blank space to the " pathos-motive " of the hungry child-tumbler in the right foreground, are too suggestive of the action of a conjurer in " forcing " a card, while drawing your attention aside. Lights and shadows are arbitrarily disposed, and all the mass of people and objects is under thorough control, producing an unreal and posed effect, not in harmony with the " colloquiality " of the subject. It is, in short, artificial where the " Railway Station " is spontaneous, sentimental and commonplace where the other is thoughtful and restrained.

Or it is Holman Hunt's "Triumph of the Innocents" before which you are inclined to linger till some one suggests that the pre-Raphaelites represent only a phase in the history of British art, and that by admiring and enjoying this picture you are committing yourself to a "pre-Raphaelite" point of view, or whisper under their breath something about the "sentimentality" of the "Light of the World"

In self-defence, bear in mind that you "commit yourself" to nothing but the thought necessary to the understanding of your own likes and dislikes. Your object, surely, is not to be able to talk about art, but to enjoy pictures—*some* pictures, not all. You are not bound to admire all the work of a man one of whose pictures attracts you. You are not primarily concerned with schools, with "movements," or with technique—these are but processes, and it is their results, the pictures, which are your concern.

And so you will find that it is not "pre-Raphaelite style" that attracts you, nor glow of colour, nor marvel of detail in plant and stone, jewel and robe, but the sequence of thought that unfolds itself as you think the picture out. See how St. Joseph plods earnestly, earthily, splashing through the stream whose waters cover his feet. He is intent only on escape from

human disaster, oblivious of miracle. For him it is no "Triumph of the Innocents," it is only a "Flight into Egypt." But the proud, almost scornful, smile of Our Lady has another meaning. She sees with the heart, though not with the eyes. It is for her the triumph of *her* Innocent, a royal progress to a royal destiny. Only the Child's eyes are open to see the children whose wakening souls are His retinue, and to greet them as they join Him on His pilgrimage. And they, the first sacrifice to the Faith, are not ghosts, not unsubstantial wraiths, though they walk upon the waters with the feet of angels, but living children waking, each as he comes, to a new ecstasy of childhood.

It is to tell you this that the painter has used his skill of colour, of drawing, of composition that marches across the canvas with the tread of armies. Do not think that, because every dancing vision-bubble is painted with such faithful care, every pebble drawn, every leaf and flower set down in the smallest detail, these things have any importance to you in and for themselves; they are only a means to an end, the phrasing, as it were, of a sentence in which every word is chosen for its contributory value to the meaning of the whole, and it is of more importance to you to grasp the whole

meaning than to analyse the process by which that meaning has been expressed.

It is the result which concerns you, not the process. The moment that you begin to find yourself falling back upon consideration of the method of the artist in producing his effect, in order to sustain your interest in the picture, you may be sure that it is because you have come to the end of your interest in its meaning, that is, in the result of his method. Interest in method is perfectly legitimate, very interesting, and very instructive, but it is a technical, not an æsthetic, interest. Although it is true that certain results can only be achieved by certain methods (and it is often interesting to note that the same temperamental peculiarities in an artist which dictate his choice of subject also form his method of painting), it is also true that the means are subordinate to the end, for any artist who has something to say; and to attach more importance to the means than to the end is, for you, an obstacle to the understanding of a picture.

None the less, there is a subtle connection between the thing said and the manner of saying it. A lover who proposed with the intonation and phraseology of an auctioneer at the rostrum would handicap his chances of success, and the

rustic who purposed to roar like any sucking dove rather discounted the lion-like quality of his performance. But the painter's hand and brain are both governed by the same temperament—his own—just like any other ordinary mortal, and he who has delicate and tender things to say will naturally be inclined to paint in a whisper, while trumpeting colour and a bold sweep of the brush will be the natural style of a man whose thoughts run upon bigger lines.

Thus, when (but not until) you have grasped the meaning of Holman Hunt's picture you will begin to find the true enjoyment of the method of the painter, in realizing how the patient and faithful building-up of its every detail is part of the same patience and faith that conceived the idea that it presents. But if a picture arrests your attention because it is " beautifully done," and the most careful analysis and thought fail to reveal to you any other quality, be sure there is something wrong somewhere, either with the picture or with you.

For it must be remembered that while all pictures that are well-painted are not good pictures, it is not true that all pictures that you cannot enjoy or understand are bad pictures. They may be brilliant expressions of ideas which your mind cannot grasp—and you may be none

the worse for that. The ripest classical scholar may turn in despair from the most lucid exposition of the integral calculus. You may have an instant and instinctive grasp of all that Turner seeks to express in his "Ulysses and Polyphemus," without ever being capable of gaining the smallest inkling of the essentials of Alfred Stevens' portrait of Mrs. Colmann. Beauty of colour may be almost a natural language to you, while beauty of form may be almost unintelligible to you as a means of expression. Much may be done by study to widen your horizon of interest, and much of that study may be unconscious, but it is natural and right that you should turn for enjoyment and companionship to the work of a man whose thoughts are like your own, however much you may seek instruction from those who build upon the same basic idea a different superstructure of thought.

For thought is everything—community of thought, clash of thought, growth of thought. To those who will not *think* about the pictures they seek to enjoy I have nothing to say. To those who demand pictures which do not ask them to think I can only say, "Ye have your reward"—in the "pot-boilers" that you are forcing the artist to paint, if he is to make a living by his craft. The only thought he can

put into them is of the price he will get for them, because your only thought of them, once they are on your walls, is of the price you paid for them. It is a square deal—waste of energy for waste of money.

Thus far it would appear that every one has the right to enjoy whatever picture he pleases, so long as he takes the trouble to find out what it is about the picture that makes it enjoyable to him. That is perfectly true so far as it goes, but it does not necessarily follow that every one will thereby get the greatest possible enjoyment out of looking at pictures, or, indeed, that he will derive any benefit from it at all. Merely to follow instinct, to allow oneself to be attracted at haphazard, and to pass by all pictures to which one is not instinctively drawn, is to acknowledge one's own limitations, and even to narrow them by tame submission.

Fortunately this is a danger which even the slightest exercise of thought about the most obviously attractive picture tends automatically to counteract. It may be that it is solely the subject that has attracted you, as—I say it without offence—a child is attracted by the "dear little kittens" in a Christmas number supplement. But if you begin seriously to think about your favourite picture, as a picture—

that is, as another man's translation into the terms of his art of a subject attractive both to you and to him—you will soon discover that what you are seeking in it is some abstract quality, or visual beauty, appropriate to the underlying idea, but going beyond the mere subject represented. Turner's "Ulysses and Polyphemus" is a case in point. If it attracts you at all, it does so primarily without reference to its subject. It is a glowing piece of colour, a decoration, a visual beauty, a thing pleasant to look at. Only secondarily, it is a vivid and dramatic illustration of a familiar story. It might be the first, it could easily be the second, without being a great picture. Yet it is a great picture, and when you have exhausted your enjoyment of it both as a decoration and as an illustration, you are still conscious that it holds you, neither through the eyes nor through the memory, but through the feelings as well. In what way? In this way—through the intimate association between the suggestion of the subject and the suggestion of the manner. That "light that never was on sea or land," sapphire, gold and bronze, vermeil and billowing grey, are the colours of romance, of faëry—it is the long-ago unreality, the lost romance of all adventure in all the ages that have been awakened in you, by the very

extravagance of colour that makes the painting visually beautiful; and in all the later work of Turner there is this quality of romance. The subject turns your thoughts into the right channel, and having done its duty as pilot leaves you to sail at will the seas of your own imagination, lit on your way by rainbow light.

From this point it is a short step to the true æsthetic impression, independent of all beauty or attractiveness of subject. Yet this is the step that people most often hesitate to take. English people especially seem to lack the confidence to cut themselves loose altogether from the guidance of subject. There is a good reason for it, which will be apparent presently. For the moment it is enough to say that a picture which merely reminds you of objects that you like, without adding to your understanding of the qualities that make you like them, may satisfy you if you are concerned only with the objects themselves and not with the artist's thoughts about them or arising out of them, but will fail you altogether if you ask more of it —and most "popular" pictures come under this head. They are mere illustration—or worse, mere suggestion—of objects, not of ideas about objects, nor of beauty, accidental or incidental to objects. You are naturally attracted by

them, because the things they represent are familiar to your mind; but their interest is soon exhausted. It is not as pictures that you have enjoyed them, but as counterfeits of objects. The things they represent are really more interesting than they are themselves, because they are more real.

It comes to this, that, apart from their technical aspect, pictures are enjoyable in the degree in which they suggest a train of thought, and assist in its development; and their technical aspect is enjoyable only in the degree in which the manner of the painting helps this process by its appropriateness to the train of thought suggested.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOLS OF PAINTING

MANY of us find it very difficult to get up any enthusiasm for the early efforts of painting. Stiff and archaic drawing, faulty perspective, flat colour, and narrow range of subject, confined to religious themes, stall off our interest and leave us cold. The most painful sense of failure to grasp the beauty of things acclaimed as beautiful by critics is often felt in the presence of early Italian paintings. The faded frescoes of Giotto at Padua and Assisi have been a dire disappointment to many sincere pilgrims to Italy in search of artistic enjoyment.

A lurking conviction that the works of the Florentine and Sienese painters of the thirteenth century have in them something that justifies their fame tends, if anything, to make the disappointment keener, the sense of impotence to grasp their beauty more irritating. In the teaching of the history of painting, in lectures

on " Old Masters " more harm has been done to the cause of art by enthusiasm without explanation than by any other means. For the beauty of them lies not nearly so much in what the artist *did* as in what he was trying to do—not so much in his act as in his thought ; and neither the aim nor the thought can be understood without some knowledge of the conditions under which he worked, of the thought by which he was surrounded.

In fact, it is well-nigh impossible to understand what an artist was trying to do, unless one understands also what he was expected to do. For we may take it for granted that an artist will never be accounted great after his own time, unless he has tried to do something more than he was expected to do.

The picture of Our Lady by Cimabue, which was carried in triumph through the streets of Florence in the thirteenth century, would not satisfy a single demand of a picture-loving public of to-day, for the simple reason that the artist did not possess the knowledge which every layman now demands of those who profess the craft of painting. But just because the painter had added something to the power of his craft to stimulate and to respond to thought, the picture was carried in triumph amid the acclama-

tions of a public into whose life pictures entered far more as a necessity than they can do nowadays.

To understand this it is necessary to realize that, in Cimabue's day, for many centuries in Italy painting had been a necessary and natural part of church furniture. The walls of churches had always been painted with decorations embodying certain well-known religious facts and sacred personages, recognizable by their proper position in the church, and by their traditional grouping, attitude, or attribute, a picture-writing in symbols legible to the unlettered, and serving the sole function of starting the train of thought, without the addition of the smallest comment or amplification on the part of the painter. The beauty of painting, as distinct from its use, lay in the depth and richness of colour, and in the decorative effect of the pictures as a whole, in the general scheme of their arrangement in relation to the building of which they formed a part. The public which "used" them, every time that it used the church, did not expect that the artist should say anything about his subject. The artist did not expect the public to be interested in his thought about it. Consequently, the utility of painting was best served by rigid adherence to a traditional

formula, exactly as the legibility of a name on a shop-front is best attained by plain and unadorned Roman capitals. Some painters decorated better than others, laying their colours more smoothly, spacing the gilded halos or background more happily; but within this meagre scope of artistic initiative there was little room for outstanding greatness, more especially as any success in the direction of decorative unity necessarily drew attention away from, instead of concentrating it upon, the individual beauty or interest of separate items of the whole.

It was with the separate gift and dedication of altar pieces that the first signs of a break in this hidebound tradition became apparent. A picture which was complete in itself, and could be painted, not *in situ*, but where the artist pleased, which was destined to be elevated to its position of honour with public ceremony, stood some chance of being looked at for its own sake, eagerly and closely. The conditions under which it was painted stimulated the artist's own thoughts, awakened his personal consciousness, in regard to the subject under his hands, and, sure of a hearing, he began to speak: and so the angels cease to be formulæ of the abstract far-away fact of adoration, and become the presentation, within the narrow

limits of his power, of sentient adoring beings encircling the Queen of Heaven, whom the bend of the head, the thoughtful, laboured modelling, the patient delicacy of the brush, transform from a lifeless symbol to a living presentment. It is as though the painter had said—" You and I, we know the Virgin Mother of Christ in our hearts, all that she is, all that she stands for. You do not need that I should tell you ; but for long months I have been in her presence, working in her honour. While you have passed to and fro upon a hundred other duties, my daily work has been to think of her—perhaps I have been closer to her than you could come. The mother-majesty and love, the virgin purity, the queenly dignity, the adoration that enfolds her, these have been my thought as I have painted, and I want you to share the ecstasy of the thought that has been given to me. I know that when this picture is newly set up in the church you will look at it, and I make my work my messenger."

Compared with all painting that had gone before it was a revelation. No longer was it a mere starting point, but a road, for thought. It said not merely, " Think of the Mother of God in your own way, or as you have been taught to think," but " Think of Her in *my* way, as I

have thought of Her." The painter has become the artist.

To turn back to the picture now is to understand its immortality, for in it one can see not only its failure, but its success as well, and, above all, the earnestness of its efforts, the boldness of its enterprise, the tact and caution with which a new ideal is linked to an old formula.

I can hear the protest: "But this is not art criticism, it is sentiment." Very true; and for the understanding of pictures, and for their enjoyment, all the better for that. Was it not Bernard Shaw who claimed to be a greater man than Shakespeare, because he stood on Shakespeare's shoulders? But does anyone suppose that he was serious, or, if he had been, would he have earned anything but pity for his seriousness? There is not an art-student to-day but could correct Cimabue's drawing and modelling, who has not the use of ten colours to his one, who could not discourse more learnedly than he upon technique and style. Yet our art-schools are not full of immortals, and Cimabue is immortal. Inspiration, aim, effort are what matter, and these are all sentiment. All else is cleverness, a good thing in itself, but not enough alone.

Others may protest that there is no certainty

that this Madonna by the Rucellai was painted by Cimabue at all, and further, that it is an ugly and primitive picture at that. The best answer to this objection that I can give is to quote Mr. Hutton's note to Crowe and Cavalcaselle's "History of Painting in Italy" (I. 168) :

"There was, not long ago, in Florence, among many beautiful things, one that was full of mystery. We approached it with a certain awe, timidly to gaze as it were on the shrine of a goddess. Need I say that I am speaking of the Rucellai chapel in S. Maria Novella, which held the picture concerning which there has been all this foolish and egotistical vapouring? Well, the Florentines began at last to take notice. The Germans had written books, more than one English critic sallied forth to this battle of windmills. The Florentine was amazed. 'What!' said he, 'they come to see that old picture? Monna Mia, but they can't see it!' So they cleaned out the Rucellai chapel, they put white glass in the windows, they took away the altar; they pulled down the picture, and took it out of its frame. Then, in a bare, cold, and very ugly room that had once been a chapel where men prayed, but is now a mere *sala*, as it were, of a gallery, and wretched at that, they hung Madonna, without any frame at all or any altar, on the bare

wall in the hard, white light ; so that the Germans could count her toes, and the Americans measure her nose, and the English say : ' After all, who knows ?—she is bad enough, and ugly enough to have been painted by some Florentine.' "

The lesson of this is clear. To find the beauty of a primitive and struggling art it is necessary to project yourself into the world of the artist, his times, his conditions ; to take into consideration the place and the reason for which his work was done, to recreate them in your imagination, if they have been swept away ; and to care nothing for the " scientific criticism " which wrangles about the attribution of a picture to this or that painter—it is the mind of the painter that matters, not his name.

It is here that study becomes necessary—and, even so, it is not study of the history of painting that will help you most, but study of the history of human beings. Nothing that you can read and learn of thirteenth century Florence, its politics, its science, philosophy, literature, religion, architecture, will fail to help you in finding the best in its painting. Dante will help you more than Vasari, for Dante is part of the mentality of thirteenth-century Florence, while Vasari is but a historian of painters. To read the life of St. Francis of Assisi will do more to reveal to

you the beauty of Giotto's pictures than reams written by art critics about the pictures themselves.

Nor, to be quite honest, need your knowledge be profound, or even minutely accurate. All that really matters is that you should bring to bear upon it a sympathetic imagination. Of course, the deeper and the more accurate it is, the more material will your imagination have from which to construct the setting of the pictures; but it is well, if what you seek is the capacity to enjoy them, to stop research before it tends to crowd out sympathy. Research in itself is fascinating, and worth while, but it is not the same thing as enjoyment of beauty. You may choose between the two, but only a rarely balanced mind can pursue both to the uttermost.

Moreover, other sources of understanding of the artist's aim soon begin to exist, and to demand study, and these sources are to be found in the artist's work itself. The man, it is true, is the product of his time, but the work is the product of the man, and, once the personality of the artist has been let loose from the bondage of absolute convention, the conditions under which he works tend more and more to be interpreted through his personality; the impress of his own

character becomes more and more clearly visible as his mastery of his craft increases, and it is not long before we are able to study, through the medium of paintings, not merely the collective temperament of an age, but the individual temperament of a painter. For example, from the Rucellai Madonna we may learn something of thirteenth century Florence, but very little, if anything, of the painter; through the work of Cimabue's great pupil Giotto, we come into personal touch with Giotto himself. Cimabue did not venture beyond an attempt to express a sentiment which he knew his public shared; Giotto showed his subject in a new light, imposing his own mental vision of it upon others.

An intense feeling for the dramatic aspect of things is Giotto's predominant characteristic, an almost epigrammatic terseness of statement, an abrupt finality. His pictures are no longer mere generalized statements of known fact, but represent each a moment of time in an actual happening, chosen from the personal point of view of the painter, set down as he saw it in his mind; and in every case the moment chosen is that which seems to him to sum up with the most concentrated intensity the essentials of the incident, in other words, the dramatic moment, and the whole of his endeavour to advance the technical

scope of the craft is based upon the necessity to express this point of view.

The possession of the dramatic instinct implies the detached attitude of the spectator, and of an analytic rather than a merely emotional spectator. Giotto, possessing this dramatic instinct, is concerned less with the feelings and character of the persons that he portrays, than with their collective effect upon his own mind. He is not so carried away by his sympathy with the actors as to be unable to take in all the contributory details of the scene that they enact, and to give to each its place in his pictorial summary of the incident. He has even been accused of a commonplace strain, of a certain levity, for the fidelity with which he records the trivial concomitants of portentous events; but it is from this almost cold externality that he derives his strength, and the keenness of his observation, grasping the relative value of all that he sees, enables him to subordinate the individual actors and their emotions to the essential meaning of the scene in which they take part, though that essential meaning be one of which they themselves are wholly unconscious.

Thus, to the agitated relations, guests, and servants, crowded round the figure of the dying knight of Celano, nothing matters, nothing is

apparent but the horror of the moment. The emotion of each of them is vividly portrayed, given its full force. Giotto has seen it in his mind, and has recorded it minutely. But all this agitation and sorrow are outweighed in his picture, by the solitary figure of St. Francis, standing alone at the table at which he had foretold the death of his host. The wave of emotion which has swept all the others into confusion has left him, not untouched, but unmoved. In a glance, we understand that it is not the death of the host that is significant *to us*, but the prophetic power of the Saint who foretold it and who by his prophetic knowledge was enabled to give to a man still in the flush of health the last absolution which could not have been his had he been struck down wholly unawares.

The same quality of mind that enabled Giotto to see all the parts of his subject in their due relation to the whole guides his method of composing and painting his picture. Both the treatment of the subject, and the rendering of it in line and colour, are the outcome of the same mental attitude; and thus we are brought into touch with the *personal style* of an artist perhaps for the first time in the history of painting. Note the firm line, the bold elimination of irrelevant detail, the simple and yet not stereotyped

GIOTTO
DEATH OF THE KNIGHT OF CELANO
Upper Church of St. Francis, Assisi

SIMONE MARTINI (MEMMI)
INVESTITURE OF ST. MARTIN
Lower Church of St. Francis, Assisi

formulæ of facial expression, the confinement of marked individuality to the principal figures, the deliberate balancing of a single figure against a group. It becomes possible to say of a painting of this period "this is, and that is not, the work of Giotto." The name of the painter is more than a label, it is the name of a human being.

* * * * *

If, then, the first use made by painters of their new freedom is the assertion of their own individuality, how is it that we hear—and see—so much of "schools" of painting? How is it that the Florentine successors of Giotto have so much in common with the great pioneer and with each other, while Simone Memmi and Duccio, his contemporaries of Siena, are different from him both in aim and in the "school" which develops from them? Why does the growth of painting tend to fall into groups, for the most part territorial in their demarcation one from the other? And why, while the Florentine school goes on from strength to strength, to culminate in the glories of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, should the Sienese school fade at the very moment of the Renaissance into the sweet archaism of Matteo di Giovanni, and struggle on only as the parasite of the stronger schools of

Umbria and Florence for another undistinguished century ?

There are four reasons for this fact, which operate in various degrees in the formation of all " schools of painting."

The first reason is *technical,* and is to be found in the method of transmitting the craft of painting from one generation of painters to another.

The second is *political,* and consists in the character of the community from which the artist springs and to which he appeals.

The third is *geographical,* and lies in a condition common to artist and public, the dominant condition in the formation of character and outlook, and so of the feeling for beauty—namely, that of place and climate.

The fourth is *racial,* and underlies the psychological attitude of painters and public towards the function of painting.

It has already been shown that painting under the old conditions was a craft with very rigid rules, and applied to one principal purpose, that of church decoration. Apprenticeship to a master of the craft was necessary, in order to learn those rules and to obtain employment, in that as in any other craft. It was only when painting reached the stage at which it was possible for the individual to express himself in his own style

that the actual painter of a picture mattered; but as soon as that happened, apprenticeship to a painter who mattered became a thing to be desired: for that painter, being sought after, had more work, more practice, to offer to his apprentices, whose business it was to keep as closely as possible to the style of the master who paid them to work for him. Thus, until an apprentice had served his time, he had no scope for originality, but was obliged to learn his craft thoroughly on the approved lines of his master, so that, by the time that he was free to "set up for himself," he had already received the stamp of his master's style of painting, and would only vary or develop that style if he were a craftsman of outstanding ability, and of some originality as well. The mediocre men never became "master-painters," but remained mere craftsmen all their lives. Men of forceful character, such as Orcagna, did not build up a craft of their own to express that character, but impressed it, whether they would or no, upon the craft that they had learnt from their master, and, equally inevitably, having as their starting point in their craft the technical knowledge of the master, added to that knowledge in those directions in which their own personality found the need for development.

Thus, the ambitious, cold-blooded Florentine,

violent but heartless, seeing all emotions from the outside, was impelled steadily onward in the acquisition of technical knowledge, never swayed by the emotion he portrayed to the point of hasty or impulsive execution, always master of himself and of his subject, while the warm-hearted, hasty, none-too-courageous Sienese—the "soft Sienese," their Florentine conquerors called them—were content to keep the old scattered symbolic compositions, the lifeless figures of Byzantine painting, so they might linger over delicacy of facial expression, portrayal of individual and momentary emotion rather than dramatic unity or lasting significance of action. Grace, charm, and fire in fitful flashes run through the work of Memmi, of Duccio, and of the great Lorenzetti brothers; but no Sienese master could hand on to his pupil any sure foundation of craft on which to build, for neither he nor the public for whom he painted cared how the thing were done so long as the momentary appeal of the passing emotion it portrayed went home.

You cannot find any dominant note, any central idea, in a Sienese picture. Set beside the "Noli me Tangere" of Giotto, the exquisite "Investiture of St. Martin" by Simone Memmi, and you will see what I mean. Giotto's picture

is not a picture of the Christ merely, nor of St. Mary Magdalene, nor of the tomb and sleeping guard. It is the picture of an invisible thing, of the very spirit of the command, "Touch me not." The Christ passes right out of the group; His lines are rigid and abrupt; note the perpendicular fall of the drapery, the line of the leg and foot pointing away from all the other figures, the sharp, oblique parallelism of the drapery across the body, the firmness of the outstretched arm—and then the space between Him and the kneeling Magdalene, unbridged by her groping arms, with their wavering indecision so surely expressed by the divergent lines of the hands. See how the outline of her cloak draws backward, faintly incurved, from knees to head, as though, in the very act of stretching forward, she shrank back at the command, so that all the folds of the cloak break at the foot with the change, and so that there is no parallelism, but a most significant divergence, both of character and direction, between the commanding figure of the Lord and the adoring figure of His seeker. To describe all this in words is cumbersome; to see it in the picture is a matter of one flashing second.

But to describe Simone Memmi's picture of St. Martin would take even longer, and would serve even less purpose; for it would mean the

description of the gentle expression, the high purpose, portrayed by the painter in the face of the knightly saint; and of the expression of emperor, knights, and musicians, each as gay of raiment and as individually human as himself; it would mean an attempt to give the idea of glittering gold and dainty colour, a catalogue of charms, a dictionary of delights, a string of lovely words that do not make a sentence.

The Sienese painter loves human beings, he does not study humanity; he loves to paint, because each thing that he paints gives him a new pleasure—the pleasure of the subject; but he does not love the knowledge of painting, nor if he can conquer a difficulty by trick or luck does he seek to discover a principle of the craft which will solve that difficulty once for all; and, as his interest is in emotions rather than in their causes, he reaches a point of skill in their expression which so far outstrips his skill in the less alluring matter of anatomy that these living, breathing heads upon lifeless, formless bodies become almost grotesque by reason of the unevenness of his success. While the Sienese is sympathetic and slovenly, the Florentine is cold but sure.

Here, then, are two "schools" working side by side upon divergent lines, because they are con-

trolled in their course by different points of view —points of view which are not merely personal to the individual and successive masters who hand on the tradition, but belong to them because they are Florentines, because they are Sienese.

The principle is sufficiently illustrated by this one example, which becomes manifest so early in the development of pictorial art. This is not the place in which to follow out the ramifications of Italian styles, and their infinite interplay, nor to trace the dominating influence of the greatest Florentines in schools far outside the Tuscan borders. It was in Tuscany that painters first broke away from tradition, and found their fellow-Tuscans ready to welcome their efforts, and therefore it is natural that they should have figured as missionaries of the new language. But even the most overmastering personality among them never did more than lend his craft to the artists of other communities, with other ideals, and with other capacities for beauty. However much of his greatness in the mastery of form Tintoretto may—and does—owe to Michelangelo, he is none the less Venetian in the glory of light and colour which is his own. That glory of light and colour was Venetian from the first, and never Florentine. The Vivarini, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, Crivelli, and many a lesser

Venetian possess it, together with a certain richness that is neither Florentine nor inherently Venetian, but rather a heritage from the closer contact of Venice with the Byzantine East. These are, so to speak, the *national* characteristics of the Venetian sense of beauty, and, as such, are ineradicable from her art. The Byzantine richness that we may see surviving in the work of Sienese artists, and in offshoots of Siena, such as the work of Gentile da Fabriano, is nothing to these painters but a survival of the Byzantine tradition of painting. In some Florentines, as for example Benozzo Gozzoli, it develops into a personal characteristic, controlled and kept in order by an almost austere decorative sense, but only among the Venetian painters does it ever develop into an integral part of the style of a whole school, and survive even in the latest forms of that school. It is vividly apparent in the work of Caliari (Paolo Veronese), and is not wholly lost in the painting of Tiepolo, "last of the old masters."

Thus we come to our third condition, the geographical, which is manifestly the one which, above all others, forms the basis of public feeling for art.

I have written elsewhere on "colour and climate," from a different point of view, that

of the distribution of the world's genius in the matter of sculpture. But I would ask you to consider it in relation to this matter of painting.

Have you ever noticed, in the works of the early Tuscan painters, how little the individual colours lose their primary character, how little they are fused, obscured, or influenced by any dominant tone of light? Nor, you will find, is this true only of the early Tuscans, but of all, even to Michaelangelo himself. Leonardo da Vinci alone among Tuscans seems to have some inkling of the fact that colours have no finality, no existence of their own independently of light. Among the painters of Umbria and the Romagna, Melozzo da Forlì displays some feeling for colour as opposed to colours (and he worked side by side with a Fleming, Justus of Ghent), but in the paintings of Perugino and Pinturicchio there is not a trace of it, while even Raphael shows it but rarely.

Go further north and you will find that where the school of Milan, as in Luini and Sodoma, touches the Florentine tradition, through Leonardo da Vinci, it is tone rather than colour which makes the unity of the work, but where, as sometimes in Boltraffio, it has turned eastward to Venice for its inspiration, colour conquers

tone and form, and the rich glow, and almost colloquial treatment of subject, are its character.

In Venice form is splendid and sure, but colour is triumphant. No longer do separate colours obstinately assert their own individual part in the making of a pattern. The form glorifies the colour, giving it coherence, instead of colour decking form and giving it prominence. The surface of the picture is not spaced into shapes of separate colours, as in a picture by Lorenzo di Credi, it is a window through which you look into a world coloured by its own light, and in which form is a subsidiary incident; nor does the pleasure that you derive from the picture arise so much from the harmony of shapes as from the harmony of colours that meet and blend.

The reason for this lies in the physical conditions under which the artist and his patrons see the natural world by which they are surrounded, and from which they draw both their ideas of beauty and their inspiration in presenting it.

The reason why light, in the work of the mid-Italian painters, has no character of its own, is mere absence of darkness, is simply that the short dawn and twilight of the south, and the uniform full light of day, offer only the smallest graduations of atmospheric colour. Light, so

long as it lasts, is white, and has no colour-character of its own. Moreover, it is intense and uncompromisingly clear, and reveals form in sharp contrasts of light and shadow; thus it teaches form to the eye of all and sundry, so that the shapes of things are a matter of everyday knowledge, and colour is appreciated only from the same standpoint as form, namely, that of actual existence, and of permanent sameness. As a cube is always a cube, so blue must always be blue, to the mind of one who thinks in terms of a permanent and absolute quality such as form.

But the further north you go the more misty is the atmosphere, the more uncertain the "visibility," the less prominent is form; and, on the other hand, the longer are the twilight and the dawn, the softer, the more subtle, the richer the variations in the colour of the light by which all things are seen, so that a tower that at twilight stands purple-black against a steel-green sky, on the morrow will glow like a burning rose against the soft blue of retreating night still spangled with pale stars, and its form, its permanent quality, will matter little to those who live beside it and see the glory of its processional change of colour.

And this same sunshine that plays such

tricks with taste plays another part in dividing north from south in this same matter of the love and understanding of colour.

You may say that at least the brilliant colourless sunshine of the south reveals colour in the same uncompromising way as it reveals form, and that all colours are more truly visible by it than by the deceptive, variable, northern sun, and that the southern painter can at least see truly all the colours that there are to see.

True enough—all the colours that there are to see—but those are not many, in nature at least.

In Tuscany are painters who can build you patterns of glorious blues and reds and greens, whose purity is a marvel to this day, and to them those colours must have been a delight, simple and unquestioning enough, but still a conscious delight. But go further south still, to Rome, to Naples, or to Spain, and in passing note how easily the Florentine consented to dispense with colour altogether, painting in monochrome for the pure beauty of form and composition alone, and you will not be surprised to find in Rome and Naples, painters whose colour is hard and heavy and dull, but their shadows profound and strong, their lights powerful and significant, their pictures leaving no remin-

iscence of colour in your mind, but stamping the ideas of massiveness, of solidity, of weight, indelibly upon your memory. And in Spain you may see the great art of El Greco, of Velasquez, of Murillo, or of Ribera the Spaniard of Naples, in which all colour seems to have been translated into terms of a range of degrees of light and darkness, of notes in a scale running between black and white, through tawny hues that can scarcely be called colours at all. Further than this you cannot go ; for there are no great painters further south than Spain.

It is all the sun's doing. The sun gives and the sun takes away. For while he is blazing down on rock and column, on man and mountain, giving every break and turn and ripple of surface its value in light and shade, all the time he is burning colour off the surface of the earth that no kindly mists protect from his rays. Away goes the green grass that shot up in the shallow soil with the winter rains. The royal scarlets and blues and purples of the anemones clamour to the eyes for a space and are gone ; the grey green of the olives fades to grey in dust and in turning of the leaf, and the yellow parched skin of the earth cracks and wrinkles, and the grim limestone bones of the mountains whiten through the long, merciless, monochrome months

of a southern summer. The southern artist has nothing in his surroundings to teach him of colour, everything to remind him of form.

Now come to the other extreme, to the English year. In this country of ours it rains sometimes, and then, sometimes, it rains. I have seen green oats reaped in a snowstorm in October, up in County Durham, and a strange colour scheme it made, with a sky of blackened copper above the rounded hill. But a colour scheme it was, and every day has its scheme of colour, all the seasons round; but perhaps there are not a dozen days in the year in which the shape of anything is sharply defined by sun and shade. And so it is only natural that our ideas of beauty should be based on colour, and that we should seek to express it in a form of art which does not interest the southerner at all, namely, landscape; for us a single landscape varies every minute of every day in drifting colour; to the dwellers in the lands of fierce sunlight it is colourless, and its form is as immutable as the rocks of which it is made.

Here, then, is a condition which is of influence, wherever there is painting at all, in directing the lines upon which that painting shall develop, and, moreover, has dictated arbitrarily the precise spot in Europe in which painting should first

rise above the level of mere symbolic variegation of walls.

Tuscany is the most southerly point at which there is sufficient conscious enjoyment of colour to make painting a craft attractive to men with an active sense of beauty. Many of these painters were sculptors as well. Further south they would only have been sculptors. But, on the other hand, Tuscany is the most northerly point at which the love of form was allied to a natural enjoyment of colour, and to an understanding of the indispensability of form to the effective use of colour as a means of expressing ideas. In other words, in Tuscany, and more especially in Florence, precisely the conditions existed which produced men with the double capacity to attack as pioneers the manifold difficulties of drawing, modelling, and perspective, on a flat surface, and to complete their work with colour, in such a way that the beauty of the one added to the beauty of the other.

If you are content with colour alone it is not worth while to learn to draw more than the most primitive forms to hold your colour within bounds. If you are content with form alone; you need no more than two or three crude colours to pick out and enhance form. If you are conscious almost equally of the beauty of both

you will seek to use the two together for their mutual aid. Tuscany, standing on the line between north and south, had this double consciousness, and it was in Tuscany that modern painting was born.

CHAPTER III

GIANTS OF THE RENAISSANCE

IN the Riccardi Palace at Florence, Benozzo Gozzoli painted the journey of the Three Kings, a winding procession of glitter and glory, amid the trees and rocks of a fantastic landscape. It is all very beautiful, very miniature-like, very decorative; above all very mediæval. Jewels and trappings, plants and trees form a pattern of inexhaustible delight, stilled for ever to adorn a wall.

One figure, all in white and gold, and mounted on a white horse, stands out in my memory, the figure of the youngest of the Kings. Tradition, probably lying, says that it is a portrait of the last Emperor of Byzantium, Constantine Palaiologos. Forty-five years before Benozzo Gozzoli had ended (1498) his long life, that glittering young Emperor had fallen, sword in hand, among the heaps of dead over whom the Sultan Mohammed II passed to the conquest of Byzantium.

In 1480 a Venetian painter, Gentile Bellini, made the portrait of the Moslem conqueror.

In that short generation a change had swept over the whole outlook of the Italian world—a change that began on the day that Constantine died—and in its advance swept away the conditions under which Benozzo Gozzoli had learned his art from Fra Angelico, the conditions of the Middle Ages.

So much has been written about the Renaissance that no useful purpose would be served by repeating it here. All that we have to bear in mind, for our purpose, is the fact that Italy, through refugees from Constantinople, was made once more free of the literature of ancient Greece that had so long been a sealed book to the western world, and that her painters kept pace with the widening of horizon that the revived learning brought in its train. Coming almost simultaneously with the discovery in Rome of fragments of the great sculpture of Græco-Roman days, it gave the impetus to the study of the antique which was all that was needed to perfect the craft of the painter ; and by emancipating the artist from the narrow round of religious subjects, so cramped and handicapped by long tradition, it encouraged individual effort and originality, both in choice and treatment of subject.

The widening of subject comes first, the broadening of knowledge follows. In the National Gallery you may see a picture of the Rape of Helen (N.G. 591), called an early work of Benozzo Gozzoli, in which perspective is wild and anatomy unsound, colour flat and gay. It is an octagonal picture, and was probably one of those trays upon which it was the custom to bring to a mother the first refreshment that she took after the birth of her child, so that we need not look in it for the careful execution proper to a work of art destined for a more public and permanent use. But it is a good example of a classical subject in mediæval treatment. Quite as mediæval in spirit, and Homeric also in subject, is Pinturicchio's " Return of Ulysses " (N.G. 911), where one of the suitors, without a bone in his body, and in cheerful gaudiness of attire, gaily enters to a Griselda-like Penelope seated at her loom.

It is strange to realize how much more vividly bad drawing, flat colour, and conventional landscape background leap to the eye in these classical subjects of moving incident than in stereotyped religious subjects. They have no sanctity, no solemnity, no tradition to redeem them, and we feel, as people of their own time must also have felt, the need for powerful and

truthful drawing, and relief of light and shade, to carry them through and to make them convincing. And so, while religious painting was able to cling to the ancient methods yet a little while, and still to fulfil its purpose, the painting of secular subjects forced an advance in knowledge upon painters, and that advance in knowledge was naturally applied to sacred painting when once it had been achieved in other fields of art.

So do not turn from these pictures of the transition with impatience because there are faults in them that you can see. If a picture is gay, enjoy its gaiety; romantic, steep yourself in its romance. The painter is still working in the old semi-symbolic, semi-descriptive tradition of decoration, and because all the world was gay to him with the idea of the wanderer's return, and, moreover, the picture was painted to make some room of a Sienese palace gay to live in, the bright colours and the happy design are his purpose, the reason of the picture, and not only part of its means.

It was a moment of transition to which only the greatest men could rise in its fullness It is hard for a moment to realize that Pinturicchio and Leonardo da Vinci were contemporaries, and that Michelangelo was born when Pinturicchio was only twenty-one, and Leonardo

twenty-three. Perhaps it is harder still to see how Pinturicchio could grow up in the knowledge of the work of that great pioneer Piero della Francesca, and work with Perugino, and see the rise of Raphael, without being touched by their greatness: but look a moment longer, and you will see that in all these great Umbrians there is one quality which Pinturicchio shares, the quality of grace. While for Piero grace at once inspires and yields to strength, for Signorelli it becomes a sweeping boldness of curvilinear composition. To Perugino it is a danger, leading to weak beauty, to Raphael it is the very spirit of beauty, perilously near to insincerity, but strong enough in itself to hold its own as the dominant quality of his work. In Pinturicchio it is instinctive, but urges him to no development of his art for its better expression. He presents the incongruity of the essential youth of the Renaissance expressed in terms invented for the expression of the religious fervour of an age outworn.

But he was an Umbrian, not a Florentine. The natural artistic supremacy of Florence at the time of the Renaissance, of which the causes have already been described, made it possible for her painters to master, instead of being mastered by or ignoring the antique. The new

knowledge came to her at a point in her development at which she was able to absorb it into her own style, instead of founding her style upon it, or shirking it altogether, as Pinturicchio did. This was also true in a measure of Venice, but in a less degree; and consequently the effect of the Renaissance was to spread rather than restrict the influence of Florence upon other Italian schools. Indeed, it may almost be said that Florence came near to conquering all Italy with a paintbrush.

No useful purpose will be served by stringing names together, for names are not pictures. Nor shall I help you by plunging into the welter of criticism which attempts to distinguish the works of Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo, and of Verrocchio, Botticelli and his "Friend," Ghirlandaio the elder, and Mainardi. These are studies that you may pursue under half a dozen masters, all very learned and all conflicting; but they will not help you to enjoy the pictures themselves.

But when you look at Antonio Pollaiuolo's Saint Sebastian (N.G. 292), and enjoy the marvellous unity of composition as between the figures of the saint and his executioners, the boldness with which the two stooping figures in the foreground leave bare and clear the tower-

ing perpendicularity of the saint, the direct simplicity with which the remaining figures build up the pyramid of which he is the summit both in form and interest, and the subtlety with which the composition of the group as a whole encircles and throws forward the central figure from its screen-like background, you realize that here is work that is leading to something greater, something in which conscious and even commonplace fidelity to the thing seen will give way to effortless sublimation of truth; in which the abrupt division of the planes is but a stage in the journey towards the real achievement of continuous depth and receding distance. In this city of craftsmen, where the artist was goldsmith, sculptor and painter, all in one—and this is true of these Pollaiuoli, of Verrocchio, of Ghirlandaio, and of many others as well—it was skill in the craft of painting that appealed both to the painter and the patron. Piety was no longer the mainspring of patronage, and it was no longer the wellspring of art. Botticelli was at his greatest when he was most soulless, and his greatness was after all nothing more than a great experiment. All the time he is only trying out the capacity of his craft. That this does not make his work less satisfactory is simply because he is satisfying a different

demand—the demand for beauty so clean-cut and sure that it can dispense with all other feeling. Look at his Mars and Venus (N.G. 915), and ask yourself what you get from it. Play with its quaint conceits, like that of the hornet's nest that must be disturbed when Mars awakes, or of the thoughtless mischief of the baby satyrs who risk the catastrophe by blowing noisy conch-shells around him, and playing at battle with his helm and lance; it is all very pretty, and the spirit of it is all a little restless and fretful, like the spirit of the painter himself. But when all is said and done it is just beauty and no more, and it aims at no more. It has no soul.

But, given a whole generation of painters striving after beauty, working with all their mind and hand for the mastery of craft so as to be capable of handling "difficult conceits," you are sure of one thing, and that is that when a genius arises he will be well equipped—the craft that they have built up for him will become tremendous in his hands.

And when Leonardo da Vinci began his wonderful career under the guidance of Verrocchio, the craft was there, and only needed using. That the man who could say in all modesty, before his life was over, that he possessed all

human knowledge, should have added here and there to the processes of the craft, was only natural. Chemist, artillerist, and engineer, speculator in the realms of a science of which he foreshadowed by centuries the achievement, the most Florentine, if not the most universal, of Florentines had no need to waste his time upon the spade work of the craft of beauty. It was done by those patient, cold-hearted students of the art of which he became supremely master.

There can scarcely be two pictures with a more world-wide fame than the fresco of the "Last Supper" in the refectory of Sta. Maria della Grazia at Milan, and the portrait of "La Gioconda" or "Mona Lisa" in the Louvre; there could scarcely be two pictures less alike, and yet both are the product of the same hand and mind.

To the majority of us the "Last Supper" *is* the Last Supper. We have no other visualization of the event. It is complete, final, eternal. Even in the meanest reproduction we accept it not with critical examination of each figure, but as a whole, one and indivisible. How many of us have ever tried even to distinguish between one disciple and another? St. John and Judas we know; perhaps St. Peter too; but we do

not linger over them or seek the expression of their personality. We come back at once, almost with impatience of mere individuals, to the *moment* that the painting portrays—the moment at which the Divine Resignation has spoken the tremendous words which sweep, like the wind through the corn, through the stunned hearts of His hearers: "One of you shall betray me." It is not the mere drama of the moment that Leonardo brings to us, as Giotto might have done, not the mere external reaction of the words upon swaying bodies and excited gesture, but the sudden sick stillness of the heart within, that found vent in the clamour, indignant, incredulous, ironic even: "Is it I, Lord? Is it I? Is it I?" And then the slow, heavy, self-defensive echo, dragged from guilty lips, and an already half-repentant soul: "Is it I?"

I do not pretend to say *how* this stupendous design produces its effect. I do not even understand why it is that in thinking of it one remembers little irrelevant details—the folds in the cloth, the overturned salt, the crossed feet of one of the disciples—in the half-conscious way in which one remembers the ticking of a clock in a death-chamber, or the swaying of a rose at its window-sill. I do not pretend that one may not look at this picture, or at some reproduction of it, a

thousand times before its great significance begins to dawn upon one. But Leonardo himself said that it was not the first impression made, but the final impression left, by a work of art that mattered; and this picture, which fastens itself upon our memory by the balance of its design, by the quietude and permanent quality of its lines, by the nobility of its drawing, must, if thought be added to memory, bring this conception home to our innermost understanding.

This is genius. You may find an equal sincerity in Pollaiuolo, a greater piety in Fra Angelico, a like grace in Filippini Lippo, a more elaborate delicacy of conceit in Botticelli, but these qualities are to each the impulse of his craft, to Leonardo they are its implements, and the whole craft of painting is to him no more than one of many means of crystallizing thought. He does not even reveal himself in his painting, but only the reaction of ideas upon himself; he himself remains hidden behind the achievement of his art, almost inhuman in detachment, amusing himself by arousing emotions that he does not feel.

I do not mean that Leonardo does not believe in what he paints. He does, and knows it to be true, but for others rather than for himself. His serenity is unruffled by the emotions that

he realizes in others, and communicates from them to us. He is the coldest Florentine of them all, who knows not joy nor any pain; and it is surely significant that some of his most heart-holding work was done, not for Florentines, but for the more impressionable Milanese.

But do not think that because he did not feel emotion himself he despised it in others. That would argue insincerity, and insincerity detracts from greatness. Leonardo is no cynic, but he is as a god, knowing good and evil, and touched by neither, touching mankind through both.

See, too, how he chooses his weapons for the attack upon our consciousness. In the "Last Supper" is no mystery, no subtle complication, but a broad, unflinching simplicity, that tells the whole of its message, as it were, in few words, and those words weighed and chosen. There are no confusing suggestions, there is no after-thought, no speculation. Every line strikes to one centre, and that centre is your heart.

But stand before the Mona Lisa, and you will quickly find that it is not to your heart that she is speaking. Your eyes receive the same satisfaction of completeness, of finality, in composition. In the same way they want no more than the painter gives you of design. The craft is perfect, but, as in the "Last Supper," it is not

the craft that is the impulse of the picture, and in this case the satisfaction of the eyes does not bring satisfaction to the mind.

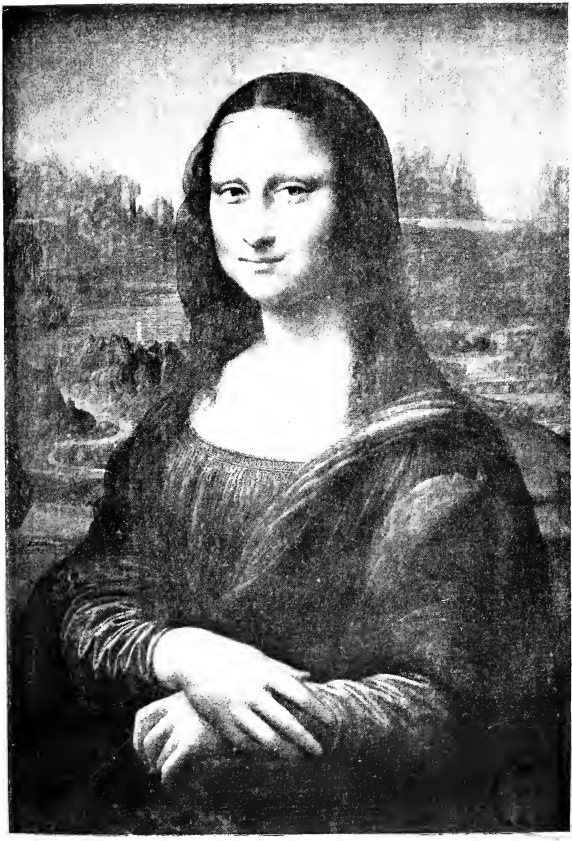
Full realization of the "Last Supper" brings to your own heart the question of the disciples, "Is it I?" You can answer the question of your own heart, and, having answered it, you can in a degree share the detachment of the painter from the emotion that prompted it. But here the question is not even formulated; it is not one, but many, it is Question itself. A none too beautiful young woman, with folded hands and a placid smile, gazes out of the picture at you relentlessly. That is all. But the smile, that seems so persistent, flickers. The shadows about the eyes seem never still. The immobility of the figure becomes exasperating, so sure it is that the moment must come when she will turn away.

I do not think there is any other portrait in the world with this uncanny living personality of its own. Does it not strike you that you have never wanted to know the "original" of the portrait?—that, in fact, you accept this woman as a woman created by Leonardo himself, as a separate personality from the woman from whom he painted the portrait. You do not say, "I like—or hate—the portrait of Mona Lisa," but "I like—or hate—Mona Lisa," and you mean

not the dead and gone Signora del Giocondo, but the living woman in the Louvre.

Do you suppose that the great painter and thinker would have wasted six years of repeated effort upon the portrait of a rather commonplace young woman? It is just because he was doing more than paint a portrait that we do not treat the result of his long labours as a portrait. Though it is more than likely that to his freakish mind—he is almost the only Italian, certainly the only Florentine, with a sense of humour—the name of his subject, "del Giocondo," first gave the idea of painting a smile, once he was embarked upon this all but impossible task, the fact that it strained his craft to the utmost would be enough to stimulate him to make the utmost use of the achievement; and so the picture is at once Leonardo's greatest victory and his only defeat; a victory because it fills the mind with unanswerable questions, a defeat because it answers none of them.

"La Donna e mobile," and so that most fleeting of all expressions, at once the most expressive and revealing least, becomes, as he labours at the presentation of its elusiveness, the sum and symbol of woman; and I do not think that Leonardo sought for a moment to know its meaning. Again he stands apart from the



LEONARDO DA VINCI
MONA LISA (LA GIOCONDA)
Louvre

emotion that he arouses. If he felt it at all, this mingled curiosity and exasperation, it was rather concerned with his craft as he created, and passed on to us through his creation. And, exactly as he has not succeeded in painting movement, but only mobility, so he has passed on to us questions, but not their answers.

In short, Leonardo speaks to us through this picture something in this sort: "Woman is your problem, motion is mine. But motion is destructive of finality in form, and woman is destructive of finality in judgment, so you will get no nearer to solving your problem than I shall get to solving mine."

When, however, he paints the "Madonna of the Rocks," whether the earlier version now in the Louvre, or the later in our own National Gallery (N.G. 1093), he presents neither confession nor accusation of defeat, but an invitation to accept a principle which he has mastered and exemplified. True, he seems to know quite well that few will look beyond the loveliness and grace with which he fills his canvas, and it is at first hard to define the essential quality in which this picture surpasses the work of his Milanese imitators, who saw and reproduced only the external beauty of his style. Perhaps it is the prominence of external beauty in this picture

which has trapped some critics into giving the National Gallery version of it to di Predis rather than to his master; but it seems to me that it is Leonardo's statement of the fact that purely æsthetic enjoyment is the sensuous parallel to purely spiritual enjoyment, without direct communication of specific ideas about the one through the other. The suggestion of ideas is here limited to a mere generalization, in that the subject is the familiar one of Our Lady with the Holy Child, St. John the Baptist, and angels. The beauty that is given to each is not their own, but belongs to the picture, and the satisfaction that we derive from the picture is not that of the mind, nor of the reasonable emotions, but of the senses. Yet (and here is the essential in which he towers above his imitators) the satisfaction of the senses is *of precisely the same nature as* that which the mind derives from its own independent contemplation of the subject. Happiness, mystery, awe, quietude—these are terms that we can apply to the sensuous reaction upon ourselves of line and colour and form in this painting; and they are terms which belong equally, but separately, to the subject of the picture: the artist has left it to us to bring them into relation with one another, to establish for ourselves the parallel between, not the identity

of, our feeling in the presence of the picture and our thought about the subject.

The thing that we have always to remember is that Leonardo was not primarily a painter, but a scientist, and that to him painting was a method of research; and therefore, to enjoy his pictures to the full, we must regard them rather as seeking to define the nature of beauty than merely as presenting an isolated work of beauty; as expressing the parallelism of forms with ideas, not mere dependence of the enjoyment of the one upon the possession of the other. The development of this theory of æsthetic, if it may be called so, is progressive and continuous. It is visible in the "Last Supper," almost reaches its limit in the "Madonna of the Rocks," and oversteps the bounds of its possible exemplification in painting in the "Mona Lisa"; and it is not in the least surprising to find that not one of his Milanese pupils ever grasped it, for while several at least of them were excellent craftsmen, not one of them was a giant of intellect like Leonardo da Vinci.

Some people have been tempted to wonder what would have happened if Michelangelo had been the pupil of Leonardo. The world would have lost a genius of another kind, that is all. It was a most merciful providence that kept

Leonardo at Milan, giving to boneless, sentimental Lombards a language which they could learn to speak parrot-fashion, while the young Michelangelo was learning to prove to all time that a man might be Florentine and yet human. Leonardo's cold interest in what painting could do as the servant of thought would have broken the heart of Michelangelo before he was out of his apprenticeship, even as his own flaming enthusiasm to enslave it in the service of instinct sent Pinturicchio and Perugino, Bugiardini and Granacci, fading shadows of prettiness and grace, down into the limbo of Art for Art's sake.

Michelangelo did not make statues and pictures. He did not embody theories and principles. He did not play upon emotions and sensations of which he knew the existence without feeling them himself. He felt in fire and spoke in form, and each thing that he said was wrung from him like a cry by the intensity of his feeling. His art was not his servant, nor his collaborator, but his enemy, to be fought and forced to yield, not by guile and strategy, but by the sword and by tactics in the open field. His is the genius of the soul, as Leonardo's is the genius of the intellect.

It is impossible to consider Michelangelo solely from the point of view of his paintings,

for he is so much more essentially a sculptor, and above all a poet—in the true sense of the word, a maker, a creator. Impatient of the restrictions imposed on his imagination by the limitations of the media in which he worked, he yet imposed upon himself an iron self-control, in order to keep that imagination within the possibility of expression. It seems fantastic to compare the Moses, or the Slaves of the tomb of Pope Julius II, or the Night, Dawn, Day, and Twilight, of the Medici Chapel, with Buddhist art, yet they are nearer to this in spirit than to the classic Greek sculpture to which they are so often likened, for they mould form into the embodiment of ideas, instead of building mental upon bodily ideals. To Michelangelo the human form was his language; the better he knew it as it really was the more freely he used it, the more ruthlessly he moulded it to his needs, with the result that the human form as he represents it is rather divinely possible than humanly probable.

Michelangelo uses form to embody ideas. Leonardo uses it to echo them. To Michelangelo the form is part of the idea, is the idea visualized. To Leonardo the form is separate from the idea, and the sensuous complement of it. In fact, Michelangelo is as unsophisticated as Leonardo

is highly sophisticated. The one feels, the other knows. Each in his way presents the very culmination of the artistic faculty, but their ways are opposite; and while Leonardo can be philosophically amused at discovering accurately the limitations of his medium, Michelangelo can only despair at finding that it has limitations at all, and, with a kind of rage, leaves one stupendous failure after another at the point at which he felt that each further stroke of brush or chisel could only serve to cramp within the bonds of finite craftsmanship the conception of the infinite which inspired him to begin.

But do not think that Michelangelo was careless or undisciplined in his attitude towards his craft. He was too true a Florentine for that. The ordered simplicity of the design, as a whole, of the vault of the Sixtine Chapel is quite primitive in its conscientious subordination to its primary purpose of decoration, and every figure in it is drawn with a severe thoroughness, a coolheaded heed of the craft, which show that Michelangelo could be as devoted to drawing as Mantegna, with whose work he had been familiar as a student. There is a monumental stillness about each separate design, which reveals the fact that the painter had

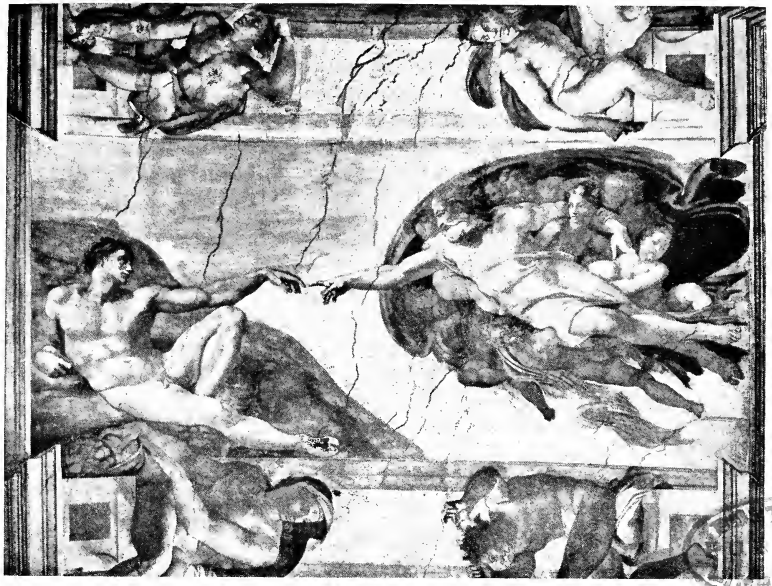
grasped the great truth that if an art is to be expressive it must be so in its own terms, which are terms of immobility. Michelangelo would never have needed to spend six years to prove that point, as Leonardo had done; he knew it by instinct, and as he was more concerned to use his art as a language than to establish the principles of its grammar, he steered clear of its technical limitations, only to come crashing up against its limitations of spiritual expression again and again. Appealing, as he does, not to reason and understanding, but to instinct and faith, he is impelled by his own instinct, inspired by his own faith, which take on their visualized form in his mind as he works, and therefore he is always pursuing a vision which unfolds as the work progresses, and keeps ever a little beyond the power of the hand that seeks to express it. Thus, to finish a work at all, he must always stop short of complete realization of the vision.

In the painting in the Sixtine vault, of the birth of Adam, the Almighty, borne on the sweeping gust which swells the drapery about Him, stretches out His hand to touch the reclining form of Adam, who, on the Divine approach, wakes into life. The suggestion, in bodily form, of the transmission of that Divine spark,

not merely of animal consciousness, but of the living soul, is nothing short of marvellous. You can see that it is achieved by a mastery of line and form, of pure design, which allows no jarring note, no technical preoccupation or distraction to interpose itself between you and the embodied idea; but between the hand of the Almighty and of the man there is a tiny space unbridged, which always seems to me to symbolize the gulf between aim and attainment, that tortured Michelangelo from first to last through his life of fevered endeavour.

To realize, even faintly, the tragedy of Michelangelo, you must read his life, written by Romain Rolland. It is scarcely too much to say that he is immortal because he failed in everything that he attempted, and it is the nearest approach to a definition of the cause of his greatness that I can find; for, looking at his work, we see so great, so free, so sure, a knowledge of the craft, so noble a power of the hand, that only a surer faith and nobler aim could have left them behind. Our joy in the work of this martyr of his own greatness lies not so much in what his art has expressed, as in the intuitive understanding that it conveys, how much more there was to be expressed, that no human art could tell.

If the work of Leonardo enshrined the mind,



MICHELANGELO
THE BIRTH OF ADAM
Sixtine Chapel, Rome

then that of Michelangelo embodies the soul, in the craft of painting.

In these two men the summit of Florentine achievement in painting is reached, and this would be as much as to say that Italy has no more to teach us of the mission of the art, were it not that Raphael Sanzio, of Urbino, the final Umbrian, has shown that painting may be great even when it has no meaning at all.

The strong Umbrians who forewent him were Piero della Francesca and Luca Signorelli, and in their work is perhaps less beauty than strength. The painting of the former is the poetry of mathematics; he is an earlier and one-sided Leonardo da Vinci in his point of view—a Leonardo in whom piety has not been ousted by philosophy, and for whom the science of his craft still held the fascination of progress. Signorelli is nearer in feeling to Michelangelo, struggling against narrower limitations of craft, and in the struggle sacrificing grace and tenderness to unachieved greatness.

It is in Perugino that we begin to see clearly the quality which the Umbrians possessed, towards whose expression both Piero and Signorelli had been struggling, while even the greatest Florentines remained serenely impervious to its charm, or unconscious of its existence.

I mean the appreciation of the decorative quality of tridimensional space. We cannot speak of atmosphere in the pictures of the Umbrians, for all the efforts of Piero and of Signorelli were directed rather towards the conquest of problems of perspective and depth of field, and these considerations rule the placing of every figure and object in their pictures, in which there is no atmosphere, but only room for it: a kind of pellucid emptiness. Perugino, however, has some inkling of it, and there is in many of his pictures a delicate deterioration of definition and colour in distant objects, but it appears to be governed entirely by caprice, and dictated by a desire to give comparative prominence to his principal figures. It is, in fact, scarcely more than an empiric way of achieving the result at which Piero and Signorelli aimed by more logical and consistent methods. But the point is that Perugino, being more consciously susceptible to beauty than his greater predecessor and his more earnest contemporary, saw why the object of their research was worth the trouble. While they concentrated upon the means afforded by the mastery of line and design, he achieved the end by the intuitive use of colour harmony. Thus while we must admire their work for its earnestness, its consistency,

and its thoroughness, we shall find ourselves forgiving Perugino the monotony of his design for the sake of his charm, and overlooking his occasionally disastrous failures because when he succeeds he succeeds so well.

A single example will explain what I mean. The "St. Michael" in the National Gallery (N.G. 288), part of a triptych painted by Perugino between 1494 and 1498 for the Certosa at Pavia, stands out beside its companion pictures of the triptych in the most remarkable way. A bold simplicity of design, and a soundness of drawing unusual in the work of this painter, are allied to his customary harmony of colour and delicate depth of space, attained, not by careful composition, but by a happy instinct in the control of the paling greens as they recede towards the horizon and meet the almost colourless sky, which in its turn deepens to rich colour behind and above the head of the saint, returning easily from the imaginary plane of the distance to the actual plane of the painted panel. You will see how this colour device at once throws the figure into prominence, and holds it securely within decorative limits. It is, moreover, a very subtle feeling for colour-harmony which places the warm brown-reds of shield and wings in front of, and behind, the green-greys of the steel armour, breaks

the monotony of the steel with touches of red and gold, and sets a loop of strong rose pink against the strong blue of the sky. These reds, and golds, and rose, in concert with the clear light of the lower sky, which silhouettes with a truly wonderful nicety the wings, arms, and body of the saint, hold the whole figure firmly in the foremost plane, and put the background into its proper place behind it, while the red scabbard of the sword, trailing in a long diagonal across the dull green field, both redeems the field from a clumsy perpendicularity, and strengthens the leg in its stance, and in its detachment from the background.

Do you notice what has happened? We have taken this picture, bit by bit, and have analysed how it is done, in order to enjoy it. Of the personality of St. Michael, of the appropriateness of the beauty of the picture to the idea of St. Michael, we have not said one word, for there is nothing to be said on these counts. As an embodiment of St. Michael the picture would be utterly unconvincing. As an æsthetic sensation it has nothing in common with our thought of the saint. Neither from the standpoint of Michelangelo, nor from that of Leonardo da Vinci, is the picture to be considered at all. Our delight in it is that which we take in an

unrelated æsthetic impression—or, more simply, we must enjoy it, if we are to enjoy it at all, *solely as a picture.*

That is to say that the Umbrian painters have worked out their destiny on the lines of the decorative element in their art. Their appeal is directly to the æsthetic and to no other side of our nature. They do not sublimate symbolism into embodiment, as Michelangelo sought to do; they do not sublimate illustration into the æsthetic parallel of the mental experience, as Leonardo da Vinci did. They simply divest painting of all thought about anything but the beauty of the picture as an arrangement of colours, lines, and forms. This picture is an inanimate thing—a piece of wood made beautiful with paint; it is, if you like, abstract beauty, neither more nor less. That the forms are familiar forms such as human beings and objects of everyday observation is merely a matter of custom and market, but it is not essential to the beauty of the work.

This is quite sufficient to account for Perugino's naïve rejoinder to the Servites who complained that in a picture he had painted for them he had painted figures exactly like those in others of his pictures. He said: "But these are the very figures that you admired when you ordered the

picture. If you do not like them now, what am I to do?" Since, to him, beauty was a permanent fact, needing no novelty, no outside interest to support it, a thing once found to be beautiful was always beautiful, and needed no change to keep its beauty fresh. The monotony of attitude in the figures of his pictures further bears out his possession of this point of view, which is a perfectly just one; but this very monotony, which is condemned by the many who seek an illustrative or a sympathetic quality in the *subject* of the picture, is combined with a variety and a subtlety of colour so far beyond the power of any Florentine, and of almost all Italian painters outside Venetia, as to give to Perugino a place among the highest.

This sense of colour-harmony is different, on the one hand, from the Florentine sense of colour-pattern, which was a heritage from Byzantine painting, and on the other hand from the sense of colour-unity, which was the great glory of Venetian painting, and is to this day the basis of all northern and western painting; and it is plainly the sense *par excellence* by which a school of painters would be led to the development to its furthest possible point of the decorative side of painting, for it implies a sufficiently strong feeling for form to preserve the sense of pattern,

but not so rigid a conviction of the absolute nature of forms and colours as to preclude the use of tridimensional space, with its visional falsifications of forms and colours, as part of a bidimensional decorative scheme.

All this sounds very complicated. Let the Umbrians explain themselves. In the National Gallery are two pictures which will serve the purpose.

The first is the " Baptism in Jordan " (N.G. 665), by Piero della Francesca, the foundation stone of the edifice of Umbrian art; the second is the " Ansidei Madonna " (N.G. 1171) by Raphael, its pinnacle. Both aim at the same thing, by the same means. The greatness of the one lies in its effort, the other in its success. Piero strained every nerve to turn his flat panel into an emptiness in which his figures could stand in relation to one another not only of superficial space but also of distance in depth. Raphael has used the emptiness as part of his decorative design. There is a " hole in the middle " of his picture, in front of which the tall back of Our Lady's throne stands boldly forward. And whereas Piero has sought to enhance distance by graduation, grouping, and contrast of colours, Raphael has used a grand progression of hues, and a subtle cross reflection from one to another,

as in the reflection of the green of the cope of St. Nicholas of Bari upon the dark blue of Our Lady's mantle, as a *decorative* contrast to the clear, colourless emptiness of the distance in the opening of the arch. Where Piero has reiterated hard perpendicular lines in the figures and trees, in deliberate and schematic contrast with the rising and falling curves of foreground and background, always in the pursuit of the secret of presenting three dimensions of space, Raphael has used the same devices of composition for their beauty of design, even curving the bare leg of St. John the Baptist, in defiance of anatomy, in order to preserve the continuously encircling flow of line which is the decorative motive of the outer, as opposed to the firm perpendicularity of the inner portion of the picture.

Thus, at the opening of the sixteenth century, the three men in whom the intellectual, the emotional, and the æsthetic functions of painting reached their highest expression were working simultaneously, and of these three the first two had already dominated almost all Italian art. Yet not one of them can be said to have left a successor. It is the penalty of genius that it founds no school; for the history of art is like the history of the world's building. The patient waters pile layer upon layer, through the ages,

in broad and level plains. Then leaps the hidden fire through the mass, hurling it this way and that, tearing across its seams, pointing its strata skyward, fusing them into new metals, crushing them into new shapes, and while the dust and residue of their disintegration rolls into the deep valleys, the rock shoulders its way heavenward, and stands a mountain peak among the clouds. Then the waters, forced into new channels, begin their work again, piling the material anew about the feet of the mountains.

The mountain peaks are grander than the plain, but less accessible, and often hidden in the clouds. And so they stand, untouched, unchanged, until some greater fire piles Pelion on Ossa to build a higher mountain still. The waters cannot work upon them any more.

And so the patient workers collect the knowledge. Genius plays with it, sometimes impatiently and wastefully, sometimes with more measured movement, sometimes capriciously evolving fantastic shapes of thought. But no man after them can build upon the structure that they leave, unless he be a genius too. Their form he can see, but not their structure, and the fire that is the agent of that structure is not in him; and in imitating that outward form he is like one who builds with earth and stones a little

mountain in the valley. The outline is, the grandeur is not, there.

At the risk of being wearisome, let me carry the simile a stage further, and liken the genius of Leonardo to the first great upheaval, steady and sure in movement, raising the plain into a soaring graceful peak, but disturbing its integral structure comparatively little; that of Michelangelo to a cataclysmal outburst, of that intensity of heat and pressure that turns carbon to diamonds,and undulating hills to savage precipices and jagged peaks; and of Raphael to the last spurt of a dying upheaval, making softer contours than its great predecessors, and deriving at least some of its greatness from masses falling from their sides to swell its bulk. Ambrogio di Predis was near enough to the central fire of Leonardo to mould a little mountain by its power, but Luini and Sodoma were only builders of cold cairns in the likeness of the mountain.

This triple and simultaneous appeal of genius to intellect, imagination and sensibility ought, we might think, to have been the last word in the art of painting. But these three sides of painting do not even touch upon the material sources of enjoyment. They are all abstracts. The illustrative function of art is, if not absent,

at any rate subordinate. In no case is realism even considered.

For good or ill, the illustrative and realistic aspects of painting exist, and are the most obvious source of enjoyment to the majority of people to-day; and thus, though the methods of art must be based even now upon the research and progress of the Florentines, its application of that knowledge to its aims rests upon a different foundation.

If there had been no link between the philosophic use of painting by the central Italians, and what we may almost call its utilitarian application by the Venetians and the Bolognese in Italy, and by the Germans, Flemings, Dutch and Spaniards, and eventually the French and English in the rest of the world, no useful purpose would have been served by our study of Florentine progress and achievement. But since we are confronted at every turn by Florentine influence, near or remote, upon all painting, and since it was they who worked out the mechanism of the art to a point at which it could become the tool of any artist for any purpose, this long consideration of a small group will be found to be amply justified. Only two additions have been made to that mechanism by painters outside central Italy, but it happens that those two additions

contain all the law and the prophets of the art for most of us. They are colour and atmosphere, the indeterminate and variable constituents of visual beauty, as form and space are its determinate and permanent qualities.

The link existed, and was more than a link between "Renaissance" and modern feeling; it was a link between Italy and the outer world; and it was forged in the most unlikely place imaginable, namely, in the shop at Padua of Squarcione, decorating contractor and dealer in antiques.

In his studio worked his adopted son, Mantegna, who, at ten years old was already inscribed in the Guild of Painters at Padua. Here, surrounded by fragments of antique sculpture and by the learned talk of Humanists and antiquarians, the boy learned the devotion to the antique which was to be through all his life his sole inspiration. In Mantegna, the love of ancient art drove out piety, drove out even humanity. The nearer that he could approach to the cold immobility of marble in his painting, the more nearly he approached his ideal, which was, not so much to re-create the glories of ancient Rome, as to transport himself and his art back into an age that seemed to him more noble than his own; and because he could only see that age through

the medium of lifeless forms of stone, its very lifelessness became to him an essential of its nobility, and he holds his art up like a Medusa head to petrify his thought into the immortality of death.

His inspiration was as sterile as it was stony, and breeds no followers. But his influence on certain of his fellow-pupils in the workshop of Squarcione had the effect of holding their noses to the grindstone of the study of draughtsmanship which alone could save their art from passionate or pretty ineptitude.

The romance of Ferrara, Bologna, Parma, and the virile, practical joy of life of Venice give, not philosophic, but sensuous impulses to art, and the painting of these schools portrays not principles but personalities. Romance takes many forms, and in the art of Cosimo Tura, who worked side by side with Mantegna, it took the form of an almost savage ascetism. Looking at his picture of the Madonna and Child enthroned (N.G. 772), one feels that drawing was to him a torture, a mortification, and therefore to be loved. The ugliness of Our Lady, the stoniness of the Child, stare at you; the involved fantasies of the throne shout their difficulty of execution at you. The enjoyment of such a picture must be sought only in sharing

the sweat of labour in its production, in realizing that here is real renaissance, the rebirth of life infusing the agony of sensation into petrified form. In Cossa, his pupil and fellow-worker, drawing still holds its own, but romance is working free into more natural expression than the volutes and shells of Tura's laboured accessories. This you can see in the "St. Vincent Ferrar" (N.G. 597), with its landscape background full of little figures going about their own business all regardless of the enigmatic figure of the saint. There was a hint of this romantic love of life in Tura's "St. Jerome" (N.G. 773) where, on mountains drawn from the imagination of a man who never saw one in his life, the life of every day goes on. There is development of the same "sentimental irrelevance" in the glimpse of landscape in the altar-piece (N.G. 629) by Costa of Bologna, who is only saved from complete ineptitude by the conscientious manner in which he repeats, parrot-fashion, the lessons in drawing handed down to him by Cossa. His saints are lay figures enveloped in conventional drapery, and topped by sentimental and insecurely attached heads; but the little landscape under the throne of Our Lady is a busy bit of human interest. You may enjoy this picture just as you might enjoy the experience of sitting next a

rather pompous parson at a public function, and enduring professional platitudes which bored him as much as they bored you, till the rising buzz of conversation gave him the chance to tell you, under his breath, an excellent story of his parish, rather spoilt for want of art in the telling, but betraying him as very human after all, and by no means as stupid as you thought.

All that Costa inherited from his teacher was the grammar and syntax of his professional language, but he knew it well enough to pass it on to Francia, who understood its value better than his master, and who used it to express his exquisite human understanding of the sacred persons that he painted. You will find many superior people who will speak slightingly of his great picture of Our Lady with the Child and St. Anne and Saints, and the Pietà which crowns it (N.G. 179 and 180). "A sentimental performance" they call it. So it is, if the history of the human heart of a woman who knows herself the Mother of God is a sentimental history, for that is what he has painted. Beside that, all the rest of his subject lacked interest for him, and in his portrayal of the saints we catch an echo of the bored professional formality of Costa; but the interest of St. Anne in the

Child, which is merely that of an old woman in her baby grandson, serves to heighten the mystic brooding in the Our Lady's lovely face, whose pensive lines are ready to deepen into the harsh furrows of sorrow to come; and in the Pietà you see the foreknown destiny fulfilled.

Once you allow the artist to hold you, not by his presentation of a philosophic abstract of thought or feeling, but by sympathy with a person, you are no longer mainly concerned with art, but with life, through the points of contact between his and your attitude towards men and things; your enjoyment of a picture is no longer logical, but sentimental; and as sentiment is not primarily concerned with thought or knowledge or sight, but only with feeling, it was absolutely necessary to its expression in terms of painting, that its painters should go through a severe training in draughtsmanship in order to bring feeling, which depends upon so many accidental and impermanent conditions, within the compass of an art of which immobility and permanence are primary limitations.

Now sentiment and logic are bitter enemies. No better illustration of this exists than in the treatment on the one hand by Leonardo, and on the other by Correggio, of the charm of woman. Leonardo, the logician, hints in the

"Mona Lisa"' that he felt the charm, but he has used his picture as an avowal that a quality based on caprice is beyond the scope of an art based on logic. Correggio meets caprice with caprice, and loves the elusive quality of woman because it is elusive, painting it with an art which itself eludes definition. He does not want to know, or to tell, what he *thinks* about woman, he is only concerned to express what he *feels* about her. Light-fingered, light-hearted spendthrift that he is, he lavishes the whole of the patrimony bequeathed to him from Francia, and through him from Tura the laborious compiler of wealth of craft, upon his personal delight in woman, and begs, borrows and steals from any and every worker and genius whose work he knows, to spend the more riotously upon his pleasure, careless of the value of what he spends, caring only for the enjoyment of which it is the means.

In the "Education of Cupid" (N.G. 10), Michelangelo's grandeur of line and form is softened to voluptuous account, Leonardo's mystery of light and shadow is tempered to luscious obscurity in the green glade; and he is as wantonly extravagant of his own genius as of that of graver men, for in his great "Assumption" in the cathedral at Parma are a hundred

treasures of figure composition half hidden in the welter of figures that fills it.

He has been called an eighteenth-century Frenchman born out of due time and place; but I think he is only a painter of things that were felt but not expressed by the earnest painters of Central Italy, to whom their art was too holy or too hard-won a power to be spent upon fancies of a moment. In any case he is a genius, turning earth and heaven into a fairyland of women.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROAD TO REALISM

NOW, the moment that the artist concerns himself with his feelings about objects, as opposed to ideas, he becomes concerned with the setting of objects, their accidents of environment. Look at the real feeling for landscape in Benvenuti's " St. Sebastian, St. Roch and St. Demetrius " (N.G. 669). The scene is no longer a mere backcloth, as in Pollaiuolo's " St. Sebastian " (N.G. 292), but almost a setting, and the treatment of the principal figures themselves is no longer pious or merely decorative, but romantic. You are more interested in them as personalities than either as saints or as parts of a design, and feel more in touch with them because of their everyday surroundings, and informal attitudes, even that of St. Sebastian being more or less accounted for by the fact that his arms are actually tied into the theatrical position which is a reminiscence of a more formal point of view.

People will accuse you of want of artistic

feeling if you enjoy the work of such a painter as Benvenuti more than that of Piero della Francesca, of Botticelli or of Leonardo da Vinci. But it is not because it is inferior ("more on your level," rude people will say), but because it is essentially *different* in aim. It is certainly less directly concerned with art, and your enjoyment of it has less to do with pictures and more to do with yourself, but it is none the less for that a legitimate and reasonable enjoyment.

To the Central Italian of the Renaissance, life itself was an art, a thing to be crammed with new knowledge, new experience, new thought. He was analytical, full of intense curiosity, seeking after causes, wanting to see the wheels go round, and his art reflects his attitude towards life. To the Englishman of any period of history, taking life very much as it comes, enjoying effects without worrying about causes, the actively intellectual attitude towards life is liable to become a strain, and having very little logic in his composition, but any amount of sentiment, an art which is based upon symbolism and built up by logic does not appeal to him so readily as that which records the enjoyment of things, without reference to their place in the "scheme of things entire."

That is why it is hard for some of us to enjoy

the pictures of Florence and Umbria. They insist on being considered as translations of thought and theory into line and form and composition, and imprison colour, which is as mutable as woman, within the limits of their immobile convention. I would even go so far as to say that no great colourist can be a rigid logician, for colour is a fleeting and capricious thing, and preoccupation with the transient element in beauty precludes concentration upon its more permanent elements. Perhaps, indeed, the truly logical mind is the intellectual counterpart and complement of the clear vision of form given by strong sunlight, and the sentimental temperament that of the subtle feeling for colour given by dense atmosphere and changing light. At any rate, it is certain that northern races have the more sentimental, and southern races the more logically observant cast of character, and the combination of the one with the colour-sense, and of the other with the knowledge of form, profoundly affects the art of each in opposite ways.

Now if we can find, close to the centre in which painting first developed to the point at which it could be used to express anything the artist pleased, a people whose joy was more in getting the most out of life than in getting the most into

it, who did not live to learn, but learned to live; a practical people, powerful, prosperous and proud, free without anarchy, adventurous without rashness, peaceful without apathy, energetic without restlessness, magnificent for the love of magnificence rather than for ostentation, using as well as amassing wealth—if we can find such a people, to whom at the same time nature has given both the revelation of sunlight and the mystery of colour, we shall have found the channel through which the art of Italy could flow most easily through the rest of Europe; for we shall have found the people who could use the knowledge of the south to express the sentiment of the north.

Venice is such a place, the Venetians were such a people. Painting began late in Venice, for the mists of her canals and lagoons made the unchanging mosaic of her Byzantine tradition too strong a rival for the more delicate and perishable fresco and tempera, and so long as painting was a matter of the covering of church walls with saints, mosaic did all that was needed better than paint. Indeed, the introduction of oil as a medium for paint by the followers of the Flemish van Eycks gave the first impulse to painting in Venice, and the Venetians first turned to painting as they saw it in the richer and

softer colouring of Flemings and Germans. Antonello da Messina learned his art from a Flemish painter ; Antonio Vivarini had a German, Giovanni Alamano, for a partner, and so we may fairly say that it was the colour-possibilities of painting that drew the Venetians towards the art, rather than the love of form.

But from the very first the Venetian painter is more concerned with the individual beauty and interest of what he sees than with its meaning or its relation to principles and ideas. From the very first, portrait painting held its own place in Venetian practice and affection, and its aim was to record what the man was like rather than what the man represented or the part he played. Least of all is the painter concerned with the *pictorial* quality of his subject. Beauty is never interposed by a Venetian painter between you and fact ; rather it is used to emphasize fact, and the fact that seems to be to all Venetian painters the most worth emphasis is the fact of life, of reality.

Thus, though Carlo Crivelli and Giovanni and Gentile Bellini studied in the workshop of Squarcione at Padua, side by side with Mantegna and Tura, there is no trace in their work of that fanatical devotion to the work itself which marks their fellow-pupils. To them all craft is but a

means to an end, and all the patience that is apparent in their efforts to encompass the craft is only possible to them because they are full of the eloquence of warm and honest feeling, and must learn the means of its expression. They ease the task for themselves by practising it upon things that they can love ; see, for example, how Crivelli in the great " Demidoff Altar-piece" (N.G. 788), has painted a fat little goldfinch as round as a ball at the feet of St. John the Baptist, and has learnt something of perspective and foreshortening (always his bugbears) in the doing of it ; and see the simplicity and common-sense with which he has given St. Peter jewels of coloured glass, and keys on a real gilded cord, because the real things honoured St. Peter better than his art could do it.

The pictures of doges that Giovanni and Gentile Bellini paint are very magnificent, very decorative, but the magnificence is that of richly woven and embroidered stuffs sewn with pearls and jewels, of glorious clothes containing human beings ; it is not the magnificence of decoration and design for their own sakes. These pictures are the counterpart in painting of that pageantry which was the natural expression of colour-loving Venice of her pride in her wealth and power. The eyes of Leonardo Loredano (N.G.

189), in his portrait by Giovanni Bellini, twinkle with kindly humanity and clear-sighted shrewdness, and the exquisitely apportioned blue and white and gold of the colour-scheme of the picture serve their main purpose in throwing into relief the warm sallowness of the face with its myriad wrinkles; the wrinkles themselves are not mere drawing, but the life-history of a human being.

Does it surprise you, then, to find that the same painters who so frankly dedicate their art to their interest in their fellow-men as individuals, each with his own character and peculiarities and inconsistencies, instead of turning them into the embodiment of principles and abstract ideas, are also, as frankly and with as little reference to abstract ideas, attracted by the accidents of beauty that form the setting of human life? Are you surprised, perhaps, to find that these people, living and working in the most completely artificial surroundings in the world, in a city where everything that stands above the surface of its waters is the work of human hands, are the only southern painters of their time to grasp and to use the beauty of landscape, and above all, the affinity between man and the natural world around him? Marco Basaiti's "Madonna of the Meadow" (N.G. 599) is but the forerunner in feeling of Giorgione's

and of Titian's landscapes swimming in soft light and glowing colour. It is still a background, one through which you may wander in delight of the flowers and birds and beasts and distant hills that he has painted for the sake of their own loveliness in the same picture with Our Lady and the child. But by the time you come to Titian's "Madonna and Child with St. John Baptist and St. Catherine" (N.G. 635), you realize that a wonder has been wrought, and that the sacred figures are rather a foreground for the hills and trees, and that it is their humanity and life, rather than their sanctity, that appeal to the painter. It is a very earthly joy that suffuses this group of very human loveliness; for them, as for their painter and his public, it is good to be alive in so fair a world.

But the world is so full of a number of things, that to delight in all of them separately would be to lose oneself in an embarrassment of diverse delights. An art which aims at painting the joy of life must find some dominant factor of sensuous experience that is shared in common by all living things—and what more common than the air they breathe, the light by which they see and are seen?

And as it is not solely the things themselves that delight, but their relation to one another,

not only their life but the condition of it, not that which separates them from, but that which joins them to all that surrounds them, and as this unity of life must be, for the painter, a thing communicable through the eyes—a visible thing, there is but one means by which he can express himself, and that is *colour*.

In a picture, lines define and separate objects, light and shadow accentuate their individual existence apart from one another. But colour binds them together, brings them into harmony one with another. Even so, their separate colours will not meet and blend, but will clamour one against the other, unless there be imposed upon them all in common from some external source, a single note of colour, a colour-world for them to live in ; and the sole source of such a unifying power is *light*.

Look at Catena's " St. Jerome in his study " (N.G. 694). Could there be anything much quieter in feeling ? The lion's even breathing as he sleeps, the tiny tread of the partridge as he steals around, fall on accustomed ears, and do not disturb the saint, peacefully absorbed in his book. But speak in whispers, or he will look up !

Yet how easily this picture might have been fussily explanatory, a catalogue of accessories,

instead of being "comfy and homey" as it has been described to me as I write.

It is the difference between beloved furniture and books in a favourite room, where they all "belong together," and the same furniture and books under the hammer of the auctioneer, no longer beloved but appraised, belonging to no one yet, nor to each other.

And why does everything in this picture "belong together," saint and all? Because the same even yellow sunlight holds them all, because their colours are all gilded with its gold. It is the world in which they *live* in harmony with one another. The grain of the wood, the feathers of the partridge, the textures of stuffs, can all be rendered faithfully without becoming obtrusive or vexing our minds with a dozen different preoccupations, because of this unifying light which holds them all and combines their various beauties into a single beauty; and it is only through this understanding of colour that it is possible for the painter to paint his picture so that it is no longer the objects in it which claim our attention, but the subject of it which is the indivisible sum of its separate contents.

But such pictures as this would never have been painted for the sole reason that they were possible. They were painted because they were

wanted. The attitude of Venice towards painting was the same as its attitude towards life. It was a thing which was susceptible of personal enjoyment. It was not enough, in a rich and prosperous state, in which the individual had a chance to expand and to indulge his own tastes, to possess pictures communally; and as political power was not, in a commercial community, the only road to wealth, nor political dominance the only means of personal security, the Venetians, as patrons of art, were more concerned with their own private enjoyment than with public prominence; they were social, not socialistic; idiocratic, not autocratic; but the love of pageantry in public matters, which gave them their splendid processional pictures and their long series of portraits of doges, translates itself, for the private individual, into a love of rich colour and abundant life in his own home. Venice, at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was very like England at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in its strong, comfortable individualism.

Now, as Mr. Berenson delightfully puts it, to be surrounded by pageant pictures in one's own house would be like having a brass band in the drawing-room, and he most appositely compares the easel pictures of Giorgione and

his followers to chamber music. I need not labour the comparison; you will have felt already that the pictures of Venice are the first in the history of southern painting in which you find companionship, with which you would care to *live*. They were not painted to propound anything or to prove anything, but just to be enjoyed, as possessions rather than as pictures; and so they do not depend for their beauty solely upon their pictorial quality, or upon their decorative value (though these are an essential part of their means), but also in a great degree upon the associations with other sources of enjoyment that they convey. Even in their church-pictures there is this touch of human familiarity—and the Venetian was very much at home with his religion, on very familiar terms with his saints. The San Liberale of the famous Castelfranco altar-piece by Giorgione is a very perfect knight and gentleman, as you can see in the painter's study of the figure, called "Gaston de Foix" (N.G. 269) in the National Gallery; the instinct of the Venetian foreran his technical development in this respect, as may be seen in the dandified St. Sebastian of Crivelli in the picture of the "Madonna and Child enthroned with Saints" (N.G. 724), but a painter untouched by the severity of Padua, swayed by no feeling

TITIAN
BACCHUS AND ARIADNE
National Gallery

but Venetian feeling, was needed to discover how to bring Christian saints and pagan gods into a human atmosphere and make them not merely exercises of virtue or intellect, but friends.

This painting is easy for us to understand, for to us also colour is the reflexion of the moods. Look at Titian's "Bacchus and Ariadne" (N.G. 35). The rose-colour of the mantle of Bacchus, against the deep golden-blue of the sky, is a triumphant shout of colour, in perfect time with all the rest, but high and piercing, through all the richer harmonies of red-brown, deep green, and royal blue. The harder blue and vermilion of Ariadne's drapery oppose, do not echo the shout, are not yet absorbed into the processional unity of the picture, into the exuberance of its spirit; but the overglow of golden yellow holds together all these varying notes of colour in one great chord of pure enjoyment. So, you may enjoy even the saddest story beautifully told.

There is, I think, no other spot in the world where the balance between the emotional interest of the subject and the sensuous enjoyment of its presentation is so perfectly preserved as in Venice of the sixteenth century. Further south beauty, further north the subject preoccupies

the *mind*. Only in Venice both appeal equally to the *senses* through the eyes. Consequently the pictures of Giorgione and Titian are the only pictures which you can naturally enjoy without *conscious* thought about either their manner or their matter. They are the only pictures in the world that speak for themselves.

Yet they are not mere literal transcripts of actual beauty, as the painting of the Spaniards, nor the expression of beautiful thoughts in beautiful form, as the painting of the great Florentines, nor the presentation of interesting things, whether beautiful or not, like so much of the painting of the northern peoples. We may find ourselves saying that they are idealized to the point of artificiality, like the "Piper" of Giorgione at Hampton Court—surely there never was so lovely a peasant piper!—but after all, as they were painted for enjoyment, it is that which is enjoyable in the subject which must be painted, not the subject for its own sake; and as it is the association of the subject that is part of the enjoyment, the subject must not be wholly swamped by the beauty; and so the tousled hair and irregular features proper to a country lad must be in the picture, but they must be given the grace of God's fair world in which he lives, that is part of our enjoyment

of the "piper-idea" if I may express it so. Murillo would have painted his stubby dirty nails; Velasquez, his vacant expression, thinking only of the peasant boy who sat before them, interested only to paint him because of some actual beauty accidental to the particular conditions under which they saw him. An English painter would have tried to tell you something about boy nature, or about the manners and customs of pipers in Wales or Brittany or Timbuctoo. Raphael would have turned him into an "unrelated æsthetic experience," a "beautiful design." Giorgione renders in paint your pleasure in the general idea of a piper in the country —the same general idea that is in the mind of a tired city man when he day-dreams of a cottage in the country with pansies in the front and potatoes at the back, untroubled by thoughts of caterpillars, customs of land tenure, or æsthetics.

If the work of Giorgione represents the exuberant growth of an art whose childhood and schooldays are seen in the paintings of Crivelli and the two Bellini, Titian is its young manhood, and Tintoretto its full-grown strength.

Titian sees life through rose-tinted glasses. To him it is all beautiful, for he refuses to see anything but beauty. To enjoy is more important

to him than to understand; but Tintoretto has an older mind. He is greater—far greater than Titian, because he is more mature; but he is not happier. It is not only the joy of life from which he takes his inspiration, but life itself, and life is not all joy. There is in his greatest achievements something of the sense of conflict that stamps the work of Michelangelo, from which he learned so much. But while Michelangelo battled against reality, and sought to purge his art of human imperfection, Tintoretto strove to show the beauty of human life with all its imperfections on its head. He made a great stride towards realism, and broke away both from the heart-broken idealism of Michelangelo, who could find no beauty in human life, and from the light-hearted idealism of Titian, who found in it nothing but beauty.

Thus, to him, the Crucifixion is all the more wonderful, because to most of those who witnessed it, it was a matter of no importance at all. The wonder of it is that it happened, and in just such a busy, preoccupied world as his own, and so he represented it as happening thus. The beauty of the picture is neither less nor more because of the greatness of its subject, for light and colour are always beautiful, and these are the beauties of the picture, as real as the subject itself.

In other words, he has grasped the fact that visual beauty is an external accident of life, and that it does not depend upon moral or mental qualities. It goes its own way, serenely regardless of joy and pain of good and evil. A painter would probably find some very fine effects of light and colour in hell. Beauties of light and colour and form may be used to express or to arouse abstract ideas of happiness and good, but in reality they have nothing to do with one another, and are not inseparable.

But the painter of realism cannot dispense with beauty. Rather the solid meat of reality needs more and rarer vintages of beauty to wash it down than the light food of joyous romance. You may get drunk with Titian on one golden wine, but Tintoretto must choose his hospitality with greater care and knowledge. Magnificent drawing and rich composition, splendid proportion and complex light and shadow, are needed to make the beauty of the picture hold your eyes while its vivid presentation of simple reality delights your interest: and Tintoretto reaches a level that has never been surpassed, in these aspects of painting. More especially in the handling of light effect, in the mingling of different lights, and in the mastery of all the problems which the presence of more than one

source of light introduces into painting, he is supreme ; and so surely does he hold the balance between realism and pictorial beauty, so absolutely governed is he by a sense of proportion, that his figures, even when they are colossal, do not lose their aspect of reality, and are grand without becoming grandiose : so, they never become statuesque, but are always full of vitality which enables us to meet them upon the common ground of humanity.

It is in this more than in all his other qualities that he surpasses Titian. For while in the elder painter's work, neither manner nor matter is the *raison d'être* of the picture, but only enjoyment ; in the work of Tintoretto, the manner and the matter contribute in exactly equal degree to the enjoyment. In the presence of Titian's pictures you feel the joy of being alive, in the presence of those of Tintoretto you feel the joy of living, which is mixed with pain.

How far this is removed from mere realistic interest in life, is seen at a glance, in comparing the Venetians with the Flemings to whom they owed so much. So far as realism is concerned Jan van Eyck had already reached, in the famous portrait of Jean Arnolfini and his wife (N.G. 186), which he painted in 1434, a further point than Tintoretto even sought to reach. But in his

picture there is no joy of living, only an intense interest in all the separate things he sees. He has set on record the forms and features and furniture of surely the meanest man and the meekest woman on earth ; but they are not the main subject ; in fact, there is no main subject, for the indiscriminate realism of the painter has given an exactly equal attention to every object before him, including the light which is common to them all and which is all their beauty.

They are not beautiful, their clothes are not beautiful, their furniture, their surroundings, their dog, are none of them beautiful, but they are all convincingly true. Their attitudes are awkward and stiff, their surroundings are drawn with uninspired care, as though the artist were anxious to "get them right." You know, in looking at this picture, exactly what everything was like ; but you could have had all this in a picture that was not great, as this picture most undeniably is. Wherein, then, lies its greatness ? In a quality of colour and light, a *realism* of colour and light, surpassing anything that Titian ever painted. Van Eyck has painted from the northern realist's point of view, that truth is the patron's business, and beauty the artist's. He has cunningly contrived, because he is an artist, to paint a picture that shall satisfy both demands,

sacrificing no beauty, as he understands it, to truth, and no truth to beauty, but making neither serve the other's purpose. People and furniture are interesting, and therefore patrons want pictures of them. Light and colour are beautiful, therefore artists want to paint pictures. But only an artist who is a genius can satisfy both his patron and himself on these terms.

You see what this means; that among folk who hold these views, artists are a race apart, a little minority of cranks who care more for an intangible, elusive thing like beauty than for facts and real things. In van Eyck's picture, realism and beauty do not collaborate, but compete. It is only because he is a genius that he can give them such equal strength that neither drives the other out of the field. Mabuse and Gerard David could not do it, for in them realism is so strong as to force beauty to become glittering and almost gaudy in order to be seen at all. Patinir could not do it because he wavered between the glamour of beauty and the clamour of realism, inclining now to the one and now to the other. Their difficulty was that to them beauty was one thing, and fact another. Their only conception of beauty lay in colour and light, which are elusive and uncertain things; form, which has the permanent quality of fact, was

bounded for them by what they saw, and that none too clearly; they could not idealize in terms of it. Therefore form (which corresponds to unalterable fact) fought against colour whose mutability gave freedom to imagination.

It was a queer dilemma, and the statement of it may run somewhat after this fashion :

" The form of this man's face is a fixed fact, but it is not beautiful " (Jean Arnolfini's certainly was not !)

" But its colour varies with the light, and light is beautiful, so let me choose a moment when the light gives ugly form beautiful colour."

" But if I choose a moment when beauty of colour obscures ugliness of form, I shall be showing this man as beautiful, when, in fact, he is ugly; and that will be false."

" Must I choose the moment when the truth appears, and paint an ugly picture, or the moment when the truth is veiled, and paint a beautiful one ? "

So Flemish painting came to a standstill in the early years of the sixteenth century, and had to wait for Rubens to learn from the study of Titian and Tintoretto how to use his natural instinct for beauty of colour and light, and to combine them with his interest in the realities of the life he lived.

Venice, knowing and enjoying form and colour, reality and imagination, taught Europe how and what to paint, as Florence never could have done. History, geographical position and temperament combined to make her the bridge between art and life, and that bridge was built in the life-work of three men, covering a hundred and fifty working years, of unbroken transmission at first hand, from the beginnings of Bellini in the workshop of Squarcione at Padua, through Giorgione, cut off too soon by death, and Titian, his fellow-worker and bearer of his torch for yet seventy years more, to the last stroke of the brush of Tintoretto.

CHAPTER V

BEAUTY UNADORNED

IF painting had stood still where Tintoretto left it, it would still have been the most expressive of the arts. But it is not in man to leave any art where he finds it, so long as there is anything in that art of which he can make use for his own purposes.

The art of northern Europe had struggled on and reached its farthest limit at the same time as the Gothic spirit from which it sprang, with no other inspiration than that of material beauty, and of interest in material things. The literal unquestioning faith of Spain had struggled on without expression in material form, save that which it copied from the academic abstractions of Italy, or from the material splendours of Flanders. Both found in Venice what they needed, to revive or to create an artistic formula suited to their own temperament.

What Spain needed was a body, visible and

tangible, for her soul. What Flanders needed was a soul to give life to the body.

It is hard, at first, to find anything to enjoy in the painting of Theotocopoulos, called El Greco, the Greek who learned his craft from Titian before he went to Spain and settled in Toledo. Harsh drawing, sour colour, and contorted modelling, livid lights and shadows, do not attract our eyes nor stimulate our imagination ; but if we grasp the fact that this southerner, painting for southerners, is a seeker after truth to whom all beauty of imagination is an obscuring haze to be ruthlessly cleared away, and if we realize that the truth, to him, demands that a picture should express everything in terms of the actual experience of our bodily sight, we have the key to his strange crudity, and can appreciate both his difficulties and the degree of his success. For, like the people among and for whom he worked, he has no imagination, and can excuse no physical impossibility in the rendering of ideas in terms of form. If a saint sits on a cloud, the cloud must be solid enough to bear his weight ; if an angel has wings, they must be wings with which he can fly. And, as painting can only appeal to the sight, the painter must conquer, absolutely and completely, the truthful representation of things as they would be seen if they

were actually there, before he can concern himself with their beauty. It was not because El Greco could not make pictures full of beauty of colour and idealization of form, but because he would not, that these pictures of his later life are so empty of these qualities, for while he was Titian's pupil, he painted pictures that were mistaken, and are sometimes still mistaken, for his master's work. And he persisted in his task, despite official prejudice in favour of Italianate painting, because he had behind him the national temperament of his adopted country, a temperament that accepts in the most literal spirit the most mystical aspects of religious faith, and grasps them boldly by clothing them in the most uncompromising reality.

Realism, then, is to the Spaniard a means to an end, not an interest in itself. It is the means of giving a form which can be understood in the light of actual physical experience, to ideas which would elude a far more vivid imagination than he could ever hope to possess.

Even from the realism of Tintoretto, which influenced El Greco not at all, there was something missing; it was not particularized. He painted a scene as it might well have happened, but conveys no suggestion that he is sure that it happened in just that way and in no other.

That does not satisfy El Greco. Painting heaven and earth in one picture, as in his masterpiece, the Burial of the Conde de Orgaz, he wants to be sure that his heaven is as physically real in its presentment as his earth; and having seen the one, but not the other, he succeeds stupendously in one half of the picture, and fails magnificently in the other—magnificently because although you may pray that heaven may not be like that, you know that El Greco has striven harder to give physical reality to his conception of heaven than you have ever done; its shortcomings are those of honesty, not of laziness or ineptitude.

Moreover, he is inspired, in that he has realized that absolute visual beauty can only be rendered by absolute fidelity to experience. But it was left to a Spaniard to carry this realization to its logical conclusion. Velasquez is the first among painters to see that visual beauty itself resides, not in facts of knowledge, but in facts of sight. And from this he deduced that to present anything in a picture with absolute reality one must paint not what is, but what is seen.

This was the discovery that Italians had never made, and never could have made, for to them the picture was always a picture, a *translation* of ideas, of sentiments, or of life, into terms of

paint, based upon a tradition which insisted upon the separate existence of the picture from the thing portrayed. All Italian painting admitted the necessity of acknowledging that a picture could not present the whole truth, and therefore felt free to select or to reject truths to suit the purpose of the picture. Consequently no Italian painter sought after or achieved actuality, never lost touch with the decorative origin of his art.

Spain was bound by no such tradition, and had not enough imagination to select and emphasize one quality of things seen to the exclusion of others. Consequently all the effort of Spanish painters is directed towards discovering the means of encompassing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, of what he sees, by means of his art. It is a new activity of painting, and must begin at the beginning.

Now the one natural fact of visual experience which is not decorative, but actually destructive of decorative unity, is atmosphere; and no Italian ever painted atmosphere. I do not care how much people may talk about the golden atmosphere of Venetian painting, it is not there. The gold I grant, but not the atmosphere. The Umbrians discovered the decorative value of space, and the Venetians filled it with colour,

but they reduced it to terms of paint laid on a flat surface. To have done otherwise would have been to destroy the picture as a picture, to defeat its decorative purpose. But the Spaniard did not care a farthing for its decorative purpose. What he wanted was something in which he could believe. To him beauty was not the only, or even the principal, truth that concerned the painter, but a thing that happened sometimes in actual experience, and sometimes did not. Until he was capable of handing on his own actual experience in the form of a picture, he did not feel capable of considering whether the experience contained beauty or not.

Now atmosphere is made visible to the eye by the progression of light from an object to the retina of the eye. The mechanical process of sight does not discriminate, it simply receives. The retina cannot reject a single ray which is reflected upon it, nor receive one which does not reach it.

You may know with absolute certainty that a piece of stuff is black, and square, but when you come to paint it, you must not use that knowledge, if your object is to set down what you see; for what you *see* is a collection of various degrees of intensity and purity of light reflected at various angles on the mirror of your

eye; and when you have, so to speak, matched the colours and reproduced the shapes of those various patches of light, upon your canvas, it has upon it an exact reproduction of what your eye sees; but that reproduction is neither black nor square. And as the reflection on the retina of your eye is flat, a resolution into a flat arrangement of various lights reflected from a solid object whose myriad surfaces face the light at different angles on to your eye, and the canvas upon which you reproduce it is also flat, *there is no longer any illusion involved in painting*, for the painting is an actual and absolute reproduction of the reflection on the eye, which is of two dimensions, that is, of sight; *not* of the thing seen, which is of three.

But, you will say, there is nothing new in all this. It is precisely what any Italian painter could do, if he chose, with the knowledge of drawing, colour, and light which he possessed. He did not choose to do it in respect of colour so much as in respect of form, but it is only a clumsy description of perspective, which he brought to perfection.

Wait. We have been talking about the eye. What about *two* eyes? And more still, what about the way of using either one or two eyes?

Take any large Italian picture, say the Ansidei

Madonna of Raphael, the Madonna with St. Anne of Francia, or Alexander and the Family of Darius by Paolo Veronese. The perspective of the architectural features will tell you where to stand to look at each of them, so that you can see the whole of the picture at once. These great pictures fill their frames gloriously, are rightly balanced every way. To see their beauty you must see them *as a whole*, from edge to edge. They are wonderful rectangles, and their beauty is a pattern fitted to their form. That is to say that they are essentially flat in aim.

How do they keep this flatness which is the essential of their beauty? By giving equal sharpness of focus to every object over the whole of their surface: not equal depth of emphasis in colour and line, but uniform clearness of vision. The result is that your eye can range over the whole surface of the picture without experiencing any sense of variation of distance from the various objects it encounters. Its area of focus covers the whole picture at once, as one thing, and is not claimed by one object in it more than by the rest. When you come closer to the picture, you break it up into a number of separate pictures, and look at each separately, all still at the same distance from your eye.

This is a convention. It is not true to sight.

A picture so painted is a pattern woven of many things seen separately, not a transcription of a single experience of sight.

You cannot with both your eyes at once see more than one thing at a time with absolute clearness, nor even of that one thing more than the very middle point to which your sight is directed; and your whole field of vision is comparatively small. With one eye it is smaller still, but equally sharp all over, though less brilliantly lighted towards the edges. What, then, is the advantage of having two eyes?

Your eyes are a range-finder. You derive your sense of distance from the fact that when you look at an object you bring two lines of vision, one from each eye, to bear upon it, forming, with the distance between your eyes as a base, a triangle of which the angles at the base resolve the distance of the object from the eyes. Those two lines of vision must converge at a point of vision common to both eyes, and at that point on the object, *and at that point alone,* the two images reflected upon the two eyes are identical. Everywhere else in the field of vision the objects are reflected upon the two eyes from slightly different angles, like the two photographs of a stereoscopic picture, and do not exactly coincide in their impression on the brain. Thus

the point of focus is seen with absolute definition, and all the rest of the " picture " of the field of vision, more and more blurred towards its edges by the increasing divergence between the two images reflected upon the two eyes, and your sense of distance—your stereoscopic sense, if you like—is derived from this divergence and its relation to the point of focus.

Velasquez was the first painter to paint what he saw with both eyes at once, that is, a picture of his field of vision, not of the separate objects within it ; and in doing so, he revolutionized the whole outlook of his art. It is no longer a question of what the objects are, and how they can be made to form a beautiful picture ; it is a question of what is seen, and of what beauty is seen in seeing them. He is not painting men and women, satins and velvets, hills and horses, but the effect of these things on the eye, the reality of sight, not the reality of things. And because the two reflections upon the eyes are flat, and, super-imposed one upon the other by the brain, become stereoscopic, he combines the two flat images upon his flat canvas, and produces the same result *by the same means.*

And as light is the means of sight, and light is subject to accidents of deterioration in kind and degree, from the circumstances of its reflec-

tion upon the eye, the painter who paints *exactly what he sees* is no longer troubled with the question of why he sees it so, but mechanically reproduces, not selected results, but *all* results of all conditions affecting light, among which atmosphere is potent, and so he paints atmosphere with the rest.

He is not concerned with form or colour as form and colour, but only as variations in degree and quality of light. To him all form is merely a collection of surfaces from which light is reflected in a greater or less degree ; all colour is merely a reflection of one or another quality of light ; he matches these with his pigments, sets those pigments side by side upon his canvas, building them up like a puzzle, and the thing is done.

Of course, there is an infinite variety and subtlety of modification to be observed in the use of such a method. You know your own instinct, when first you meet a man, to " look him up and down." It is scarcely more than a flicker of the eyes, but it serves to " take him in " from head to toe. And so Velasquez, when he paints a full length portrait, looks his subject up and down, and takes him all in, before concentrating his gaze upon a single point—eyes, nose, or silver button or whatever it may be—

and so paints with ever so little more than the true definition the buckles on his shoes. Every subject suggests its own degree of fixity of attention, and is painted accordingly; but the main principle persists throughout, which is that of painting no more and no less than he sees.

Also, of course, such a conscientiously actual point of view has its limitations. Ethereal fantasy, half-embodied thought, flights of imagination, are beyond its scope. But that did not matter to the Spaniard, for they were beyond his scope also. The angels of Velasquez are more solid, more earthly, even than those of El Greco, precisely because he has mastered the problem which tortured his fore-runner; but, by way of compensation, he is not obliged to paint them so often. The sturdy, commonplace angel in purple and brown serge, who stands behind the very human little girl who represents St. Bridget in the "Vision of St. Bridget" (N.G. 1148), and whose wings are discreetly swallowed up in shadow, and blurred in the extreme edge of the field of vision, as though the painter resented their necessity, is the nearest that Velasquez can get to the representation of a spirit, and it is not very near. That is because in his thoughts he has to clothe an idea with a physical body before he can bring it before his mental vision,

and so transfer it to his canvas, and through your eyes to your mind.

It has its triumphs too, and this same picture is one of them. As to St. Bridget her vision of the Passion of our Lord was actual, bridging time and space so that she seemed in the very presence of the Divine Tragedy, so Velasquez has presented it to us, even embodying physically, in the flash of light that spans the centuries of shadow, the link between the consciousness of the Christ and the heart of His saint. This is the literal faith that makes the deepest mystery of the soul a natural reality.

This materialization of the symbols of ethereal things is carried very far. The glory about the head of the Christ is not a formal symbol of, but a physical emanation from his divinity. In a phrase, Velasquez leaves nothing to the imagination.

Whether this pleases you or not will depend, not upon your artistic judgment, but upon your temperament. To me it is sublime, to you it may be ridiculous. But if you remember that it is the work of a man in whose race all emotion, and especially religious emotion, has a direct physical reaction, you will concede that it is at least reasonable. The "Franciscan" of Zurbaran (N.G. 230) sweats and groans in an agony

of prayer. The stillness, the stony silence of the King and all the Princes and Princesses that Velasquez painted in nearly forty years of close association with Philip IV, is the physical reflection of their pride. The superb "Philip IV," old (N.G. 745), though the face is scarred with sorrow, is still the portrait of a King—and this is as much due to Philip as to his court painter.

But if Velasquez is truly such an uncompromising realist, what is his contribution to beauty? His pictures may represent nature, but how do they help art? In what way do they constitute an advance in painting?

Beauty of colour is not their beauty, in the sense that Italian or Flemish pictures are beautiful, for he has done away with colour. It is as though he painted in black at one extreme of light, and white at the other, scarlet midway between the two, and all the other colours as tinted greys, because that is how he sees and understands colour. Beauty of form is not their beauty, for form itself is subject to alteration and indefinition by the limitations of sight. Beauty of composition they often have, but it seems rather to come than to be brought into them, for he often enlarges his canvas as he works to suit his subject as it develops. Beauty

of subject matters least of all, and many of his subjects are frankly hideous—witness the Niño de Vallecas, a vacuous, distorted idiot dwarf. But this very picture is one of his most beautiful.

Realist that he is, he has discovered that beauty is as real as anything else, and he paints it where he finds it, as he finds it, regardless of ugliness in the individual objects that help to build it up. He does not analyse it or determine it; perhaps, half the time, he does not know exactly in what it consists, but he *sees* it, and he sets it down exactly as he sees it.

In doing so, he opens all the world to our eyes in their search for beauty, and, more important still, he opens our eyes to all the world. Nothing is ugly that may not have its moment of beauty; and as beauty is noble, nothing is irretrievably mean; for beauty is independent of, external and accidental to objects and persons. It is light.

Velasquez is the greatest painter of light that ever lived. Not the light that becomes visible by colour, as the Venetians painted it, but light by whose presence or absence our seeing or not seeing is determined. Light's hide-and-seek among more ponderable things is the beauty of Velasquez's painting.

Because of this, he is the first painter to whom

both outdoor and indoor atmosphere was worth the trouble of painting. He is the first true landscape painter, the first true painter of interior light.

Even in one of his rare efforts at decorative painting, the "Surrender of Breda," see how quietly the light flows out of the distance over the distant landscape engulfed in its soft purity, and gleams sharply between the serried lances that give the picture its name, "Las Lanzas." But in the "Conde Olivarez," the "Don Carlos Baltasar on Horseback" or the "Philip IV in Hunting Costume," it is the landscape that matters. The figures—with all due deference to their exalted rank let us speak low—are but a foreground for the lovely distances of light that stretch beyond them. It is the figures at which you look, it is the landscape of which you are conscious, at which you will turn to gaze when they have passed by.

And in the two great masterpieces of his later days, "Las Hilanderas" (the tapestry weavers), and "Las Meniñas" (the Maids of Honour), he reaches at once the summit of his achievement and the fulness of simplicity. In the one, the flood of light in the inner raised chamber swallows up the royal visitors and the tapestries, which in the work of a mere, realistic illustrator would

VELASQUEZ
LAS HILANDERAS (THE TAPESTRY-WEAVERS)
Prado

have been all the picture, and comes pouring out into the dark workroom that is the foreground, over the bare arms and rough garments of work-girls, dissolving the obstinate shadows, carpeting the floor with glory, and fighting through the dusky gloom of the high ceiling above the lighted arch. In the other, the Princess, her attendants, the dog, the dwarfs, the lookers-on, the portrait of Velasquez himself at his easel, marvel of skill though each one of them be, are but a setting of material objects for the soft light that feels its way into the furthest corners of the great emptiness of the room, that is thick and heavy with still atmosphere.

There is little more that painting can achieve. The Florentines found in form, evolved from the study of forms, a formula for thought. The Venetians found in colour, evolved from an instinct for colours, a formula for feeling, and the Spaniard found in unrelenting unimaginative truth, based upon a faithful hold on truths, not a formula for beauty, but the key to the actual beauty of the material world.

CHAPTER VI

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

IN spite of all that has been said in the foregoing pages, are we any nearer to grasping the purpose, and enjoying the beauty, of the pictures of Rembrandt and Hobbema, Vermeer and de Hoogh; of Rubens and Vandyk, and of the two Teniers; of Hogarth, Reynolds and Gainsborough, Constable and Turner; of Nicolas Poussin, and Claude, Watteau, Boucher, Fragonard, Chardin or the Barbizon school?

I think so. For in all the painting that we have considered up to now, the process of painting has been developed concurrently with the purpose. The craft has been developed this way and that to serve the aims of Italian, Venetian and Spanish temperaments; and but for their development of their craft for their own needs, it is to be doubted whether Flemish and Dutch, English and French, would ever have found expression in painting at all.

The interest of all these schools—or nations

rather—is not so much in their paintings as in the things their paintings represent. The subject dominates their thought; and interest in, or thought about a subject would not impel a man to paint it, unless painting were already a fairly well developed craft.

The progress of the Dutch in landscape painting is progress rather in the study of landscape than of painting. Their progress in portrait painting is progress in the study of men and women. They choose to paint this and that and the other not because it is beautiful, or because it expresses an idea, but because they like looking at it, because it interests them.

This does not imply depreciation of their work. Compare Rembrandt's portraits of himself, as a young man (N.G. 672), and as an old man (N.G. 221), at the beginning and the end of his career, with Velasquez's portraits of Philip IV young, and Philip IV old; or set Hobbema's "Avenue at Middelharnis" (N.G. 830), almost the greatest landscape picture in the world, beside a landscape by Velasquez or Giorgione.

In both the portraits by Velasquez the beauty belongs not to the man, but to the picture. Because they are literal transcriptions of things seen, *you* can be interested in the man as though he stood before you, but the greatness of the

pictures does not depend upon that photographic accuracy, but upon conditions external to the subject. His portrait of "Æsop" is just as beautiful, and just as impersonal.

Rembrandt's portraits of himself are not only portraits of himself in form, but in essence as well. All the portraits that he painted, as a young and prosperous painter, were portraits of himself, of his youth and prosperity, whomsoever they represented. All portraits that he painted as an old man are pictures of his own old age. You may trace all the ups and downs of his life, all the developments of his character, in his pictures at the National Gallery. Every one of them is a picture of his soul. What I am trying to say is this: that if you are, as you say, interested in an object, it is because there is in that object something that appeals to *you*, personally and individually, something in which it is *like yourself*. You are unconsciously tacking an abstract quality of your own on to a corresponding material quality in the object that interests you, identifying it with yourself. You are not concerned with its beauty, but with its reflection of your own temperament. It is a very subtle process, wholly unconscious in most minds, subconscious in many, not fully realized and understood, I think, even by those who

REMBRANDT

PORTRAIT OF A MAN IN POLISH HEAD-DRESS
Hermitage, Petrograd

PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF *c.* 1664
National Gallery

seek to use some art to express it. But in representing anything in which you were interested, you would naturally emphasize those qualities in it which attracted you, for which you felt an affinity, and might even overlook altogether other qualities with which you had no sympathy, which were unlike yourself. Consequently, your representation of it would tend to become like yourself; and the deeper your interest goes, the more profoundly you probe into the nature of a thing in search of qualities that you can understand and with which you can sympathise, the more completely will you invest it with your own personality.

Light-hearted, magnificent, extravagant young Rembrandt did not go deeply into his interest in human life. Its glitter and glory fascinated him, were his affinities, and these he painted. Self-willed, soured, obstinate Rembrandt of the evil days that followed his wife's death, went deeper into life, and the beauty of his pictures of that period is more subtle, less conventional, and far more varied. Gentler, more kindly, happier Rembrandt touched both joy and sorrow in the days when the love of Hendrikje Stoeffels made life easier for him, and there is a deeper philosophy, a more serious joy in the pictures of his middle age. He paints, not men and women,

but aspects of humanity, seen in the light of his own sad experience, pictures such as his " Jew Merchant " (N.G. 51), with all the defensive dignity and shrewd watchfulness of the homeless race summarized in the features of one man. And in his old age of failure and loneliness, when life held little that is worth interest, it is life itself that held him, sometimes fiercely, as when he paints that old, old woman (N.G. 1675), whose eyes alone retain the fire of life, and glitter viciously, defiantly out of the canvas, as though she refused to give in ; or with philosophic, humorous regret of wasted time, as when he paints his own portrait, shabby, dissipated, worn, resigned, but still so much alive, and rather amused to find himself still content to live, although so weary as to be content to die ; and last of all, with a flash of cynical scorn of the blind complacency of youth, he paints in the " Portrait of a Woman " (N.G. 237), a summary of all contented fools that ever were—including himself !

Rembrandt soars above his fellow-countrymen, like a church tower in the Holland fens. But his foundations rest upon the flat earth of which they are made. His impulse is the same as theirs, interest in things. How far he went beyond their understanding is sufficiently shown

by his failure ; and it is noticeable how many of the Dutch artists who had elements of greatness in them were hard-worked and poor, and often rather disreputable too. Your Dou and Mieris and Schalcken, painting every feather on a pheasant's neck, every hair of a cat, every scale of a fish, catching the flicker of a candle-flame in paint, carried their interest very far, not deep at all, and prospered. Painters of pots and pans and plates of oysters could command a living, for they painted things within the range of every one's observation and interest. Florists and fruiterers in paint sold wares that all the world would buy. For souls the market was small, and beauty accidental to, not an integral part of material things, was too elusive for the mind of most ; and so Vermeer slaved and starved, painting the pearly light of grey northern skies, pouring into quiet rooms, while de Hoogh, painting an almost equal beauty of light that fell on common things, made money and lived well.

The fact that there was any great Dutch painting at all is a splendid tribute to the courage of those painters whose greater depth of interest in the things they painted carried them beyond the range of common sympathy and understanding. But it is a thing to note that Hobbema

painted his one stupendous landscape at a date far later than most of his works, when he was independent of public appreciation, and free to develop his delight in wind and fleeting light, in the pattern of landscape, in its beauty, rather than in the prettiness or interest in the objects that went to build it up. The vast majority of Dutch painting consists of the reproduction in paint of people, and things, and places, for their interest or humour rather than for their beauty, and the fact that there is beauty in them is due rather to the painter's observance of the rules of his craft and to his own instinctive enjoyment, as an artist, of the beauty, than to any demand for it on the part of those for whom he worked, and the moment that the painter discovered interest or beauty in some quality not obvious to the majority of his fellows, he was working against, and separating himself from their interest in its superficial qualities.

The same is largely true of English painting, but the divergence between artist and public has been developed into active antagonism by the fact that the whole craft of painting is, in this country, derived from foreign sources. In the sixteenth century Holbein, in the seventeenth, Rubens and Van Dyck, Lely, Kneller, did all our painting for us. Cornelius Johnson was English

born, but Dutch by descent and training. Dobson was a pupil of van Dyck and left no followers. Painting was under aristocratic patronage, a learned art. It made no appeal to ordinary everyday folk, till Hogarth linked it on to the tradition of the broadsheet, much to the contempt of his fellow-craftsmen.

The "patron of the arts" is not an English invention, but I think it is only in England that he actually brought painting into existence, and his motive for doing so had nothing to do with his love of beauty. The Tudor methods of government and "reform" filled the country with a crowd of *nouveaux riches*—"founders of families" is perhaps a politer description—who wanted to have their portraits painted for their own gratification, and in order to hand down their commonplace features and fine clothes to a grateful posterity; and they hired a clever German to do the work, because he was accounted "good at a likeness." That he was a very great artist did not interest them overmuch, for they did not look for beauty in a picture, but only for themselves.

Please do not imagine that I mean to imply that the Englishman had no sense of beauty. All I mean is that he had never thought of using painting to express it. He had his own arts for

that, above all the art of words, both poetry and prose, in which a beauty is enshrined that defies the limits of line and colour. But to the Englishman of the sixteenth century, generally speaking, painting was a foreign device for making portraits, and no more.

As it was among the rich and powerful that painters were first patronized, it was naturally among the same people that the interest in pictures was born. Charles I was a natural connoisseur, and the great dead of Italy, as well as the great living Flemings, contributed to a royal collection formed with rare taste. But the Commonwealth dispersed them as pomps of royalty, just as it dispersed the crown jewels; and Cowper painted Cromwell, "wart and all." The portraits that had been a fashion in the sixteenth became a commonplace of the seventeenth century, and, except among the "artistic," the first and only demand of the sitter was that they should be "like." They supplied the need that the camera has since met.

But it was in the seventeenth century that Englishmen began to know something of Europe, and in the latter half of the century men of taste and education, attached to kings in exile, learned more of Holland and of France than was wholly to their liking, while merchants of Yarmouth,

Lynn, and Bristol brought the homely pictures of Holland into English homes, as we bring picture postcards back from our travels. Still the portrait-idea was paramount, whether it were a portrait of a man, a ship, a city, or a stretch of countryside. Not so long ago, a picture by Vermeer, that had reached England probably while it yet was new, changed hands for a five-pound note (worth that because it was a biggish picture), because the Christ in it was unpleasing to its owner's eyes—" not like my idea of Christ at all "—a bad portrait, in fact.

No lover of pictures could have sold it for such a reason. But the fact is that we are an incurably literary people. Literature is our natural art, and painting is no more to us than its servant. From this point of view, the only thing that painting can do better than words, is to show us what a thing is like when it is at rest. It cannot show us what that thing *does*, nor what it was or will be. We love a portrait, because we like to know what the man looked like, who did this or that, in order that our mental moving picture of his life may be complete. Or, if a portrait strikes us, we say " Who is that ? " not " Who painted that ? " or " What a beautiful picture." Our first impulse is to fit a striking

personality into the scene of action to which he belongs.

All pictures are to us by nature illustrations of men and things. I speak as one of the multitude, who are not "students of art." Among students of art, even among connoisseurs of the art of Europe, there have been and are many Englishmen and women who have cultivated in themselves a keen enjoyment and deep understanding of the aims and achievements of other races in other applications of the art of painting. But no English painter has ever been, nor, I believe, ever will be, great, who does not bow to his national instinct, and count his knowledge of the work of others less than the sincerity of his own.

But a failure to grasp this fact has created a false barrier between art and life. As the people interested in painting, in this country, both patrons and painters, have been forced to study the practice of the art in foreign examples, they have arrived at a false conception of the place of art in life. As it has necessarily been for them a subject of study, they have come to regard it as a "branch of knowledge," the possession and display of which are proofs of aesthetic superiority over those who do not possess it. So the patron demanded from the artist evidence of his study

of "art," which, to him, meant Italian painting, and the painter thought he had proved himself an artist when he had painted something stamped with the lore of foreign lands. To them both, "art," or the display of their own intellectual superiority to the common herd, was so much more important than life, beauty was so absolutely a matter of form and precedent, that they drove out nature with a pitchfork, and put a posturing Flemish or Italian scarecrow in its place.

Tamen usque recurrit. The Englishman who never heard of Italy has a sense of beauty, which is quite his own. It is mixed, illogical, ill-defined, but it is triumphantly English. It is England: and it is the true beauty of English art.

You and I can afford to pay a passing tribute to the colossal classicisms of Sir James Thornhill, and to the patient Claudification of landscape by Richard Wilson. We know the pains they took to learn how to be unnatural: but we can hail with delight the lapses of Calcott, when a corner of real English colour slips into a carefully Italianized "picturesque" landscape. We know whence we get our love of beauty, and what form it takes in our minds. From Piers Plowman through Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, now wholly English, now Gallicized, or Italianized

in its expression, the one beauty runs through all, the "beauty of nature." We are very insular. England and Englishmen are the things we know and love. A sense of colour is our heritage, beyond that of all other races of Europe. A love of action is our character. Thought is not greatly ours, and logic not at all. Abstract ideas, aesthetic parallels, and sensuous reactions do not attract us. We are nearer to the great Dutchmen in their study of humanity and their loving observation of fields and sky and trees; or to the Flemings, whom our kings and courtiers used, with their flexibility of colour tuned to every mood; but I think that in our colour-sense we go beyond them, even perhaps read into their work more than they ever knew was there.

All our greatest painters are naturalists and colourists, more or less perfectly balancing the two qualities in their work. And all our greatest painters speak to all of us about the thing they paint, without a word about their way of painting it. You need no knowledge of the history of art, to enjoy Sir Joshua Reynolds' "Admiral Keppel."

That *he* needed an immense amount, to enable him to paint it, does not concern you, and he does not thrust it on you. If you must analyse

it, for your own instruction, you will not find in it the Caracci, nor Titian, nor Michelangelo, though something learnt from all of them is there. What you will find is a very thorough knowledge of the craft of painting, placed wholly at the service of the subject, and the element of that craft that you cannot by any means trace to a source outside this island is the exquisite understanding of colour, in its relation to the subject in hand. I will not try to explain this in detail. Go and look at this portrait, and then at his portrait of Lord Heathfield. Study the men, the two different men, in the two different pictures, and you will soon see that the colour-scheme of each picture, so beautiful in itself, is part of the artist's character-study of the man, and *suits* its subject. The artist is relying upon your possession of, and you are using, a faculty denied to all other peoples, the English colour-sense.

And as we get that colour-sense from nature, from the fickle, moody English climate, it is natural that very early in our painting history we should begin to paint such landscapes as the world had never seen before.

It began with " portraits of places," like those which English travellers brought back from Holland in the seventeenth century, or paid

Canaletto to paint in England. There is more than a hint of such things in Hogarth, glimpses of the common world of every day, seen through a window. Paul Sandby invented water-colour painting that we might the more easily sketch the passing beauties of sun and cloud. Scott's pictures of the Thames are quite as much concerned with charm as with topography. Gainsborough used landscape as Reynolds used colour, to carry out the personality of a portrait, but he also painted pure landscape, more happy perhaps, because freer to develop his own enjoyment of natural colour without the preoccupation of the portrait figure; but in the "Mrs. Graham" in the Scottish National Gallery, or in the "Dr. Ralph Schomberg" (N.G. 684), you can see what perfect harmony of character exists, as between the figure and the background.

In Romney, the colour-sense never quite finds a medium for its expression, thanks to faulty drawing and weak characterization; so it has to stand on its own merits, as pure decoration, and very well it manages to do so. All his pictures are dainty pieces of furniture, satisfying a subtle love of colour, and aiming at no more. He paints no landscapes, but his delicate feeling for colour arises from the landscape-sense.

The outdoor setting of portraits soon becomes

the rule rather than the exception, among that wonderful group of portrait painters who first gave our painting a truly national expression with a truly national appeal. It is not a new device, nor exclusively English, for Velasquez and the great seventeenth-century Flemings used it freely, but in England alone is it the source from which the painter drew his understanding of the right use of colour, not only for the setting, but for the portrait as well. If the average Englishman looks at a landscape as a portrait of nature, one might almost say that the English painter of the eighteenth century looked upon a portrait as a human landscape.

But it is the first half of the nineteenth century which brings England its full expression in painting. The very names bring a pageant of England before our mental vision—Constable, Cox and Bonington, old and young Crome, and Cotman and all the Norwich school, the Nasmyths, Barker of Bath, and Ward, and, greatest of all, England's genius, Turner.

Need I tell you how to enjoy the pictures that give you England, shaking the raindrops from the lashes of her laughing eyes?—or those that wrap you in the sleepy gold of summer evenings, spread over the deep-breathing moorlands; or Cox, with his scudding clouds and snoring breeze;

or Bonington, painter of the great clear heights of silent skies? These are things you know for yourselves, and each man paints them as his own, in the aspect that is his delight. In vain the critics stormed, and wept the departed grandeur of art, the degradation of painting to the mere record of nature. The English nation had come into its own, and would not be denied. It took the judgment of Paris to convince the English critics, when it acclaimed, with the gold medal of the Salon, the picture they had despised, Constable's "Hay Wain" (N.G. 1207); but the common world, that took beauty where it found it, had already made up its mind.

As I have said, it is a mixed, illogical thing, this English sense of beauty. It defies analysis, for it is quite as much sentimental as æsthetic. It loves, not the colour of the tree, nor the form of the tree, but the "tree-ness" of the tree, form and colour and nature and associations all in one. It is, if you like, the romance of things seen and felt and known, but never analysed.

That is why its supreme achievement, the work of Turner, sometimes almost escapes our enjoyment, for he himself cannot pin down surely in his mind the source of his delight, nor surely fix its goal. Follow him through all the stages of his art, and you will feel that in all of

TURNER
THE FIGHTING TEMERAIRE
National Gallery

CONSTABLE
A LOCK
Burlington House

them alike, it is not beauty that he seeks so much as feeling ; colour more and more becomes to him a language for the expression of that feeling. Gloom and joy, romance and mystery, sometimes a sharp physical thrill of enjoyment arising directly from the subject itself, as in his "Frosty Morning" (N.G. 492), these are the realities of his pictures, whose beauty is their vehicle, whose subject is but the text of the discourse.

I cannot get nearer to it than that, but it is the summit of English painting, and it is built upon the same love of nature that is yours and mine, a lover-like devotion that reads all virtues and all powers into the object of its love.

One word more, and I have done. It was French discrimination that reconciled our pundits to our painters. What of the French painters themselves ? Well, if English painting is based on a romantic egotism, French painting is inspired by a logical egotism. For France is logical first, foremost and last. That is why women are so powerful in French history, for it is only in face of woman that logic fails.

That is also why a Frenchman cannot paint a woman. He insists on analyzing what defies analysis, isolates a single characteristic, calls it woman, and paints it in a woman's body. The

result may be a magnificent allegory, it may be coquetry, innocence, wantonness, dignity, or mere physical loveliness, but it is not woman.

The same limitation exists in all French painting, and results in the use of painting for the embodiment of abstract ideas and qualities in visible form. Sometimes the idea and the form of its expression approximate to identity. Nicolas Poussin affords an example. These sombre unities of colour and design, so still and restrained, purified of all eccentricity and individuality in form, impersonally, correctly beautiful, are the last disillusioned expression of the spirit of the Renaissance, which had sought in beauty of form and design the expression of beauty in life ; but the life has died out, and all that beauty can do is to express itself. Mignard's portrait of Descartes (N.G. 2929), is a symbol of cultured philosophy, rather than a picture of a man. Fantin Latour paints the shadowy evanescent charm of flowers, and his portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Edwards (N.G. 1952), has just the same shadowy unsubstantiality as a bunch of flowers by the same hand (N.G. 1686).

One would have thought that in Watteau, Boucher, Nattier and Fragonard, in all the dainty fripperies of paint of the last three Louis, there might be found something less cold than

this detached and analytical spirit. There is a shade more u ecialized humanity in Watteau. His men are virile creatures inside their fanciful trappings, and his shadow and sunlight are not wholly subdued to art. But Watteau was a Fleming, not a Frenchman, and the days of the Roi Soleil were great days for France. The Court painting of the eighteenth century leaves an impression in the mind, of a deliberate disregard of reality, as being less pleasant than make-believe. After all a skeleton at the feast does not add to the gaiety of diners, and one had better not dine at all than not dine gaily. It is a logical position, and does not deny truth, but merely ignores it. Nobody suggests that Nattier's portraits are much like life, but they are much more pleasant, and quite as like reality as the court life of France when they were painted.

Chardin is the Mirabeau of painting, a splendid theorist, to whom all realities were beautiful, because he never came directly into touch with them, but saw everything through the ennobling glasses of his own dignity of spirit : and that is how he paints a portrait or a loaf of bread.

In him the egotism is perhaps unconscious. In David and his fellows, who after the Revolution swamped the deliberately superficial art of the *ancien régime* with a " classicism " just as

superficial, but unconsciously so, the personality of the artist is almost wholly merged in the dull uniformity imposed upon his craft by his interpretation of its laws. Never at any time much swayed by sentiment, the Frenchman of the First Republic was a fanatically reasonable being, and his artistic expression is Ingres !

If it is to France that we owe the first appreciation by artists of the work of Constable, it is because they grasped, not so much the love of nature which inspired it, as the possibilities of landscape as a medium of individual expression. For landscape has, to them, no marked personality of its own, and for that very reason can be treated by the artist as the unclouded mirror of his own personality, as he sees it himself. Constable talks to you about the joy of rain among the trees. The painters of the Barbizon school talk to you each about himself. Their painting is not unconsciously, but consciously temperamental. It is not so much himself, as his ideal of himself that the French painter puts into his picture, the abstract quality for which he feels the most sympathy. That is why Fantin Latour paints flowers and human beings alike, because he himself is the same Fantin Latour all the time. It is more marked still in the Barbizon painters. You can tell a Millet,

a Corot, a Harpignies, a Courbet, a Diaz, at a glance. They are men, not pictures, men as they see themselves, and as they want you to know them. But for all their strong and sometimes distorted, always one-sided personality, they are logical still. They know that to use painting as a means of self-expression, they must know how to paint, and they are all good craftsmen. You would hardly think, to look at a Corot landscape, all fading lights and haze-hidden forms, that Corot was a figure-draughtsman of a very high order, in a purely academic style. But no French painter worthy of the name made a new aim an excuse for shirking the old knowledge. That is what gives their work its clean-cut air of certainty. They never fumble.

Of the men of 1860 and their followers, I have no space or need to speak. They, too, were honest workmen, some of them very uninspired, others, as Manet, possessed of more force than grace. Manet has been called the pioneer of Impressionism, which only means that he has carried on the tradition founded by Velasquez, and he has not surpassed his founder; but you will admire, even if you cannot enjoy, his relentless truthfulness to what he sees.

When I look back through these pages and observe my sins of omission, I feel how hopeless

a task it is to give, in a book even many times the size of this, reasons for enjoying all kinds of pictures. On the whole, I have sought to include only such pictures as would serve to set a rule or to explain a principle; and for this reason, I have scarcely done more than to refer in passing to the Flemings, who seem to me to stand midway between the Dutch and English in the principles of observation and colour-sense which they exemplify; and I have said nothing about the pre-Raphaelites because I could not find anything to say, for I cannot enjoy their work, except that of Holman Hunt and Ford Madox Brown. Archaistic experiments should be kept in art-laboratories. I can enjoy the way that Holman Hunt paints a sacred subject because he feels its sanctity, and paints with reverent care. I can enjoy the way that Brown paints "The Emigrants," because he loves humanity and paints it humanly; but I am not concerned with what they think about painting as a craft, because that is their business and not mine; and for all I can see, Burne-Jones and Rossetti can think about nothing else. The manner is everything to them, the matter, material or abstract, nothing and less than nothing. Such painting I cannot enjoy, and so I cannot teach you to enjoy it. It may have been, in fact I

believe it has been, of great service to painters and craftsmen, and so has chemistry.

There are a hundred other omissions from this book, but it is no history of painting ; it is scarcely more than a collection of thoughts about the purposes of pictures, a hint at some few principles upon which you can work in thinking about a picture and finding the artist's purpose in painting it. For all these purposes you cannot care, perhaps, and so some pictures will remain to you as books unread, not because they are sealed, but because you do not care to open them. But if I have helped you to make one more picture yours, I have done as much as I have sought to do, and after all, that is success.

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