

VISION REALIZED

A LIFE STORY OF  
REV. J. A. O'NEILL

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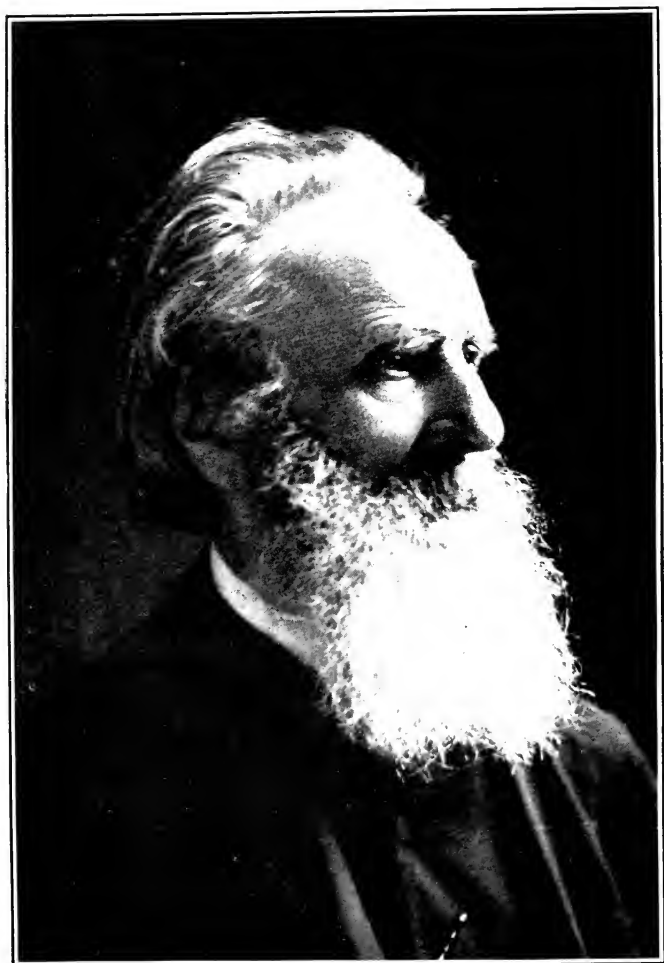
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**A VISION REALIZED**







PORTRAIT OF REV. J. A. OERTEL, D.D.



# A VISION REALIZED

A LIFE STORY OF  
REV. J. A. OERTEL, D.D.  
ARTIST, PRIEST, MISSIONARY

BY  
J. F. OERTEL

MILWAUKEE :  
THE YOUNG CHURCHMAN COMPANY  
1917

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1917

“Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for power,  
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour ;  
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize  
More bent to raise the wretched than to rise.”

—Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village"

## DEDICATION

This book, now offered to the world to perpetuate the memory of J. A. Oertel, has been compiled rather than written.

Much has been taken from his own writings, much from those of his wife. Without the latter the record would have been incomplete as his own life would have been without her.

His most ardent admirer, yet his most severe critic, the mother of his children and the mistress of his home, she was at the same time his guide in business affairs.

His comfort and stay in all the many trials and disappointments that beset his career; she cheered him in adversity and with dauntless courage and an implicit faith in his genius sustained and inspired him until at last the great purpose of his life was realized.

To her, OUR MOTHER, this record is reverently dedicated.



PORTRAIT OF MRS. JULIA ADELAIDE OERTEL  
From a drawing by J. A. O., 1854



## PREFACE

[Extract from letter dated February 29, 1896.]

J. A. OERTEL TO HIS WIFE.

“At this moment comes to me what a pile of material the fellow will have who, after we are gone, undertakes the thankless labor of trying to rescue our names from oblivion by compiling a biography, no inconsiderable part of which is noted in my letters.

“I pity him beforehand, *i. e.*, if so foolish a fellow could be born. Let's burn them all and prevent so inconsiderate an undertaking.”

---

The letters were not burned, and the “foolish fellow” (or fellows) were born, and in a spirit of duty to their great father have undertaken to give to the world the following record of his life and works. This is given as a simple story of his life, much of it autobiographic, his aim and purpose in art, his struggles to maintain the standard set and to reach the goal he had in view and his ultimate success.

J. F. OERTEL  
T. E. OERTEL, M.D.





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## INTRODUCTION

“The imagination of Fra Bartolommeo glowed with religious and poetical exaltation, with the love of God, and enthusiasm for art.”—*Poetry of Christian Art*, Page 280.

“In our day it (art) is nothing but an accessory, a pleasing talent, whereas of old, and in the Middle Ages it was a pillar of society, its conscience and the expression of its religious sentiment.”—JEAN FRANCOIS MILLET.

In the art of to-day, reaching so far as it does toward perfection in the glorious possibilities of technique and outward expression, the inner life, the soul of the work, is too often forgotten, or rather not thought of or looked for at all.

If the figure be arrayed in gorgeous raiment, if the draperies be of exquisite shadings and richest harmonies of color, what it may say to the beholder is of small moment; lovely without, the critical eye of the period is satisfied, and cares not for the spirit beneath the folds, nor asks for anything more from the canvas than the sentimental and sensuous delight this harmonious perfection affords.

The subject, as can be seen by reference to the walls of our exhibition galleries, is apt to be quite inferior to the manner of its execution, and any subject painted in accordance with the ruling taste of the day is accepted, no matter how trivial, or in some cases even repulsive, as in the gladiatorial pictures, or scenes from vulgar life.

Those olden times when art was "the pillar of society, its conscience, and its religious enthusiasm" have passed, and while it remains intellectual and sensuous, it has lost the grandeur of being the exponent of a people's faith, and the power of lifting the thoughts to higher and better things, of being a purifier, an element of religious education and advancement, and a spiritual force to draw man nearer to his God.

It is not pertinent to the subject to inquire how this state of things is but the natural outgrowth of the onward rush of the present century, as is claimed; the fact is patent, but it may be of value to stop and consider what is lost by the change, and to ask whether the result to the world of all this acute study of artistic excellencies is worth the effort it costs, when not joined to an art that has a higher and holier motive. This should not be understood to underrate in any way the value of a perfect technique. A worthy subject is worthy of a perfect expression, and if this perfection of execution might only be thrown around the noblest subjects it would give life to an art worthy of the advanced times in which we live.

That art "of old and in the middle ages" enchains to this day not only the intellectual faculties but the affections are drawn out to it, and it finds a responsive echo in the holiest recesses of the Christian soul and life.

Why should modern art drift away, feeding the mind and eyes only and leaving the soul to starve?

Why should not this outward excellence be studied with careful motive to clothe with winning

beauty a holy and helpful thought, as the wonderful shrines are covered with silver and gold and enriched with precious gems, not for their own sakes but for the value of the sacred relic lying within?

In so far as the wonderful loveliness of the Creator's works is shown and the soul dwelling in flower or landscape revealed, or when the great heart of humanity is touched by an artistic rendering of the toils, and joys, and woes, and the rude poetry of the life of the common people, as by Millet, a high plain has been reached and a most worthy object attained, but there are still grander ideas connected with man's spiritual development, with his downfall, his redemption, his hopes of immortality which ought to be *first* as themes for the artist's mind and hand and rank high above all others, as the sun shining in his strength is beyond all lesser lights in glory.

If art, as has been said, must be purely emotional and its province be altogether exclusive of ideas and the fewer the ideas contained therein the finer the art, there is surely nothing in it to satisfy the craving of an immortal soul; and froth and foam and husks only must leave unappeased the hunger which craves the wine of truth and the fine wheat that nourishes to eternal life.

The art of the great Past was always "the expression of the religious sentiment of the people" from whom it had birth; pagan as well as the true faith crystallized itself in artistic forms, and it has remained for this later age, so full of monstrosities in religion and philosophies, to divorce art from the people's faith and make it purely subservient to

the world and the uses of this mortal life, polluting it by dragging down to earth what should be a pure spiritual guide leading up to Heaven.

Alas that the time has gone by when the artist believed himself a seer, an interpreter of God's mysteries!

He no more feels ennobled by the knowledge that he ministers at the altar of his God, and that he "paints for eternity"; his pictures now stand on a level with the embroideries on a portière, if indeed they have not a tendency to lower the mind and soul by their influence.

There are some signs of an awakening in the increase of art decoration in the churches, though in many of them the same rule prevails as in the picture world; they are made glorious in harmonious chords of color but in senseless and unmeaning forms, appealing only to the same faculties of sensuous emotion and with no motive to make them worthy of the place they hold. In a few instances, however, an art which teaches finds a place, and enrichments, memorial or otherwise, are introduced which will stand silent preachers for many generations.

There are other indications too, now and then, which show that lovers of aesthetics are becoming anxious for an art that is not all mere color and subtlety of handling and that the will of the religious public is a strong and controlling force.

The time for Christian art of the highest kind may be approaching, and the rendering of truly noble thoughts find appreciation and encouragement in this country.



With this idea is brought before the reader an old name that is almost crowded out of the artistic list by the multitude of new names that have risen on the waves of popular favor as they sailed with the prevailing winds of fashion and technical ability, a name linked in the minds of those who remember it at all with so many different styles of work they scarcely know where to place it, and which would be immortal as the painter of "The Rock of Ages" if the name of the artist was known—as, strangely enough, it is not—wherever the reproduction of this most popular of modern works has gone.

In considering the material in hand from which to compile an account of the life and works of the Rev. Johannes A. S. Oertel, D.D., one leading idea is impressed upon the mind—that here was a man who battled for a principle through a life of vicissitudes and changes and of many failures and disappointments, but who always kept his eye fixed on the goal he was striving to win and in whose artistic career there was no variation of purpose notwithstanding the stern necessities of daily life compelled him to a variety of departures from the path he would have chosen.

In a letter written in 1896 he says:

"I have just read a sketch of Lord Leighton's life, and my mind drew the contrast of such a career and mine from beginning to the end; every advantage given of station, money, teachers, travel, training, and abundance of facilities, and with marked success all along—and my experience; in poverty, an object of charity for years; confined

within narrow limits of travel, of seeing, of helps for study; with only such training as persistent half-blind effort supplied; hampered by want of facilities; cramped by care; forced aside by multiplicity of pursuits; discouraged to intimidation by failure and cold public sentiment, my faculties split up by efforts at making a living in a variety of directions, from the start as a boy of 14 to this date, seven years older than Leighton, one continuous, long almost uninterrupted conflict.

“I do not overdraw. To this very day I have to create my own tools, as it were. In this line I have done nearly everything but manufacture my own canvas, paints, and brushes; for as to models, the glass has served me much more frequently than other people’s figures.

“Reading of such a different life, of course, brings some reflection. Of course, also, I appreciate the value of such training for independence, self-reliance, self-help and increase of resources.

“That I have not a greater amount of all these I almost regard as a blame.

“In all probability the incessant cold water of neglect over me has kept down more vigorous work and squeezed me into a shrinking attitude.

“But let it pass. It matters not what man’s position is in the mouths of men. Human estimate is at best a fickle and very deceitful thing. To the struggling man it is of inestimable comfort to have the knowledge of the existence of bookkeeping by double entry—one for this world, another for the next; a view of that, and a striving for lofty aims,

has alone supplied me energy when outward failures would have crushed every effort.

“ ‘Fly your fancy into the clouds, and from this imaginary height take a view of mortals here below’ said even pagan Marcus Aurelius! and why should not I, a Christian, with more exalted knowledge?”

These very vicissitudes, much as they are to be deplored, show him to have been possessed of a versatility of talent most remarkable though they divided his faculties, frittered his strength, and made his life a battle for existence rather than an opportunity for the development of the great natural and spiritual gifts with which he was endowed.

His principle was that art worthy to be made the life work of a man with an immortal soul and God-given intellectual powers should be *teaching* art and not a mere manufacture of the beautiful, his desire and aim to lay all he could do at the feet of his Divine Lord and through his art to preach Christ and tell the story of salvation to the world.

In the following chronicle it will be necessary to speak much of the man and the circumstances surrounding him at various times because his art life was shaped by those circumstances as the course of the stream is turned by the configuration of the country through which it flows and its waters either placid or lashed to fury by the character of the bed beneath it, whether it be sandy and smooth or full of jagged rocks and boulders.

But in speaking of these circumstances and conditions the aim will be to mention only such as

had direct bearing and influence on his artistic career and as such be of interest to the world at large.

## CHAPTER I.

Johannes Adam Simon Oertel was born in Fürth, near Nuremberg, Bavaria, on November 3, 1823.

From his infancy the ruling talent of his life was apparent; inventiveness showing itself at a very early age. Not only did his baby hands draw, but his baby brain invented forms and composed them in groups; and in the pencil he found the chief amusement of his early youth. Some small drawings, both figure and animal, bear the words "from my 6th year." Although of course he was often compelled to copy, it was exceedingly distasteful and in his later years became positively repulsive to him, his mind being so filled with images of his own that it could not endure the task of reproducing the work and thoughts of others. When about 9 years of age he executed two elaborate pieces of calligraphy which are still in existence in a fair state of preservation, "The Lord's Prayer" and "The Ten Commandments." They are 3 feet by 2 in size and contain much ornamentation and even figure drawing. They were done in india ink and with quill pens made by himself from crow quills gathered in the woods. He was a small and delicate child and could only execute them by lying flat upon the table while he worked.

His parents always testified to the earnest perseverance with which he pursued this work when out of school, even late into the night.

He seems, notwithstanding the prominence of his artistic tastes, not to have intended to follow them, as in his thirteenth year he went to study with the Rev. Mr. Loehe, an eminent clergyman, with a view to giving himself to the work of foreign missions.

While he studied he traced one fancy after another upon the broad margins of his class books, and the good and wise pastor soon saw that his pupil had mistaken his vocation, and that if he had a message to declare to the world it ought to be by form rather than words. He advised the boy to change his plans and become a student of art. After a year with Mr. Loehe he acted upon this judicial advice and became the pupil of Mr. J. M. Ensing Müller, a noted artist and engraver of Nuremberg, taking up the study of art in general and steel engraving in particular.

This excellent teacher was himself a man of superior and poetic mind, of large inventiveness and refined ideality, and he guided the young and ardent mind of his gifted pupil most judiciously, only directing it, and leaving it free to work out its own individuality.

This connection continued, with some interruptions and the change from the relation of pupil to that of friend, until his twenty-fifth year.

The tedious and laborious art of steel engraving was distasteful to a mind so full of active thought, but he worked on unflinchingly.



BATTLE AT THE PASS OF THERMOPYLAE





In 1838 and 1839 he was, with his master, in Munich. Surrounded by the works of Cornelius and Kaulbach, whose style and influence then controlled the Munich school, the boy's mind was filled with a new and powerful impulse; especially the works of the latter artist seemed to give him wings, and he commenced more extended efforts in composition than he had before attempted. He was at that time an enthusiastic student of Grecian history, from which several bold designs dating from his eighteenth year are still preserved. These were executed in cartoon and in his leisure hours, but he could not lay aside the steel plates from which he derived his support. One of the cartoons, "The Battle of the Granicus," embodying an incident in the life of Alexander the Great, is 8 by 12 feet. It is vigorous in treatment and skilful in composition. Though damaged by age and by frequent removals, this hung on the walls of his various studios until his death. It was also done in color about the same time, 13 by 20 inches.

Another of these compositions, "The Battle at the Pass of Thermopylae," is in monochrome, 2 feet 6 inches by 3 feet. It represents the few remaining Spartans struggling against the opposing hosts; a bold composition and displaying a wonderful knowledge of the human form.

All of his early works, as well as his writing—some of which almost required the use of a magnifying glass to read—showed his training as a steel engraver in the fine detail and exactness with which they were executed.

His father, Thomas Frederick, was an expert

metal worker and, as was the custom at that time, had his shop in his house, where he worked with his helpers and apprentices.

Johannes from him inherited marked mechanical ability and in the shop learned to do all kinds of metal work, a knowledge that was very useful to him in after years when obliged to "create his own tools." While thus training his mental faculties the physical were not neglected.

As he grew up he gained in strength and spent considerable time in training his body at the gymnasium, excelling in feats of strength and agility, and was classed as one of the best athletes in Bavaria. He was also an expert in fencing, both with the foils and with broadsword. These gymnastic exercises he continued until late in life and in his studio could always be seen dumb-bells, some of 50 pounds in weight, which he handled as if they were toys, his foils, and huge "Indian clubs." With these the iron muscles were kept in perfect condition to perform the severe labor he imposed on himself and continued unremittingly to the last.

He was very fond of running and leaping and had a good record in both. One of his performances in this line was to go "leap-frog" over seven men standing in a row face to back with bent heads only.

He also studied music and took up as his instrument the flute, which he played well; though he often expressed regret that he had not selected the violin or 'cello, complaining that the flute was too limited in its capacities and admitted of so little display of feeling. He played the organ; but only

for his "Chorals," of which he was very fond, hymns, or in improvising, was it used, though for some years he had one in his studio. He planned some 20 years before his death to have a pipe organ in his studio and began to make it, constructing several stops of wooden pipes, but this, being for himself, was never finished.

## CHAPTER II.

In 1848, in company with his master and some other friends both artistic and musical, he bade farewell to his native land and with a heart full of hopes and undefined anticipations he set out for America, coming over in a sailing vessel which required 10 weeks to make the trip. During the voyage he quite astonished the sailors by his ability to go aloft—anywhere they could—and, as the quarters below were none of the best, he spent most of his days on deck or in the “top” and at night slept on deck with the anchor chain for a pillow.

Nought awaited him here but disappointment. He found at that time little knowledge of art, no defined public taste, and a people who seemed to care nothing for ideals. The whole state of society was indeed foreign to him. He had been living for many years an idyllic sort of life in a quaint German village, his master and the group of pupils making his world, the gymnasium, the woods ramble, and the evening readings at the master’s house supplying the recreation from study and labor; and when thrown loose on the rushing tide of American life his sensitive nature was shocked and hurt at every turn and he found himself in entirely unexpected surroundings and was as a child in his ability to meet them.

Another painful fact, which had to dawn upon him by degrees, was that he was no painter. Educated as a steel engraver, he had all materials with the point in full subjugation—pen, pencil, crayon, graver, but not the brush. This was a difficulty with which he had a life struggle and to which some of his failures are doubtless attributable, and was overcome only by persistent and continued effort.

He was advised during his first months in this country to turn his attention to teaching, and he obtained for a time a situation in a young ladies' seminary in Newark, N. J., although his knowledge of the language was very inadequate to the performance of his task.

He had studied English before leaving Germany, and knew much as learned from books, but found he had nothing practical at his command when he landed on these shores. That difficulty was soon mastered, for with constant study and an immediate putting in practice what he learned the lack of an avenue of expression was not a drawback for any great length of time.

He eventually obtained a command of English equaled by few even of those born and educated in this country and exceeded by none entirely self taught.

He was told that it would be useless to make Christian pictures, that they would find no sympathy or sale; so, as the next best thing, he attempted as his first important painting in America a theme from "Paradise Lost," thinking that the English-speaking people must have sympathy with their own classics. It was called "The Lament

of the Fallen Spirits” and was founded on the following lines :

“Others more mild,  
Retreated to a silent valley, sing  
With notes angelical to many a harp  
Their own heroic deeds and hapless fall  
By doom of battle; and complain that fate  
Free virtue should enthrall to force or chance  
Their song was partial, but the harmony—  
What could it be less when spirits immortal sing?  
Suspended Hell and took with ravishment  
The thronging audience.”

It was a weird, original composition, full of thought and careful work, but it was poor and hard as a painting and as a whole a failure. It was exhibited at the American Art Union in the early months of 1850.

He made other compositions from this poem, “The Descent of the Fallen Spirits into Hell,” a painting, and “Satan Falling from Heaven,” a drawing.

Within a year after his arrival in America his parents and two brothers, Frederick and George, followed and all located in Newark, N. J.

In 1851 he married Julia Adelaide Torrey, daughter of Asa and Mary Sandford Torrey, of Newark, the one woman, it would seem, in all the world best fitted to go with him through the years of struggle which followed; guiding, cheering, encouraging, and inspiring, as undaunted in the face of adversity and trial as himself, with a depth of feeling and true appreciation of art as great as his own and, though almost entirely self-educated, with talents both artistic and literary second only



THE DESCENT INTO HELL





to his. The part she had in his work and her influence on all that he did can not be over estimated, and truly it may be said that this chronicle of his life must be hers as well.

Four children were born to them, Mary Magdalena, November 10, 1852; John Frederick, November 3 (his father's birthday), 1856; Samuel Philip, November 28, 1859 (died Dec. 11, 1859), and Theodore Eugene, April 20, 1864.

After his marriage he moved to Madison, N. J., the home of his wife's parents, built a studio, and commenced anew to study in Christian Art to which his life was pledged.

A composition, a finished work in pencil, "The Death of Saul" (1 Sam. 31:3-6), made at this time shows the artist working with the conventional ideas imbibed in the study of Kaulbach and the Munich school; still it is full of fine grouping and harmonious lines. The bodies of the three sons of Saul lying together are most skilfully rendered, and every line artistically placed. The form of the giant Saul, pierced by the sword, stretches through the middle of the picture, at his feet lies the corpse of his armor bearer, in the background the battle still rages around the falling standard of Israel, and in the sky appears the shade or spirit of Samuel testifying to the truth of the prophecies he had uttered in regard to the fate of Saul and which were now fulfilled. (1 Sam. 28:19.)

No regular record of works produced was kept previous to 1854, and what became of this drawing is not known, but in later years the same subject was done in color.

During the winter of 1851-52 he made a series of designs illustrating the redemption of mankind, *which he set before him as his life work*. On the ultimate production of these his very soul was centered. From this date until the completion of the works—nearly 50 years—every effort was put forth to place himself in position to enable him to undertake them. Every move was made with this possible end in view. As the years rolled on and plan succeeded plan only to end in failure it seemed that it would not be permitted, and there were those who urged him to abandon art entirely and make his living in some other way.

Through it all he never flinched or quailed, always was his gaze upward and onward. When failure of a plan came upon him he was still undaunted; and, instead of having the effect of diminishing his enthusiasm or causing him to waver in his purpose, it only spurred him on to renewed efforts, and as these designs were taken as his life work so the story of his life is the story of these works—a story of unremitting effort to attain the end in view, a devious path leading over bowldered hills, over many a sandy waste and treacherous bog, a path beset by many dangers and untold difficulties, where the foot must not slip, the eye grow dim, nor courage fail. And yet this path he trod, his step firm, his eye bright and clear, his courage unfaltering, and with a sublime faith that the Almighty God in whom he believed and trusted would protect and guide him and conduct him to the haven where he would be.

And so he went on, giving his life and work to

the great principle of bettering the conditions of humanity, helping and cheering those whom he met by the way, relieving the distressed wherever found, soothing the unhappy, giving from his slender purse to those in need, pointing the way to Heaven by word, deed, and work, and giving the credit and glory all to his Divine Lord and Master whom he served.

He looked upon these designs as inspirations and his faith was firm that they were God-given and that the time would come when he would execute them.

His plan was that of an enthusiast to be sure, and the practical man may smile at it; but it was earnest and unselfish at least. It was this: He knew there was no hope of sale for pictures of this character and colossal size, so he determined that he would make them by his own exertions, and then he believed that if they were made successfully some one could be found to put up a proper building to receive them and that he would make them a gift as a nucleus for a free gallery, hoping thereby to give an impetus to Christian art in this country.

These compositions are entitled:

1. "The Dispensations of Promise and the Law."
2. "The Redeemer."
3. "The Era of the Holy Spirit."
4. "The Consummation of Redemption."

In the case of the first one, so complicated and full of figures and meaning, he had been reading the Old Testament for some time seeking a subject

comprising 10 or 12 figures, but finding nothing to suit him, until, sitting and thinking of what he had read, a voice seemed to say audibly to him, "Why not make the whole Old Testament in one picture?"—and immediately this composition rose up before him in its entirety.

After he had secured it on paper in charcoal scrawls he read for days to obtain his references and authorities but found no reason to change it in the slightest particular.

The second of the series, "The Redeemer," in the same remarkable manner stood upon the bare white wall of the Methodist church during the sermon, at which place the small band of Episcopians in Madison at that time held their services; so that on coming home he was able to note it down in all its wonderful completeness of logical thought. On returning from service that day he said to his wife, "If I can put on paper what I have seen on the wall over the preacher's head just now I shall have one of the greatest compositions ever made for its terseness, and containing so much in a few figures."

The other two followed in a similar way. His mode of thinking seemed ever to be a bringing out of the spiritual and hidden truths rather than a rendering of the outside of things, as is particularly noticeable in this series—and in all his better works.

The following description of the intention of the great series is from his own pen:

"These compositions are designed to delineate the outlines of that great scheme of Redemption,

which God has been carrying on since the Fall, for the recovery of ruined man.

“And as in that plan Christ is the central object, toward which all things point and concentrate, and in which at last all things are completed and consummated, so also in these pictures it is designed that all shall point to Christ.

“Christ through the sin of man became needed and, through the mercy of God, promised and typified in the whole ceremonial law and worship: then revealed, fulfilling the promise and the type, obtaining for man the conquest over sin, Satan, and death; then ascended to His mediatorial throne the possessor of all power in Heaven and upon earth, sending forth His Word and His Spirit to enlighten the nations; then glorified in the final and complete separation of the evil and the good, in the destruction of the evil, and the gathering together and perfecting of His redeemed in His heavenly and eternal Kingdom.

“Each picture is distinct in itself and yet each one supplements all the others.

“They are designed to illustrate and make conspicuous the unity of all God’s dealings with man; the grand harmony of His plan of redemption in its peculiar development, from the suggestive outlines drawn in the first promise made after the Fall (Genesis 3:15) until the triumphant consummation in eternal glory; pointing, from Genesis to Revelation, continually and only to Christ, the Lord Jehovah and Saviour of man.”

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SERIES.

## 1. THE DISPENSATIONS OF PROMISE AND THE LAW.

In this composition there are three points prominent, namely, *Sin*, *Prophecy*, and *Typical Sacrifice*.

They are developed from a center, and carried in streams of figures and groups to the foreground, or near it.

The center is Moses, from whom Prophecy stretches to the left; Typical Sacrifice, in a semi-circle to the right; while Sin and its punishment occupies the middle from the altar to the immediate foreground.

Besides there is an upper part to the picture, in the clouds, dividing the time of simple promise from the time of the law.

The *Shekinah of God's Glory*,<sup>1</sup> surrounded by angelic heads, is the true center and the light of the picture. Jehovah's presence was the life and the light of the Old Dispensation.

The fall of man in Eden, and the sentence of sin drew from the mercy of God the promise of a Saviour, which promise expanded subsequently into prophecy and found visible expression in the divinely appointed sacrifices of the Mosaic dispensation. Under these three heads the whole Old Testament ecclesiastically is comprised.

The old dispensation was a preparation for the new, and foreshadowed it. In this manner, also, the composition is treated. It embraces the 4,000

<sup>1</sup> Ex. 13: 21; 14: 19-20, 24; 40: 34-38. Numb. 9: 15-23; 10: 34; 14: 14. Deut. 1: 33. Ps. 78: 14; 99: 7; 105: 39. Is. 4: 5, 6.







years before Christ as a time of prophecy, of types, and of figures. It makes use of the cardinal facts of the ecclesiastical history of that period, so far as they relate to the coming of the Deliverer and the great sacrifice for sin to be accomplished by Him. The justice and the mercy of God are in it united.

The angels on either side of the Shekinah first show these. Upon the side of the law, the flaming sword does its full work upon the daring sinners<sup>2</sup>; but where the smoke of sacrifice ascends acceptably to the Lord, though the law is still in force, the sword lowered signifies that God is just and yet can be “the justifier of him that believeth.”

But while punishment overtakes the transgressors of God’s holy law, salvation is also provided to them who in faith will avail themselves of the means of God’s own appointing; and whereas death entered into the world by reason of sin, promise<sup>3</sup> extended to fallen man even while he was judged, opened to his faith a vision of the Redeemer. Of this Adam and Eve, on the left of the Shekinah, remind us, and the sacred line behind these, with Abel, the first eminent type of Christ’s sacrifice, leading. Next to these is Enoch,<sup>4</sup> in his translation without seeing death, the type and pledge of Christ’s triumph over death and the grave. Beside him sits Noah<sup>5</sup> and his three sons, saved by faith from the overwhelming flood, typifying the salvation of the redeemed in Christ, “the like figure

<sup>2</sup> Cor. 10: 10. 2 Sam. 24: 16. 1 Chron. 21: 16. 2 Kings 19: 35. Acts 12: 23.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 3: 15.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 5: 21-23. Heb. 11:5.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 7: 7, 13; 8: 18. Heb. 11: 7.

whereunto, even baptism<sup>6</sup> doth also now save us, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

On the right are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and his sons, patriarchs of the 12 tribes, Joseph, the feeder of his brethren, and Benjamin, and Judah, the progenitor of our Lord, being prominent. With Abraham was the covenant<sup>7</sup> established; with him the visible church began. The “Father of the Faithful”<sup>8</sup> invokes the blessing of God [El Shaddai] upon his children.

These, represented in the clouds, belong to the *Dispensation of Promise*.

The Dispensation of the Law occupies the lower and larger space. Moses, the giver of the law, stands prominent upon the steps of the temple. The shadowy promise now expands into prophecy, which develops as centuries advance, until it spoke in clear, explicit language of the “Man of Sorrows” treading the winevat alone, bearing our iniquity and transgression.<sup>9</sup> That which in the prophetic line is foretold is typified by the sacrifices to the right of Moses, and thus these two sides correspond in prophetic expression as also they form a continuous stream of figures.

Prophet himself,<sup>10</sup> Moses gave his name to the dispensation which began with him. Though the great deliverer of Israel from Egypt, he could not bring them within the borders of the promised land. This was accomplished by the typical Jesus, (Joshua,) his successor,<sup>11</sup> the warrior before whom

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 3: 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 15: 1-18; 17: 1-14.

<sup>8</sup> John 8: 39. Heb. 11: 8, 9, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 53.

<sup>10</sup> Deut. 18: 15, 18, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Deut. 31: 23. Josh. 1: 2-9.

fell the enemies of the chosen people, and who divided to them their inheritance. Next him, the head only visible, is Samson, type of the strong deliverer, even in his death vanquishing;<sup>12</sup> then Samuel,<sup>13</sup> prophet and judge; the line of judges, Baruch, Deborah, Jephtha, being visible; then David, the sweet Psalmist and poet king of Israel, progenitor of the Messiah;<sup>14</sup> then Solomon, the wise and opulent, reigning in peace and prosperity; type of the King of Peace (NOTE A), whose blessed dominion should extend to the ends of the earth, to endure forever and ever. Somewhat isolated, as the mighty, zealous prophet was in the period of Jewish history to which he belongs, stands Elijah,<sup>15</sup> like Enoch of the preceding generation (directly above him), a type and pledge of the conquest yet to be given over death, of life and immortality to be brought to light. Over his shoulder looks Elisha,<sup>16</sup> laying hold upon the mantle of Elijah, by importunate faith obtaining a double portion of his prophetic spirit.

Beneath and more in the foreground are the prophets of a later period. On the right sits Micah,<sup>17</sup> pointing to David, whose birthplace should also be that of the coming Saviour; next to him, seated upon a fragment of ruin, Jeremiah<sup>18</sup> is bewailing the sin and captivity of his people, and the widespread desolation of Zion. Immediately above him, Isaiah,<sup>19</sup> the evangelical prophet, is foretelling, in lofty visions, and sublime, rapturous

<sup>12</sup> Judges 16: 30.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Samuel 2: 35.

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 11: 1.

<sup>15</sup> 2 Kings 2: 11.

<sup>16</sup> 2 Kings 2: 13; 2: 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Micah 5: 1.

<sup>18</sup> Lam. 1: 1-3.

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 53; 50: 6; 52: 13-15.

strains, with historic minuteness and fidelity, the atoning death of the Messiah, and the glory which should follow; a prophecy which could be reconciled and explained only in its fulfillment. Then Daniel, proclaiming the exact period of the Messiah's coming,<sup>20</sup> his death and the subsequent enlargement of His Kingdom, "till the kingdom and dominion and greatness of the kingdom under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the Saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."<sup>21</sup> Next to him is Ezekiel, distinguished by his measuring-rod as he who so minutely described the spiritual temple<sup>22</sup> to come, filled by the glory of the Lord, and His abiding place for ever; then Nehemiah and Ezra, intent upon their plans for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, in their looking away to the future, seeming to catch with the prophets a glimpse of the glory which should cover the second temple, through the coming of the Holy One.<sup>23</sup> In the background are seen the prophets of lesser note.

To the right of Moses is depicted the ceremonial worship of the church, a worship chiefly embodied in sacrifice, which, like prophecy, pointed onward to the future, being the "shadow of things to come" of the Divine Sacrifice yet to be accomplished.

The Holy Place of the Temple opens to view, with its golden candlestick<sup>24</sup> and the golden table<sup>25</sup> containing the shewbread, being seen. The curtain of the Holy of Holies is shrouded by a flood of

<sup>20</sup> Daniel 9: 26-27.

<sup>22</sup> Ezekiel 43: 7.

<sup>24</sup> Exodus 25: 31-40.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel 7: 27.

<sup>23</sup> Haggai 2: 1-9.

<sup>25</sup> Exodus 25: 23-30.

light from the Shekinah; but without stands Aaron,<sup>26</sup> the high-priest, his hands upon the head of the scape-goat, while making confession of his own sins and the sins of the people. Thus the Annual Sacrifice, or the great Day of Atonement, is represented. The Daily Sacrifice,<sup>27</sup> offered each morning and evening, is shown in the smoking altar, with the officiating priest pouring out the victim's blood at the foot of it, the smoke rising up as a sweet-smelling savor unto the Lord, accepted through faith and obedience.

OFFERING OF FIRST FRUITS.—To the right is seen the high-priest pronouncing the blessing<sup>28</sup> of Jehovah over the faithful, who are thronging up to the temple with their votive offerings from the rich store of Jehovah's bountiful blessings. The *first fruit*<sup>29</sup> of every thing was holy to the Lord and *His* portion; the first born male child had to be redeemed by a pair of turtle doves, offered instead. The firstlings of the flock, the vineyard, the field, must be given into the Lord's treasury. Thus was prefigured the Divine First Born, whom the Father, His greatest blessing, gave in infinite compassion for the Sins of man.

SIN OFFERING.—Below the Altar steps, with contrite posture and humble petition, approaches a group of penitents.<sup>30</sup> Absorbed and solemn they come, each conscious of individual unworthiness. Among them, the harlot, and the prince, on a level here as alike sinners, and alike needing

<sup>26</sup> Lev. 16.<sup>27</sup> Exodus 29: 38-46.<sup>28</sup> Numb. 6: 23-27.<sup>29</sup> Exodus 13; 22: 29-30; 23: 19; 34: 26. Lev. 23: 10-11. Deut. 26. Lev. 12.<sup>30</sup> Lev. 4. Lev. 5.

remission, are seen with their prescribed sacrifices, and the old woman and man bent and hoary with years, form the contrast of far greater burden of soul with the child, carrying for them their sacrifice of turtle doves.

THANK-OFFERING.—Prominently conspicuous in the right foreground is a rich family group, with festive array of flowers, and palm and olive branches, rejoicingly entering the courts of the Lord with their many *thank-offerings*.<sup>31</sup> This group illustrates the joyful, sanctifying influences of true religion, even under the dimmer light of the Old Dispensation, and the abounding prosperity<sup>32</sup> with which God rewarded His faithful worshippers. Mark the serene aspect of the parents, the father, the priest and the prophet of the family, (upon whose forehead we observe the phylactery<sup>33</sup> with its inscribed Scripture texts,) pointing out to his sons the deserved punishment of Sin, according to the Law, and also speaking of the heavenly glory and blessedness awaiting the righteous<sup>34</sup>; the mother with matronly grace and love watching over her daughters. How beautifully does the little child, shrinking away from the unwonted aspect of sin and its penalty, suggest to us childhood's innocence, nurtured and developed under the fostering influence of sanctified parental love. The whole group reminds us of God's word to His prophet, "Say ye to the righteous it shall be well with him; for they shall eat of the fruit of their own doings;" and again, "From the uttermost

<sup>31</sup> Lev. 3; 7: 9-34; 2.

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 13: 16. Numb. 15: 38-41.

<sup>33</sup> Lev. 26: 1-13. Deut. 28: 1-14.

<sup>34</sup> Deut. 6: 6-9.

parts of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous.”

But in painful contrast we behold in the middle of the composition the delineation of Sin as the the transgression of the Law, and its dread punishment. The justice of God to unrepented, and therefore unforgiven, Sin, is here set forth. “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.” The signal punishment of the Law, beginning at the very Altar, and with the sons of the high priest, Nadab and Abihu,<sup>35</sup> presumptuously offering before the Lord in their censers unhallowed flame, are here depicted at the moment of their destruction by the descending fire of God’s vengeance. A few incidents from Jewish history illustrate further the reward of Sin: the *murmuring Israelite*<sup>36</sup> stung by the *fiery serpent*; the *stoned blasphemer*;<sup>37</sup> the *famishing mother*;<sup>38</sup> *blindness and raving madness*;<sup>39</sup> the curses so fearfully pronounced by Moses against the disobedient. Around the crumbling idol altar,<sup>40</sup> built in the very courts of the Lord’s house, now defiled by burning human bones, a fierce group of scoffers cling and vainly seek refuge from the wrath of an offended God. More in the foreground the dead bodies of other idolatrous Jews<sup>41</sup> are flung across the shattered images in which they trusted.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Leviticus 10: 1, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Numb. 21: 1-9.

<sup>37</sup> Lev. 24: 10-16.

<sup>38</sup> Lev. 26: 26. Deut. 28: 38-40.

<sup>39</sup> Deut. 28: 28, 29, 35.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Kings 13: 1-3. 2 Kings 23.

2 Chron. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Lev. 26: 30.

<sup>42</sup> Deut. 28: 26.

*Dagon* (NOTE B), the fish-god of the Philistines;

“Moloch (NOTE C), horrid king, besmeared with blood  
Of human sacrifice and parents’ tears;  
Though, for the noise of drums and timbrels loud,  
Their children’s cries unheard, that passed through fire  
To his grim idol;”

and *Baal* (NOTE D), the *Sun-God*, and Ashtaroth, the deity of the moon, are selected to represent the idol worship of the Jews. A group of captives closes the scene of deserved desolation, but not without an intimation of hope in the promise yet to be fulfilled, betokened by the child touching the harp of sacred song in glad anticipation, even while the parents despair; *Aaron’s budding rod*<sup>43</sup> signifying the priesthood and dominion not yet departed from Israel, which would yet see restoration, and that the voice of weeping be again exchanged for “thanksgiving and the voice of melody;” and the boy holding the scroll of the Law still unfilled as touching Him that should come to be its perfect accomplishment.

The hope of the captives is thus joined to prophecy<sup>44</sup> in looking beyond for the coming of that Saviour, who had been the burden of all of God’s promises, and of the Law and the ceremony.

Thus we see foreshadowed in this composition *Christ*, the Messiah, the true sacrifice for Sin, the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” the “Prince of Peace and Lord our Righteousness,” whose appearing for man’s salvation forms

<sup>43</sup> Numbers 17.

<sup>44</sup> Jeremiah 25: 11. Leviticus 26: 40-45. Jeremiah 29: 11-14.



the grand theme of all the sacred writings, His Divine Person the fulcrum of man's history. The SPIRIT of the Old Testament Dispensations is thus exhibited in these three points, into which the picture naturally divides, namely:

*Sin*, which drew down upon offending man the justice of a holy God;

The *Promise*, or prophecy, of a Saviour, which the mercy of God extended to man; and

*Typical Sacrifice*, also a prophecy and pledge of the coming Redeemer.

Like the Old Dispensation itself, the sentiment of the composition breaks off unfinished. Every thing indicates the incompleteness of the present. As yet faith looks forward with yearning desire for the Consolation of Israel; the blood of sheep and goats could not take away sin; redemption could only be accomplished by the Son, whom the Father would send, and in Him the PROMISE, the LAW, and the SACRIFICE, would be fulfilled.

#### NOTES.

NOTE A.—Solomon, or "*Shelomah*" (Hebrew), is identical in meaning with "*Friedrich*" (Frederick), i. e., great, or rich, in peace, or a king of peace.

NOTE B.—*Dagon*, the national God of the Philistines. He was represented with the face and hands and body of a man or woman, and the tail of a fish. 1 Samuel 5: 5. The fish-like form was a natural emblem of fruitfulness. Judges 16: 21-30. 1 Samuel 5: 6. 1 Chronicles 10: 10. The Philistines dwelled on the seashore. The wars between them and the Israelites were frequent, and these suffered terribly at their hands. The prediction of Moses (Deut. 28: 25), "The Lord shall cause them to be smitten before thine enemies," found its literal fulfilment in these wars.

NOTE C.—*Moloch*, or Molech, the fireking, the tutelary deity of the children of Ammon. Among the rites with which this God was worshipped were human sacrifices, purifications, and ordeals by fire, *devoting of the firstborn*, mutilation, and vows of perpetual celibacy and virginity. Psalms 106: 37-38. Jeremiah 7: 31. 2 Chronicles 28: 3. According to Jewish authority, "This image of Molech was made of brass, hollow

within, and was situated without Jerusalem. His face was that of a calf, and his hands stretched forth like a man's who opens his hands to receive something. And they kindled it with fire, and the priests took the babe and put it into the hands of Molech, and the babe gave up the ghost. And why was it called Tophet or Hinnom? Because they used to make a noise with drums, (tophim,) that the father might not hear the cry of his child and have pity on him, and return to him. Hinnom, because the babe wailed and the noise of his wailing went up."

NOTE D.—*Baal*, the supreme male divinity of the Phœnicians and Canaanitish nations, as *Ashtaroath* was their supreme female divinity. Numb. 25: 3 sqq; Deut. 4: 3; Judges 2: 10-13; 1 Samuel 7: 4; 1 Kings 16: 31-33; 18: 19-22; 2 Kings 16: 3. *Baal* means master, owner, possessor. Under his image, and that of *Ashtaroath*, the sun and moon were worshipped. *Baal* had numerous priests, 1 Kings 18: 19; and it is a priest that in the composition embraces this idol under the shield the young warrior stretches protectingly over him against the smiting angel.

#### REMARKS

The limits and character of a composition like this dictate the necessity of omitting all that is not strictly essential for a lucid, logical representation of the fundamental idea. Hence it can lay no claim to historic minuteness, and embracing even *every* person and feature which has a *direct* bearing upon the main thought it endeavors to illustrate. It is by nature suggestive; and on the other hand must confine itself to that which is capable of *pictorial* rendering. In regard to the sacrifices, for instance, there would be, theologically, more heads and divisions than the three of *first fruits*, *sin offering*, and *thank offering*, beside the *annual atonement* and the *daily sacrifice*. There would be the Paschal Lamb, burnt offering, trespass offering, etc., but they could not be pictorially distinguished. So there were signal punishments of sin, like that of Korah and his people, and acknowledged typical persons, like that of Jonah, which found no space in the composition.

The *spirit* and *design* of Old Testament litera-



THE REDEEMER



ture, having the character of unity and singleness of purpose and aim, has been held in view by the author of this picture. It teaches the universal sinfulness of man, the penalty of sin, and its remedy. It was the development, by successive revelations, of a plan for man's redemption, which has its center in Christ, the Messiah of the Old Dispensation. As an epitome of this plan, so far as the Old Testament history is concerned, the composition stands; a suggestive outline of the grand general proportions, easily filled up by the diligent Bible student when once securely comprehended.

May it please God to use it as an incentive to closer study of the pages of His holy Word, and as a means of instruction in the truths which concern every soul, leading the guilty to that Great Sacrifice, the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world."

## 2. "THE REDEEMER"

By J. A. O.

With so simple a composition and all the parts and action so obvious an explanation is hardly necessary, both the figures and their interrelation being of common experience.

There are three factors: (1) The Saviour, divine "High priest of our profession"; (2) Man, representative of our race; (3) The united trio, Satan, Sin, and Death, man's enemies.

A belt of clouds, typifying earth, divides between light and darkness, heaven and hell.

During probation, connection of man with sin still exists, the possibility of yielding to temptation

and falling with his enemies; the power of Christ and man's affections turned to Him, keep up man, clothed now in purity, the rags of self-righteousness dropping off.

Satan is a malicious but conquered enemy, allowed only wiles and deceit as means of ruin, the foot of the Crucified on his head and arm checking his assault.

Death is here the spiritual reward of sin rather than the separation of soul and body.

The outlines of all the figures, their relation to one another, the colors employed; the several emblems, the symbol of our redemption behind Christ; the serpent tying the infernal trio into one; the chain on Satan's feet; "Death's sting"—are used as sign language for the expression of essential truths in the story of man's redemption by Christ and man's position toward his Saviour and his enemies from day to day.

### 3. "THE DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT"

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IDEA.

This composition is the keynote to the entire series of four, including the still prophetic part of the grand plan, "The Consummation of Redemption". That work sets forth the three main divisions governing the Church idea.

First. Its origin.

Second. Its constitution and missionary character.

Third. Its works as fruits of the faith.

The divine origin of the New Testament Church



THE DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT





is shown in the upper part of the picture. Jesus Christ is the Founder, His apostles the first instruments for its propagation.

The divinity of the Christ is emphasized by His position on the throne of glory and power; by the adoration of the angel host, Seraphim and Cherubim; and by His present office as ruler of the universe and High Priest of His people.

The apostles and evangelists go out from Him—to Jews on the right and to Gentiles on the left—inspired men and commissioned by His authority. They are the founders of the Church.

This Church in its essential features is below them. In it the Holy Spirit is the presiding and ruling Deity.

The division of clouds under the apostles is here taken away, for though absent Christ is yet ever present with His Church. “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

Now from the first the Church has always consisted of three essential parts:

First. The Faith, contained in the inspired Word of God, the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, upon the altar.

Second. The lawful ministry in threefold order, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Third. The sacraments as means of grace; baptism and its complement confirmation; and the Holy Eucharist.

This church had commission to go “into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature”; hence representatives of all the principal races of

mankind are introduced as hearing the message of "Christ Crucified."

But that faith is evidenced in works, the legitimate fruits of its divine regenerating power, and so the foreground is occupied by works of mercy and ministrations to the poor, the orphan, sick, and the fallen. Good works are the outgrowth of a living faith, organized by the Church and partaken in by all her members, official and lay.

But at all times from the first there have been in the Church the enemies of Christ, as is evident from the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles, and so they could not be left out in the picture of a Dispensation "still militant." They turn their back on the Christ and scorn His Cross. False, destructive philosophy and learning, pride of intellect, blasphemy, wanton pleasure, the mad rush for gold and honor, hatred and violence, all especially active in our days.

In a composition dealing with so comprehensive a subject, as nothing must be introduced not strictly relevant to the main idea to its confusing and overloading, so nothing should be omitted that can—within certain limits dictated by a rigid adherence to sound logic—illustrate this idea.

In conformity to this rule, in all the upper and central parts, colors are used for their symbolic meaning, red for love and ardor, yellow for divinity, blue for truth; and they are so distributed as to convey to each part of it its specific signification.

The angelic ministration is also extended from the clouds into the Church below; the adoration of



THE CONSUMMATION OF REDEMPTION



the Divine Spirit; the "Prince of thy people" (Dan) St. Michael, that does battle for the Church on the side where "Soldiers of Christ" are enrolled in Holy Baptism and their new name inscribed in the Book of Life.

On the other side the archangel Gabriel, with his symbol, the Incarnation Lily, where the "God Man" in the Eucharist is given to the faithful in the consecrated Bread and Wine; hands in blessing extended by angels over the believers, and the palm of victory.

It should be kept in mind that art is a language capable of expressing thoughts and sentiments by form, color, and action. By these the artist has a wide field whither he invites to follow him studiously, taking for granted there was a sufficient reason, in his mind at least, for choosing what is seen on the canvass in the order, number, and connection best suited to depict the subject undertaken.

#### 4. "THE CONSUMMATION OF REDEMPTION OR THE TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIANITY."

LAST OF THE SERIES—EXPLANATION BY J. A. O.

"Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world," is the declaration of St. James (Acts 15:18). Therefore the Plan of God for the Redemption of man is and must be conceived of by us as an absolute unit. God's revelation to man was made in three successive dispensations, each of them during two divine working days of a thousand years each as fore-

shadowed in the six days of the world's creation (Gen. 1:31), and on the seventh day God endeth His work which he hath made (Gen. 2:2).

In this series of paintings we have now come to the beginning of this "seventh day." During the three dispensations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit there has been carried on, by successive revelations, the work of God for the redemption of the human race. When, in God's foreknowledge, the time is fulfilled of the completion of this work, this third period, the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit, will be closed by the coming again of Christ to judgment, when the great sabbath, the seventh day of rest and the reign of Christ on earth, is to begin.

In this series of paintings the conflict of Good with Evil and the final triumph of Good is represented.

In the first and third, during Old and New Testament times, that conflict respecting mankind; in the second the same conflict in each individual of mankind.

The fourth picture then is the victory of Good, of Christ and His Church, over Evil. Good and Evil are here represented and the God is triumphant over the Evil. During all these six thousand years since Adam and the Fall, the six working days of God for man's redemption, Good and Evil in conflict were to human eyes as it were mixed though radical opposites. Now at the last they are positively separate, in two separate hosts.

The visible triumph of Good has come, Christ,

and through and with Him His Saints are victorious.

The basis for this painting is the nineteenth chapter of Revelation, from the eleventh verse.

### CHAPTER III.

A large cartoon was made of "The Redeemer," mounted on rollers, and sent to the Academy of Design in New York, but was rejected because it had no frame. It was never exhibited but hung on the walls of his various studios for years, until worn by age and damaged by frequent removals it was finally destroyed.

Part of the time during the year 1852 Mr. Oertel was forced to leave his studio in Madison and go to Newark in order to make money on which to live.

Here he did all kinds of work and resorted to various devices to secure the necessary dollars, living meanwhile in bachelor quarters and doing his own cooking.

From here, under date of May 5, he writes his wife that the reason he does not go oftener to Madison is "on account of my boots, for-to walk (15 miles) I consider them, and to ride I consider the money." During his stay here he painted mostly animals and worked on portraits from daguerreotypes for another artist.

To this kind of drudgery he was often reduced by pressure of circumstances. He could work unceasingly, but he could not bear to ask for pay. Before leaving Newark he wrote, "I shall have to



make a few more calls for the purpose of collecting all the money I have due and wish to get, and then march off from Newark. Almost any kind of work I could do without much murmur, only I can not beg cheerfully.”

He had been brought up and was to this time a Lutheran, but in 1852 he became a member of the Episcopal Church and was confirmed by Bishop Doane in October of that year.

In the spring of 1852 Mr. Oertel removed to Brooklyn, and the next year was spent entirely in making designs for steel engravings for use on bank notes, drawing illustrations on wood, or painting portraits, the only notable work of that time being the design for the Crystal Palace Medal, which was selected for the prize by the judges at the competitive trial. It represented Industry led by Progress to receive a crown at the hands of the city. Only three figures—yet the whole story told—and again the qualities of terseness and comprehensiveness combined. He also made the model in wax for the diesinkers to work from.

A design was made at this time bearing the title “Things as they were and things as they are.” This was published as a lithograph by Goupel, of New York, and bears the signature “John A. Oertel Del. & Lith.”

On the left of the picture are the “things as they were,” on the right “as they are,” and these are divided by a pillar through the center the base of which rests on a snail shell (left) and the head of an eagle (right), and it is surmounted by the figure

of Gutenberg, a book under his right arm and in his right hand the compasses.

To the left of the base is seen the courier galloping with his dispatch, and this is balanced on the right by the railway with train going over a high bridge toward a tunnel; above the courier sits a sandal-shod monk with an hourglass before him on the table, writing on parchment with quill pen; behind the monk, and forming the border of the picture, are various ancient weapons, bow, spear, pike, etc., and through the vaulted and vine-clad window is seen the old feudal castle.

On the other hand a man clad in modern garments sits with his hand on a telegraphic instrument; above his head is the gas jet and from it hangs a watch; behind him a newsboy is crying his "extras" and in the distance appears a huge factory with towering chimney, a steamship, and telegraph poles with wires. It is finely balanced and beautifully drawn.

"Pulling down the statue of King George at Bowling Green, N. Y." was also made and published in a large steel engraving.

In August, 1853, he began engraving for the "National Magazine" and "Presbyterian Board of Publication," and early the next year exhibited at the National Academy of Design the following designs in pencil:

"The Death of Saul."

"Angel of Prayer."

"Behold, I Stand at the Door and Knock."

In 1854 he again returned to his studio in Madison, N. J., where he remained about a year. Some



STEEL ENGRAVINGS MADE FOR BANK NOTES



of the time was lost engraving on steel for the American Bank Note Company, but he did more painting than in the preceding years. "The Captive Soul" dates from this time. This was painted to commission of Dr. S. J. Guy, of Brooklyn, N. Y. It was a life-size female figure, one hand chained to a rock on which she knelt, the other raised high above her head, while the upturned face was full of indefinable longing as she gazed up into the blue sky. All was light above, all dark beneath. The lower part of the figure stood in dark brown ragged drapery which was apparently slipping down from the form; a white robe showed above it; leaving the upper part of the figure nude as if it were stretching out and away from the rags of earth. Around the base of the rock a serpent is gliding and a skull, barely visible, lies there in the shadow, Sin and Death. Whatever may be thought of this as a painting, as a composition and the presentation of an idea, it is extremely full of suggestive thought and must appeal to every soul alive to the struggles toward a higher and more perfect existence.

He began this painting during the absence of his wife and thus writes her:

"During my solitary days I work like a hero going out to conquer—and conquering—a mountain-like resolution, and big brushes do their work. Day before yesterday I painted, in a few hours, the color sketch. Yesterday I began the picture, covering the background; to-day all the flesh parts and a portion of the drapery marched on the canvas, and to-morrow, if God permits, the whole will be covered."

Always, when his heart was in his work, he painted rapidly.

Being very much annoyed by the country lads who would very often intrude to see what was going on in that "paint shop," he found his revenge in painting a satire which he called "The Country Connoisseurs." It was the interior of his studio; the back of a large canvas, supposed to be that of "The Captive Soul," was seen, and before it stood a group of country worthies of various types, but all studied from life. A mongrel cur snarled at the Diana mask which stood against the wall.

This picture made some sensation when it went to New York, as the critics thought it a sly hit at them; but the artist was innocent of any such intention.

He also painted two other humorous pictures, "Coming home from Meeting" and "Bob Singing a New Song."

Again in 1855 he returned to New York and the next two years were spent mainly in "miserable bread winning," steel engraving, portrait painting, and even coloring photographs.

During this time he not only worked at odds and ends in art, but made other ventures and attempts to make the money he so badly needed for daily necessities and so much desired to enable him to carry out his cherished plans.

He invented an electrical machine which he and his father made. This proved a failure. He also became interested in a process for making steel out of cast iron by electricity. It was the invention of a Pole named Mayrhofer. He demonstrated it re-

peatedly before Mr. Oertel, his father, and others, and had several offers for the patent.

Mr. Oertel says: "If he will give me \$10,000 I will guarantee to sell for more than three times the amount offered. Father went down to Mayrhofer to-day (April 3, 1856) and he accepted my offer of his own accord and promised me \$50,000 if I made good my words." Mayrhofer offered him all he could get over \$100,000 and of that he said, "For the sake of my old debts and the sake of my art I am covetous—but I could not do that."

Prominent men were interested and agreed to pay one million dollars if the process could be demonstrated to their satisfaction to be as claimed. Mr. Oertel was very much elated: Here at last was the money to enable him to have free hand in art and carry out all his plans.

In the meantime some friend of Mayrhofer, a Pole, persuaded him to the belief that he was not going to get enough for his process, and that *he* could get him more and the extra money could be given Kossuth for the cause of Poland.

He had such a hold and influence over Mayrhofer that when the test was made he purposely failed in his demonstration. His friend could not help him as he had promised, nor could Mr. Oertel after this, so it came to nothing. Mayrhofer died soon after and with him the secret. Mr. Oertel tried many times to produce the result by what he knew of the process but never succeeded.

As many hopes had been cherished and plans made on the success of this—which seemed to him so certain—the disappointment was great. He

wrote his wife: "I speculate and toil. Art is almost gone from my thoughts; it is a thing that was—and will be—but is not; it exists now in the chrysalis state; life is just perceptible by a few twitching jerks. In the meantime I endeavor to finish my machine. It is a new peg to hang hopes upon; we have had others before this and will have more after, but God alone decideth our ways.

"Is there no finger of God in the fact that all my works remain my property while things disconnected with art are thrown into my hands? Or do I seek them?"

In the early days of 1857 Capt. Montgomery C. Meigs came from Washington, seeking among the artists of New York for one to work upon the decorations of the Capitol. Oertel was engaged. This seemed to him a great opening, to work thus on a national building, and as it offered a regular salary he saw the chance of being able to save something for the furtherance of his darling plans of painting the great series.



## CHAPTER IV.

On February 19 he left for Washington to take up the work, full of enthusiasm and true patriotic feeling for his adopted country. He wrote his wife (Feb. 20) "I have been up to the Capitol. I shall inscribe my name on its walls either as a man who will live—or as a nonentity that does not deserve to live."

The first work assigned him was the decoration of the Senate library. This evidently was decided at once, for in a letter to his wife (Feb. 21) he says: "I have to make four allegorical designs for the ceiling of the Senate library, each 11 by 6 feet. These are for frescos. Mr. Brumidi has made a sketch for them, together with the ornaments, but I am not to mind his, but follow my own ideas."

He made his design and at once began preparatory work. He intended to place allegorical figures on each of the four fields of the ceiling representing Poesy, History, Law, and Commerce, and to group under them on the respective side walls the greatest American poets, historians, lawyers and merchants.

He had worked some weeks on these preparations when Captain Meigs came to him and asked as a special favor that he would put off his work in

the building and draw for him the designs of the State arms for the use of the glass stainers who were to make the ceiling of the Representatives' Hall. He showed him how important it was that they should be put in the hands of an artist of varied knowledge, as they contain figures, animals, plants, and a variety of emblems, and that all the existing authorities were stiff and badly drawn, and would have to be entirely remodeled. Much against his will he consented to undertake this task to oblige Captain Meigs. Nearly a year was spent in the producing of about 50 water color paintings each in a 20-inch circle, having to repeat some of them because he was furnished with incorrect designs for copy. He then turned with a sense of relief to the consideration of the frescos. He went up to the Capitol for material, and in talking with Mr. Karsten, the superintendent, he was asked what room he was going to paint. He replied, "The Senate library." "But," said Mr. Karsten, "Brumidi is painting that." It seemed impossible; he went up there at once and found it about half done.

He turned to Captain Meigs for explanation. That gentleman professed to be surprised, himself, "regretted it had occurred, etc.," and wished Mr. Oertel would make another selection. This he did, choosing a suite of committee rooms, and so notified Captain Meigs, when he was informed it was not proposed to decorate these rooms expensively, he must choose again. He then went over the plans with Mr. Karsten and found that every part of the building of importance was already in the hands of Mr. Brumidi, he having made designs which had

been accepted by Captain Meigs, been photographed, and passed into commissions.

He at once sent to the captain the following indignant letter of protest and resignation:

“WASHINGTON, D. C., *April 27, 1858.*

“CAPTAIN M. C. MEIGS.

“DEAR SIR: I have endeavored three different times since Saturday to see you, and not succeeding I take this method of communicating with you.

“In consequence of your last letter of April 23, instant, annulling my choice of room No. 65 and wishing me to make another selection, I went at once to the Capitol to do so. The proposition to ‘paint one half of the library, leaving the other half to Mr. Brumidi’ I rejected once before verbally, as you will recollect. I could not now accept it.

“On carefully reviewing, with Mr. Karsten, the plans of all the rooms in both the extension wings I learned that there is in either of them scarcely a single room of importance left, which is not at present occupied as anticipated by Mr. Brumidi with a sketch or design for decoration and paintings.

“When last year I responded to your call I did so as an independent artist subject to no one but your own commissions.

“My position was then carefully defined. Agreeable to your wishes I submitted to the irksome, laborious work of revising and redrawing all the various State arms without ever entering a complaint, trusting the time would arrive when, according to your promise, I would succeed to a fair, impartial chance as a self-producing artist. The Senate library was to be my field and for this I labored hopefully, making studious preparations.

“When ready to begin upon the wall I was unceremoniously despoiled of my right and commission by Mr. Brumidi. For this wrong I have obtained no other satisfaction than a letter to Mr. Brumidi could afford me, informing him that I regard his proceeding as an ‘unjust interference with my rights.’

“But I had looked for an adjustment of my claims to yourself, and could not honorably accede to a compromise—nor can I ever.

“Nor could I, after what passed, accept with self-respect any work by concession of Mr. Brumidi; the same insult, once practiced on me, would be liable to repetition. My feelings of professional independence will not brook any other than a position of republican level with any other artist.

“I could honorably descend to *inferior work* but not to an *inferior position*.

“But there is also another and stronger motive actuating my present course, from the fact of Mr. Brumidi having already initiated to himself, for decoration by ornamentation and frescos, nearly every available room in both wings at the Capitol extension. This truth was not revealed to me but on compulsory search for those rooms for which nothing had been designed, and except for this circumstance I might have remained ignorant yet for a time.

“It would ill become me, as an American citizen, with the knowledge of these irregular facts, still to persist in writing my solitary name upon the walls of the nation’s first and best building and to remain unimpressed by the entire absence of sympathetic national art atmosphere within its spacious halls, looking in vain around me for congenial society.

“Merely personal injuries I might have passed over and forgiven—to trespass my self upon *national ground*, I dare not.

“I therefore beg of you, respectfully, to accept herewith my resignation and to kindly notify me of your acceptance.

“Respectfully,

“JOHANNES A. OERTEL.”

This letter was thrown into print by a friend of Mr. Oertel, though without his knowledge—a gentleman high in position in Washington—and widely copied, as at that time public sentiment was much aroused in regard to alleged abuses in the management of the Capitol building.

A copy of one of the newspaper articles follows. This is in Mrs. Oertel’s scrap book, and there is nothing to indicate the paper from which it was taken.

“ART AT THE CAPITOL.”

“It is now upwards of two years since I first began, in my idle way, to call attention to the art outrages committed by the Autocrat ‘in charge of the Capitol Extension.’ A very honest gentleman, he may have been competent to superintend the laying of stones and the mixing of mortar as the worthy and accomplished architect might have directed. But so inflated was he with his ‘brief authority’ that he assumed the dictation of *everything*, and even of the art decorations, which remain a monument to his bad taste.

“It has been whispered that in this department a man named Brumidi (a dauber of speckled men and red horses in true oyster-saloon style) has assumed supreme control, receiving \$10 a day for his services. Full proof of this is found in the following letter, written by a gentleman with whom I am only acquainted by reputation; but that reputation is high and honorable.”

Here follows Mr. Oertel’s letter to Captain Meigs.

“AN APPEAL TO CONGRESSMEN.”

“Will not each member of Congress give the above letter a careful perusal? *It needs no comment.* Venal editors who wish to have relatives kept in Meig’s employ may call it the work of a disappointed artist, but it shows that it is not; and if it is, why, that does not alter the case. I don’t care a snap for Mr. Oertel; but I do protest, as every citizen has a right to protest, against having

the entire Capitol disfigured, at immense cost, by ignorant and incompetent men whose bad taste flashes out too outrageously to be mistaken.

“THE REMEDY.”

“Don’t vote a dollar of appropriation, Messrs. Congressmen, until the entire decoration is taken away from Meigs, Brumidi & Co., and placed in the hands of competent persons! I have no suggestions to make as to whom these persons shall be. Let the President appoint them; let Congress designate them in the bill; but let the National Capitol not resemble a Neapolitan icecream saloon, a French coffee house, or an English gin palace.”

Similar articles appeared in various papers, quite an excitement was raised over the subject, a convention of American artists was called at Washington, and an attempt was made to remedy the conditions so plainly at variance with the spirit of American art and art lovers throughout the United States.

This convention met in Washington, March 20, 1858, and having resolved itself into a “National Art Association” elected the following officers:

Rembrandt Peale, Esq., of Philadelphia, President.  
 J. R. Lambdin, First Vice President.  
 H. K. Browne, of New York, Second Vice President.  
 John Cranch, of Washington, Third Vice President.  
 H. D. Washington, Secretary.  
 J. M. Stanley, Treasurer.

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*Executive Committee.*—Dr. Horatio Stone, J. A. Oertel, H. F. Darbey.

The object was stated as "for the purpose of consolidating the members into an efficient body and organizing means to promote the interests of art before the American Congress, and to secure to native artists the illustration of our national history in the public buildings of the Government."

A committee was appointed to draft a memorial to Congress embodying the subjects and purposes of the artists of the country. The committee presented a draft of a memorial and the association adopted it.

It was signed by the members of the Association of the National Academy of Design, New York; Artists' Friend Society of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Academy, and leading artists of Boston.

This "memorial" was presented to Congress May 19 by Mr. Marshall, of Kentucky. It was later acted on and three of the best artists in the country were appointed to serve as art commissioners—Henry K. Browne, sculptor, of New York; Henry Peters Gray, painter, also of New York; and Horatio Stone, sculptor, of Washington. These were appointed, but with characteristic foresight no appropriation for salary or expenses was made.

These gentlemen were very willing to make some sacrifice for the good of the country, but could not give all the time it would require without some compensation; so the movement died a natural death and the Italian decorators continued.

During his stay in Washington Mr. Oertel made the acquaintance of Charles Lanman, well known as an author of no ordinary literary merit and also

as an artist, and they became firm friends, the relation continuing through life.

Though drudging daily at his task of copying the State arms, his mind was busy on his own designs and ideas, as shown by letters to his wife in which he exclaims (Aug. 3, 1857): "My mind is made up for work, and work I will. Yea, work I *must*, to labor into existence all I have planned. My mind is busy as a bee in my solitude. I should only need the country and freedom from irksome duties to make me half crazy with ideas."

He complained bitterly of the "distracting noises of the city," children with drums, tin trumpets, etc., and the piano played by a young girl in the next house.

One day he writes: "I have comparative quiet if there were not just now a villain of an organ grinder about; not only is the sweet girl gone but her piano after her." It is plain to see how irksome was the task on which he was engaged. In one letter he breaks out with: "Pay day again! The laborer is now going to get his hire, and so in reality it is. I am on a par with the stone cutters and tile layers just so long as the State arms last, and I verily believe they are without end."

During this time he determined to turn his attention to sculpture, though he was unable to carry out his plans. Of this he says: "There are some of my compositions especially suited for sculpture, and they are thoughts it would be a pity to lose; and besides this I am aware of my predilection for *form*, irrespective of colors and of my choosing such subjects as in the main appear to as much





CATTLE AT REST



advantage in pure white and black, as in colors, and perhaps to the *only* advantage."

He moved his family to Washington in the spring of 1857 and rented a house on I Street, No. 1357 "near the park (Franklin Square) where one may hear the tinkle of cowbells at night." But once again he must move. His wife and children returned to Madison about the 1st of May, 1858, and he to the house of his brother "Fritz" at Stapleton, Staten Island, where he fitted up a room for a studio. The failure of the Capitol work was a great disappointment, yet he did not regret his action in the matter. He writes (May 13, 1858): "Mr. Ensing Müller was amazed at my appearance. That was natural; but my motives are acknowledged everywhere. This sympathy of all is a consolation and an encouragement. God alone knows what the whole occurrence is good for."

For the next two years, most of the time at Brooklyn, he painted principally cattle, sheep, and horses, in which branch of art he attained considerable reputation.

In a criticism upon a collection exhibited by Snedikor at the National Academy of Design in 1859, the New York Evening Post said:

"Oertel aims at sentiment as well as life. Less attractive in color than some others, his pictures more than make up this deficiency in accuracy of drawing and composition. As faithful transcripts of nature his animals leave little to be desired. They are also moralists, poets, and philosophers. His cattle not only delight in green pastures; like

Landseer's, they have a story to tell. The largest piece in the collection is his "Rich and Poor"; at the right is the poor man's cow looking from a barren and stony roadside with a subdued forlorn longing into the exuberant pasture where the rich man's cows are frolicking or resting in their surfeit and looking at the hungry outsider with almost human haughtiness and disdain in their expression over the division wall between. Near by in the background is the poor man's cottage and a woman bearing a bundle of sticks on her head, while past her, enveloping her in dust, gallop a lady and gentleman on horseback toward their elegant mansion on the high ground in the distance.

"The common story of every day life is here told as eloquently as it could be expressed in a dozen volumes."

This period offered but little opportunity for the practice of Christian art. Some pictures were painted, but none of great importance.

All these years the yearning in his soul had to be satisfied with work done in the late night hours by crayon or pencil—"to keep my spirit alive," as he wrote once, "for if people prefer to make stables of their parlors, then in the daytime I must perforce paint cattle instead of prophets and angels."

While on Staten Island he attempted to gain financial and artistic independence by going into dairy farming—that is, he bought cows and had a partner to care for them and run the business. This partner was a "practical man" and, as is usual in such cases, ran the farm for his own profit

alone, and the artist was finally compelled to withdraw and leave him the business.

He worked very hard to establish this. "Cattle," he writes, "all is cattle—horned and unhorned; cattle to make cattle, dead ones converted into live ones. I shall be celebrated yet for my cattle, whether for dead or live ones is the question." In December, 1860, he made a drawing called "The Circling Year," a flying group of four boyish figures. The following description of this picture was written by Mrs. Oertel:

"In rapid, ever circling round, this joyous brotherhood,  
 O'er the fair face of Earth dispense their varied gifts.  
 First cometh *Spring*—so soft and dewey-eyed,  
 With sweet reposeful features, and a smile  
 Benignant and serene. Enwreathed in flowers,  
 His sway is one of love and gladness, even his tears  
 With sunbeams bright are mingled.  
 Then full, ripe, rosy *Summer*, severs with sickle keen  
 The bending grain, and round his sun-bronzed brow  
 Entwines the golden treasures.  
 Drunk with the purple juice of the rich luscious grape,  
 Bedecked with tendrils of the vine, luxurious *Autumn*  
 Joins the merry band—and danceth on  
 With joyful shout and roystering, gleeful laugh,  
 But louder still, hale, hearty, fur-clad *Winter*  
 Glides on his way o'er the black glittering ice fields  
 Upon his steel-shod heel. In wild tempestuous mirth  
 He passeth by, and gentle *Spring* again  
 Flower crowned, resumes his mild and peaceful reign."

## CHAPTER V.

In April, 1861, seeking relief from the many annoyances of city life, and to find a home where expenses were not so great, he removed to Westerly, R. I. Here he built a studio and settled down to earnest and serious work, hoping soon to be able to take up his religious designs. In this studio some of his most important paintings were produced.

His first picture there was "Father Time and his Family." This was a flying group. In the center Father Time, the conventional old man with wings, scythe, and hourglass, with a lovely female figure representing the Year, were surrounded by the months as children, each bearing typical objects, fruits, etc. The Year held a cornucopia from which she poured out a variety of things upon the earth. An explanation of this painting from his own pen follows:

### "FATHER TIME AND HIS FAMILY."

"Symbolical and typical expression is the most primitive and the most suggestive. It is the expression of poetry and of poetic art. By simple emblems a great number of thoughts are often comprehended and various and manifold relations suggested. In the desire to describe forcibly and

compactly the mind, as by instinct, seizes upon resemblances or illustrates by analogy. In this manner many of the deepest truths and broadest facts are associated in the popular mind with simple signs and phrases. Time and the Seasons are thus suggested.

“From early antiquity the old, winged man with hourglass and scythe has told of rapid flight, of power and death—and every child understands the symbol. The Seasons have often been sung and often painted in various manner. Their constantly recurring changes make everybody familiar with their characteristics, and hence with their symbols when represented by art. They are connected with our lives, our joys, and our griefs. Childhood’s outdoor sports have endeared their varied phases to our hearts, and the thickening experience of advancing age deepens that love. We are the recipients of the blessings they abundantly supply, of the rich beauties they scatter with a most lavish prodigality; of the joys and sorrows they bear along; and of the buoyant hope their very fleetness and certainty of return inspires. They mark our existence and its duration upon earth; and when we are reaped by that solemn mower, ‘Time,’ we still hope that some significant flower may peacefully bloom over our heads, and our silent graves be gently enfolded in the wintry vesture as an emblem of rest after labor.

“In order to represent on the same surface the changing aspects and gifts of Time, as experienced and enjoyed by man, it becomes necessary to make use of poetic license. For this the subdivisions of

time by years and months furnish a universally understood basis, regarding, for the picture, the Year as the spouse of old Father Time, and the twelve months as their offspring, thus constituting, as it were, a family, and developing the diversified features of time from one central idea. The representation of 'Time' and, to a degree, that of the 'Seasons or Months,' is traditional. The Year, in the form in which she appears in the picture, is an invention, as is also the combination of all the figures into a family.

“Rapidity of flight that can not be stayed, resistless vigor and power too strong for created beings are the marks of 'Time.' With a most earnest, relentless purpose he watches our fast-running sands, ready to cut when the last one falls. His encircling arm hurries on the fair, fruitful Year, draped in white and girt with the red of joy and life; and as death envelops and follows life, so she is shrouded in a black mantle of mourning and sorrow, the scythe of Time coming in where the white and black join, ready to sever the golden cord. Emblems of human experience, from out of the golden urn of fate, are dropped by the Year as she passes over the Earth—the jeweled sword of war and power; the palm of victory; the olive of peace; pearls and coins of wealth; the cross of faith; the red rose, life, followed by the white rose, death; the sharp thorn of affliction; and, last, the ivy of hope. These she empties amidst her children, the months, who carry the attributes of their respective characters, mostly relating to the fruits borne by each in reward to man's toil; and in this



manner, also, in turn, humanizing the interest of the picture.

“The blusterer March initiates this idea by holding the spade and shepherd’s horn; him follows the husbandman, April, sowing his seed. Joyous and gentle May, the month of poets, is bending over these two, tossing from his lap the spontaneous growth of delicate spring flowers. Then there is June, the leafy, hay, and rose month; the heated July, shadowed under his sheaf; the ripe, auburn-haired August, mellow like his fruit; the bacchanalian September, the connecting link between summer and autumn. These, in which life renews and activity prevails in nature, are ranged in front as belonging to life typified in the Year; and where floats the dark mantle of death, those months are situated in which decay begins and gradually resumes sway. October, in the sere drapery, bears with the heavy load of fall fruits also the yellow and the bright autumnal leaf. From his abundance prudent November provides for winter store, while in December the temporal blessings of the months are crowned by the choicest spiritual blessing of God to man, His own Son, of which the Christmas Tree stands as the type, and from it the tricolor floats, acknowledged emblem of liberty, in its highest sense most fitly springing from Christianity. The ice month, January, and the stormy snow month, February, close the group.

“The character of allegory is regarded throughout the whole picture; forms, colors, and relations being chosen in reference to expressiveness and sentiment. Time, with stern power; the Year,

with admonishing gentleness dispensing life and death, joy and sorrow; the months, fraught with labor, hopefulness, and blessings, move ever onward by divine command, and in this constant round, all of man's earthly experience, from the cradle to the grave, from the beginning to the end of the world, is compressed, nor will fail to be so, according to the promise: 'While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.'—Gen. 8: 22."

This picture was exhibited in New York at the gallery of Goupel & Co. and found a place in the collection of the late Marshall O. Roberts. It was the first to give Mr. Oertel a substantial footing there as a painter.

Early in 1862 he had a fall from a step ladder, breaking three ribs and his right wrist, which for a time stopped all work, but in a few weeks he was again in harness.

"The Final Harvest" followed in 1862.

This was a flying group of three angels in a 6-foot circle, founded on the text "The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels." One angel carries a sheaf of wheat, one lifts high a golden vessel filled with grapes, and the third with a saddened face and empty hands points below, where a lurid fire is burning on the sea shore, showing that his task has been the burning of the chaff. This picture was largely exhibited and enough written about it to make a volume. In Boston the papers at last refused to publish anything more, as a controversy had arisen in

regard to the doctrine involved. One of these articles from a Boston paper follows:

“FINAL HARVEST.”

“What differentiates Westerly from all other places at this moment, is the fact that the artist, Johannes Oertel, has his studio there.

“If ever thou should'st come by choice or chance  
To Modena, pray thee forget it not.  
Enter the house, and look awhile upon a picture there,  
'Tis of three angels in their glorious youth.’

“The subject of the picture is ‘The Final Harvest.’ The Reapers are the angels. The end of all things has come. Time shall be no longer. A black waste spreads over what was once the earth. There is a suggestion of a ruined city, and a smoke, on which are reflected lurid lights from below, indicating the fire that goeth not out. But above the earth which was and is not, soaring to the Heaven which is their home, are the immortal reapers.

“We have all seen angels in other pictures. Over beautiful, human forms, more or less exalted, floating in drapery, is painted, wings of quill and feather are added, and you have your angel complete.

“But in Mr. Oertel’s picture the robes of righteousness are a part of the angelic essence, and the wings are powers mighty and harmonious.

“The central figure bears a sheaf of grain, ‘He shall gather the wheat into His garners.’

“One knows the meaning of the word seraphic when one has seen this angel’s face.

“It wears the rapture of him whom God keeps forever in perfect peace.

“The coloring of this figure is white, with blue which becomes deeper in the wings.

“If this angel represents, nay *is*, Purity and Peace, that at the left is Purity and Love. It is clothed in robes of flame, and the color deepens with intense and burning ardors in the upward-soaring wings. Even the feet are not so still as those of the first, and the arms are extended to their full length.

“The second angel bears aloft a vessel of grapes.

“You understand that this is a religious picture. The motive is Christian, the execution devout. The whole thought is scriptural. ‘He shall send His angels and they shall gather His elect.’ ‘They shall be Mine in the day when I make up My jewels.’ Wheat and grapes, His own choicest gifts to man, such will the Lord require from field and vineyard. May there not yet be another meaning in the sheaf and clusters borne hence by the Angelic Harvesters? These two were often used by the Lord as typical of Himself. ‘I am the true vine,’ ‘I am the bread of life’; and these were chosen also as the sacramental emblems of His most precious body and blood. But the third angel; what is his work to gather? ‘And the chaff into unquenchable fire.’ ‘In the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them.’ This

reaper has performed his task. One hand is placed on the breast, the other hangs by the side.

“I thought there was more strength in the beauty of these hands than the others.

“There is a wonderful nobleness in this third angel; a profound measureless joy and love in the face, and the burnished emerald wings gleam bright, no shadow dimming them from ‘the smoke of their torment,’ in the corner below his hand.

“On all the faces is the sign manual of Heaven. The hands adore, the feet are holy, the wings seem glancing and glowing with awful splendors that kindle anew as we gaze.

“Had the artist told us that not upon canvas, not by the aid of oils and ochres and pigments of mundane origin and use he had made this picture, but that these angels had suddenly floated out of their glowing Heaven and were projected on a background of cloud, we must have believed him.

“The ‘Final Harvest’ is to be exhibited in New York next month, and I wished that it was also to be shown here—that it was to stay here.

“I was about to say that its native state ought to possess such a marvel of beauty, but Rhode Island is not its native state. We may say that it was painted here, but to none of the original thirteen does its nativity belong.

“Its birthplace was above the stars. Never, surely, since that Sabbath when it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, has there been on this earth such ‘a vision of angels.’

“I say nothing, I know nothing, of the technical execution of this painting. Art critics, who know

the words and how to use them, may do that hereafter, if they can. I have only aimed to express my own feeling of the matchless beauty of what I saw, to speak of the divine idea so nobly interpreted.

“There was no stammering in that utterance in the studio of Westerly, believe me, poor as is the speech of your correspondent in attempting to convey an impression of it.”

(Signed) S. S. J.

This picture would have sold readily but for its size and circular shape of frame. One gentleman said he would take it, but found that he had no space in his house large enough to hang it, and so cancelled the contract. During the many moves which followed in the ensuing years the frame was broken up and the picture so damaged that it was eventually destroyed.

During this period he commenced in crayon the preparatory cartoon for the first of the great series. It was 5 by 4 feet in size and was studied and drawn with the greatest accuracy, but only in outline.

When “The Final Harvest” went to New York for exhibition, the drawing of “The Dispensations of Promise and the Law” was taken down also, to be shown to a few friends of whose understanding and appreciation the artist was assured. A publisher who saw it persuaded him to work it over and finish it up to full effect in light and shade, so that it could be photographed, being very enthusiastic in his hopes for it in the market. He did so, working almost night and day on it to get it done in a given time, making serious inroads upon his

health, as by the time it was finished he broke down completely. He suffered intense pain which nothing would relieve but the most violent exercise. He would run for miles, returning exhausted, and then he could sleep a short time, only to repeat the exercise when he awakened or suffer great agony. The doctors did not know what was the trouble nor could they relieve him in any way. Mrs. Oertel grew desperate as time went on and he became worse instead of better, and as a last resort she took her little boy "Fritz," then nearly 7 years old, and without telling Mr. Oertel where she was going set out for Newark, N. J., to visit and consult a clairvoyant—Dr. Perkins—of whom she had heard from friends in her old home.

When Dr. Perkins was "put to sleep" by his wife with a lock of Mr. Oertel's hair pressed to his forehead he immediately began to act like him when in his studio; he walked up and down, backed off as if from a picture, and in response to Mrs. Oertel's question "who is it, Doctor?" he replied: "It is a man—your husband—a great man and a great work to do. You think he is going to die; he is sick enough, but he can't die; he has too much work to do, too many great works to produce. He *can't die now*; he must wait until it is all finished."

Prophetic words, truly. Whatever one may think of this kind of manifestation, certain it is that his words were true, and certain it is that after taking his medicine a few days Mr. Oertel was free from pain and working away with his usual strength.

The cartoon was sent to New York and photo-

graphed, but never found the recognition that the publisher predicted for it.

After having it handsomely framed—under glass—it was placed on exhibition at the National Academy. Here it was given a place in a corner of the corridor, and the critics said that there was “not a single important work on the walls that year”!

No wonder the heart of the sensitive enthusiast sank at this. These works were the children of his soul rather than of his intellect; they were a portion of his life, and therefore when the world treated them slightly he was wounded deeply, not for *himself*, but because of the Divine subjects of which they speak. He was hurt, but not in the least shaken in his resolves for the series. He went on just as if he had never met the rebuff, seeking only to find work that might be remunerative enough to prove a steppingstone to gain the height of his desires—to be able to go on and paint the four grand designs.

This cartoon was damaged and torn in moving it from place to place and he cast it aside as worthless, but after his death it was discovered rolled up with some old drawing paper and it was placed in the hands of an expert in Washington who mounted it on cloth and almost completely restored it.



## CHAPTER VI.

The war now raged in the South and some of Mr. Oertel's friends urged him to go to the scene of the conflict and make studies, as in their opinion when the time of peace came every record of the strife would be of interest. In accordance with this advice he set out September 21, 1862, spent several days in New York buying his outfit, and on September 28, he went to Washington, leaving there for the front October 3, when he joined the Sixth New York Cavalry, then under General Burnside, at Pleasant Valley, Md.

His letters to his wife show the usual enthusiasm which he displayed in all undertakings where he felt he was doing his duty. From New York he wrote: "I expect to get a special letter of introduction to General B. I do not want to be classed among the 'Special artists.' I expect to serve my country as but few can, and men like General B. ought to assist me.

"I am leaving for Washington; once more I shall see that city on a strange enterprise. Before I paused there; now my field lies beyond. The feeling of being cast adrift upon an untried sea is mine.

"I have put my new painting box in order and this took me some time, as I find tinkering necessary after every mechanic.

“I bought a pair of cavalry boots and a rubber blanket; likewise a soldier cap in which I look ‘a la militaire’ to the amusement of my friends, who never saw me but with exuberance of wild hair and an easy felt hat in a backward inclination planted on top.

“The little defenseless group of a mother and two children on the platform of the depot in West-erly at night is ever before my sight. May God bless and preserve you, and permit us to meet again in the safety and happiness of home and quiet.

“I go from all I value to obey a strange call. May the almighty arm of the good God never depart from shielding and guiding me.”

He soon fell into the ways of soldier life, going on reconnoissance along the front with General Burnside’s bodyguard and doing picket duty, and says “This is an exciting life full of wild interest—I rather like it.”

“I have material for fine subjects and have made studies for ‘An Army Train,’ he writes from Warrenton, Va., November 11, 1862.

“It seems at first a subject of little importance, but to those who know it it is a subject illustrating much of a soldier’s life and the life of a large army. Indeed one of those countless, endless trains is calculated to show more forcibly the magnitude and ponderousness of a great army than the scattered camps over a stretch of many miles and invisible one from another. Nor is it the wagons only that move in the train; the army that has marched ahead leaves its many representatives. There is the straggler from the ranks who throws his musket

and knapsack upon some team and saunters along leisurely, and more, there is the poor, weary, sick man, who is willing but can stagger no further, and, like the overworked horse or mule he is almost forgotten and left by the wayside. Forsaken, smouldering campfires all along tell where a rest has been made, lame horses tied to the backs of wagons are dragged along. Stony roads, with ruts and steep, rough hills impose dreaded difficulties on man and beast; and many more and sometimes thrilling incidents conform with the variety of ammunition and company wagon, the hay wagon, the ambulance, the caisson, and quartermaster, surgeons, etc. This is an army train. On the mountains of Virginia the eye can sometimes trace it for miles, winding, disappearing, and appearing again, still further and further off, till the white wagon tops seem like sheep in single file on the distant hills.

“I shall make a large picture of it, and am now at work on the material.

“To-day I saw General McClellan depart from his army for home. General Burnside accompanied him to the depot. I followed an impulse and went into the car to bid him good-bye. It needed but a mention of my name.

“I begged leave to shake hands with him as I might never have another opportunity. He was sad and seemed to struggle with his feelings, and after the train had got in motion he raised the car window and gave one more long look upon the crowd of officers behind, then shut it down again.

“Burnside also was unusually quiet, and for

once his fine teeth were not so prominent when he spoke—I was going to say smiled, but he did not smile, not to-day—‘Some political deviltry has been intriguing again.’

“The army has made a tremendous demonstration at his leave-taking and feel bereaved of a friend and father. The event has saddened me also, though I never before spoke to the man, but I believe in him. May his removal at this juncture, when the whole army is in motion against the foe, work no great mischief to the country!”

This was the time of which has been said that it would only have needed a word from General McClellan for him to have returned to Washington at the head of his army as Dictator.

The month of November was spent in camps at Liberty, Morrisville, and Richards Ford, on the Rappahannock, where he was “busy making sketches in oil, a pile of which is constantly increasing,” and he adds, “If a battle does not result in or around Fredericksburg I am mistaken.

“We are but 2 miles this side of Falmouth (Nov. 28), and the army is enlarging constantly—all now is life, expectation, and constant drill. The army lies close together, as it would before a great battle is fought, and the land literally swarms with an armed host. Nothing meets the eye than the sight of martial life, and martial sounds the ear. The plains and the woods, the hills and the valleys, are vast camps, and parks of wagons and dark columns of men moving hither and thither; and supply trains going and coming; and new armies moving thickly in, to fill what vacant place is left.

It is a grand spectacle. They cover indeed 'the face of the earth.'

"It can never be rendered in a picture, only a hint conveyed, and this I propose to do in the composition I have sketched.

"I am becoming more and more enlightened about the way of painting 'The Army Train' every day as I move among this new and tragic life all around me and see the men and objects which are to compose part of it, and I believe the picture will not be a failure. I can be literal, when needed, and literal I will be, even to the very rags, and dust, and dirt. The people shall see their soldier as he is and the people will not be unmerciful of the truth.

"You know my maxim is to strike few, but hard blows. Little pictures fret a man's energies; I have tried that. Few men can paint comprehensively, but many will be the penny productions cooked up from photographs and fancy which will flood the market after this war. I shall not belong to the latter class; I will endeavor to tell my story by one or two works of importance, and the one in contemplation will have as great variety of feature crowded into it as anything I have yet made."

So he continued to prepare for the work which he believed it his duty to execute even though it was not to his liking. He made about 80 studies and, the last of December, left camp and returned north to his home in Westerly, intending to go on at once painting "The Army Train" or "The Army in Motion" as he decided to call it.

This plan he never carried out, partly because

the public seemed rather to prefer to bury the remembrance of these events in oblivion than to have them perpetuated on canvas, but more because he realized that there was so little in it all to fill his own mind that he feared he would not be able to keep his interest alive long enough to finish it successfully.

Under date of June 2, 1863, Mrs. Oertel wrote a friend: "I do not believe that my husband will ever paint the first stroke on that army picture after all. He is evidently very much disinclined to the work; besides he feels that his years are fleeing away and if he is ever to work in his Master's cause it is time he was about it."

He painted, however, six war scenes of considerable size, most of them treated as animal pictures. Two of them were bought by Sir Morton Peto, the great English financier, and taken by him, with Bierstadt's "Rocky Mountains," to England. One, "The Virginia Turnpike," showed a six-mule team and army wagon laboring up a hill in the awful mud which signalized General Burnside's winter before Petersburg as "the mud campaign." It was bought by a company of gentlemen and presented to Ex-Governor Fenton, of New York.

He also painted "The Gallop of Three" and "The Raid" for Mr. J. E. Paine, of New York.

"The Raid" was sent to the Brooklyn Art Association's Exhibition (Dec. 22-26, 1865), by Mr. Paine, about which he wrote the artist: "The 'hanging committee' gave it the central position on the long or unbroken wall, and what I should consider the 'place of honor,' certainly the most prom-



THE ROCK OF AGES





inent and the one of all others that I should have chosen for it.

“I have no hesitation in saying that it had a hundred times more attention bestowed on it than any other picture, and gave more pleasure, not only to the pleasure seekers merely, but to the thoughtful and intelligent.

“The picture was considered one of extraordinary power and very great merit.”

On the death of Mr. Paine this picture passed into the hands of his son-in-law, Mr. J. A. Edwards, of Chicago, Ill.

“The Walk to Emmaus,” “Easter Morning,” “Mary Magdalene at the Sepulchre,” and other religious works were painted, all remaining in Rhode Island and never being exhibited. Then came the work about which so much has been written and which has been reproduced and is to be found all over the world where art has penetrated at all, in the palaces of the rich and cultivated, in the homes of the poor, ignorant and lowly, sometimes changed, it is true, in some of its details, but always bearing the same name, carrying the same message, and teaching the same lesson of Faith (as it was at first called) and trust in the cross of Christ—“The Rock of Ages.”

As has been said, the artist’s name has not followed this work. Had it done so, no name of modern times would be better known. From first to last a strange fatality seemed to hover over it and to prevent the reaping of any benefit by the artist either in a financial way or as to reputation. It has been copied in every possible way, produced

in every process, given away as premium on the purchase of soap or of a cheap magazine. It has been used by churches to illustrate their pamphlets and circulars, stamped on medals, and sold as a "picture postal" for a penny, yet rarely, if ever, in all these various publications has the name of the artist been mentioned. It has been described as "the greatest religious picture," "the most popular American painting," etc., but through all this is never seen the statement "painted by Oertel," and though the copies sold by his publisher bore his name, yet few there are of all the millions who know and love it can tell whence it came.

Can this be said of any work as popular and of such widespread distribution—if indeed such a work exists?

It has been made the subject of scores of newspaper articles, and its story varied in as many ways. No doubt the writers received their regular pay per line for all this, but never, so far as is known, did it result in the slightest benefit to the artist.

The whole story of this work had best be told here, though it extends over a number of years.

The title, as entered in his record book (June 10, 1867) is "Saved, or an Emblematic Representation of Christian Faith."

Later he called it "Faith"; then the name of "the Rock of Ages" was adopted as being the more popular title.

The first sketch of the subject was made in the album of a Westerly lady, in pencil. Next a small painting, and then a painting 12 by 18 inches, which

was presented to Mrs. Rowse Babcock, of Westerly, after which came a larger painting 26 by 49 inches.

This was sold the second day of exhibition, at Shaus's, in New York, to Mr. Augustus Storrs, of Brooklyn.

Mr. Oertel did not realize the importance of this design, but when it came before the public the popular heart was touched as it has not been by any other modern picture, and he soon had offers to purchase the copyright and to publish. George T. James, of New York, was selected as the publisher and copies both in photograph and chromo were made and sold rapidly.

When it was decided to publish the picture Mr. Storrs was requested to loan his copy for the purpose of making the necessary photographs, but this he refused to do, so Mr. Oertel painted another for the purpose.

This was 36 by 61 inches. Some years later it was sold to Mr. William Fogg, of New York. After his death his collection of paintings was sold at auction, and it is understood that this copy at that time was purchased for the Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Two editions of the chromo, made in France, sold in London before one copy was brought to this country. The explanation of this is easily seen when it is known that Mr. James claimed *all* the receipts from foreign sales and paid royalty only on what was disposed of in the United States.

For some time they could not be printed fast enough to supply the demand.

For once it seemed he had achieved a financial

success. But, alas, the popularity was so great that it aroused the greed of the dealers in such wares. They took the trouble to look closely into the matter of the copyright and discovered a "flaw."

Mr. Oertel had always considered himself a New York artist, although living in Rhode Island, and all his art business was done in New York. So in New York he took out the copyright. The law, of which he was ignorant, said that it must be taken out in the State in which the artist resided, or in the general office in Washington, D. C.

So the picture pirates commenced publishing for themselves various forms of cheap imitations. Oertel's publisher got out injunctions against them and three expensive law suits ensued in defense of the copyright which the artist had to wage single handed, as Mr. James insisted that under the terms of the contract he had no responsibility in the matter. The artist paid the expenses from his royalty of one-fourth while the publisher looked on complacently, pocketing the while his three-fourths in safety.

The first two suits, in New York City were decided in favor of the artist, Judge Cardoza holding that, the technical flaw in the copyright notwithstanding, the artist had a right to the income from the work of his own brains and hand—a just decision indeed. In the third trial, however, which was held in Chicago, the decision was against him, the copyright was broken, and from that time on the "Rock of Ages" was the property of anyone who chose to use it.

It would seem that David Thoreau was far from

wrong when he said, "I have learned that trade curses everything it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business." Even this "message from heaven" could not be made an object of trade without being subjected to the curse, and it is no wonder that a man with the principles and aims of Oertel preferred rather to give away his religious pictures than to have them brought under its baneful influences and be tainted, as he said, by the spirit of the money changers whom Christ scourged from the Temple.

In 1895, July 10, another copy was made, 24 by 40 inches, "for my son Eugene, to be reproduced in the "photochrome process." This copy is still (1915) the property of his son, Dr. T. E. Oertel, of Augusta, Ga. Several small copies were made at various times as presents to his friends.

It was painted again in 1898 (August), this time life size, 7 feet 8 inches by 12 feet "for purpose of exhibition and possible publication."

The exhibition referred to was arranged for by H. Jay Smith, whose business was to exhibit for various artists, and who came with good indorsement. Several paintings were placed in his hands, of which mention will be made later, and these were exhibited in Boston, Mass., that fall.

After the exhibition closed all the pictures were returned except the large "Rock of Ages" and an animal piece which Smith said he wished to buy. The "Rock of Ages" he expected to exhibit in Chicago, whence he wrote saying he had arrived and would "soon send payment for the ponies."

Once more Chicago was fatal, as neither Smith nor the paintings were ever heard from again. Every effort to learn of his whereabouts proved abortive, nor has the slightest trace ever been discovered of the big canvas.

Such is the history of this famous design. Even though the name of the artist be unknown, yet will it continue to live throughout the ages, ever telling its story to the world; and though obscure in life yet in this will he live while the world endures.

As he himself wrote, "I wish to preach even more than instruct; and if this photograph goes out by the thousands, I shall have delivered so many earnest sermons and continue to deliver them even when my stammering tongue is silent in the grave."

In October, 1867, he began a series of eight designs illustrating the poem of William Cullen Bryant, "Waiting by the Gate," and at that time the first, "The Gate," was made.

A plan was now evolved by which it was hoped to introduce copies of "The Dispensations of Promise and the Law" throughout the country. It was thought that clergymen, especially those of the Episcopal Church, would take an interest in this work if it could be brought to their notice, and the artist's wife undertook the thankless task of attempting to see and interest them. Armed with letters of introduction from her pastor in Westerly and others she visited New York and several eastern cities, but succeeded in awakening no interest—finding least where most was expected.

In this effort weeks were spent going from city

to city and tramping from door to door carrying a heavy portfolio of specimens. Rebuff, refusal, and even insult was met—little encouragement—but she kept bravely on until satisfied that nothing could be accomplished in this way, and returned home.

The success of "Faith" ("Rock of Ages") prompted Mr. Oertel to produce also "Hope" and "Charity," but they were never popular and had little sale.

The first was a female figure standing by the side of a rock on a bluff overlooking the sea and gazing out over the expanse of water—where was seen a ship standing in toward the land.

The second was the same scene as the "Faith," only the figure clinging to the cross held on with one hand only while with the other she helped a sister to climb up on the rock.

In a circular issued by Mr. James they were thus described:

#### CHRISTIAN HOPE.

"PATIENT IN SUFFERING, JOYFUL IN HOPE."

This is not the ancient allegorical maiden who has been leaning from time immemorial on an anchor, but a transcript of a human soul, the sentiment and expression of which is truly told in the passage of scripture here quoted. Hope bears upon a rock (typifying Christ), to which clings the ever-green Ivy.

While the shadows of a parting tempest are fleeting across the lower part of her figure her face looks up into the bright clear blue above, dressed in the white robe of imputed righteousness, bearing

the red mantle of Joy clasped with a golden anchor.

Upon her bosom, suspended below this emblem of Hope, is a Jet Cross—the Cross not of Faith only but also of self-denial and suffering.

The sky and ocean are symbolical of the storms of life, and upon the shore are strewn wrecks of earthly things.

### CHRISTIAN CHARITY,

THE COMPANION PICTURE TO THE “ROCK OF AGES.”

Taking the same scene of a storm-beaten Cross in the midst of a raging sea; a female clinging, but with a more assured grasp, shows her grateful appreciation by assisting a sister struggler, almost gone, who has just secured a feeble hold. A most beautiful exposition of that highest of charities—true Christian charity which cares for perishing souls around her.



## CHAPTER VII.

Social life was not in any way neglected. Though spending most of his time in his studio, he made many friends and took an active interest in public matters. His music was kept up and he played his flute weekly with Dr. Gorham, who also played the flute, and Edwin Vose, pianist. He had with him at various times several pupils who came in as members of his family and as friends. Among these should be mentioned Miss Cornelia A. Conant and Miss Mary Gove, of New York, and Edward L. Hyde, of Mystic, Conn., afterward Rev. E. L. Hyde, of Boston, Mass. No more appreciative pupil or true and stanch friend ever blessed the "Master's" life than "Edward." Through all the years of life they were close friends and regular correspondents. The "Master" wrote to him as he did to no other, and from him always received sympathy and appreciation. When there came to the notice of "Edward" any idea or scheme by which it seemed possible the "Master" might benefit, he never failed to bring it forward and ever remained the same true friend and brother.

In 1902 the "Master" writes him thus:

"My Dear Friend of Many Years Ago: Indeed how long it has been since we lived and worked together in the Westerly studio! And how many

and varied have been the experiences of each of us! In truth, I sometimes, thinking back and trying to locate facts, have to unravel them like knotted thread to get at the proper sequence. But the essence, the vital parts, and the prominent personalities always stand out distinct in memory; and surely your name could never be effaced or remembered with diminished affection and interest."

The last letter the "Master" wrote was penned with trembling hand to this, his dearest friend, whose interest and love had never flagged. All the letters ever written to this friend by either the "Master" or his wife were preserved, and when he was informed that the compiling of a biography of Mr. Oertel was contemplated he gave them all to the latter's sons to be used in furthering the purpose. Many passages from these are quoted, and it is a matter of regret that some can not be given entire.

During the stay in Westerly Mr. Oertel formed a friendship with the Rev. John C. Middleton, who was then rector of the Episcopal Church in Mystic, Conn. Here also was one with whom he was in close sympathy and he was closely associated with him in later years when rector of St. Paul's parish, Glen Cove, L. I.

Though not a large man, weighing not over 165 lbs., Mr. Oertel was very powerful and very proud of his strength and willing at any time to exhibit it. On one occasion, at a gathering of friends when he was alluded to as "a small man" he walked to the center of the room, placed his hands on the floor, and invited two of the largest

men present to stand on them. Those who came forward weighed 220 and 236 pounds, respectively. When they had each placed a foot on one of his hands he rose with them, carried them across the room, and gave them a toss upward as he let them fall to the floor. He was a very rapid walker and never seemed to tire; his stride was like that of a thoroughbred horse, and this he maintained mile after mile with machine-like regularity. He would not "keep step" with a companion, nor moderate his speed; they must step with him and keep up with him or be left behind. Sometimes he walked over to Mystic, 6 miles distant, to see his friend Middleton, allowing himself one hour each way and always coming in on time.

Of his home life there is little to relate. His studio was his home, and his work hours there from 12 to 24, according to the exigencies of the case. He always had a couch or lounge in his room where he rested and slept either day or night when exhausted nature demanded. He came into the house to retire at any hour, from 10 o'clock p. m. to daylight—or not at all, as was often the case when engaged on important work.

The first call to meals was seldom heeded. When the bell had been rung for him the family took their places at table and waited. If he did not come in some minutes one of the children was sent to ask if he had heard the bell. Often he was so absorbed in his work that he had not; frequently he would say, rather impatiently, "Yes, I come," in which case there was nothing to do but wait, and continue to wait until he appeared. Often the dishes of food

were returned to the kitchen to be kept warm until it pleased him to come. A meal was never eaten without him, for at the table was about the only time the family were together and after it was over he would often remain for some time and talk.

Useless noise or chatter he could not endure and had little patience with the children at their play. Such a thing as a drum, horn, or any noise-making toy was a forbidden article in his household.

He had infinite patience to bestow on his work, but none at all with the petty annoyances of everyday life.

The bark of a dog or the continuous cackle of a hen would soon bring him from his room with the impatient ejaculation "March off, you beast, and stop your confounded noise."

He loved to talk of his work to any visitor who showed intelligence and appreciation or who seemed to have an honest desire for information, but he shut up like a clam in the presence of those who came out of mere idle curiosity and who presumed to know much and to criticize, or as if duty bound to express admiration.

At one time, when he had on the easel a fine marine—the setting sun throwing a flood of golden light over a rough sea—a lady visitor entered and with a glance at the canvas exclaimed "Oh, how pretty! a prairie on fire!" He used to tell this anecdote with great gusto, adding that the funniest part of it and the joke on him was that the lady left without changing her opinion.

In 1867 he took an important step which largely influenced his subsequent life. Having been for a

long time teaching a young ladies' Bible class, which Bible lessons had gradually taken the form of lectures, and on account of the illness of the rector being also obliged to act as lay reader of the services, the rector pressed him to take deacon's orders, as he was doing the work of a deacon without the authority. After much consideration he consented and prepared at once for his examination. He was ordained to the diaconate in June, 1867, by Bishop Clark, of Rhode Island, under the canon "for restricted deacons," and had no intention of going further into the ministry, but only desiring to make himself more helpful to his rector.

At the end of seven years it seemed imperative for him to be nearer New York, and in the spring of 1868 he removed to Tarrytown-on-Hudson. It had been his intention to reside permanently in this section, and property near Irvington had previously been purchased; but in the meantime the land adjoining had been sold off to a most undesirable class of people and he was forced to dispose of his holding for what it would then bring, being, of course, less than the purchase price.

The following summer he went for a short time with his brother Fritz to the Catskill Mountains, and while there met a young lady, a student of art, Miss Laura Norwood, of Lenoir, N. C. From her he learned much of the general situation of the South at that time, and particularly of conditions existing in her home town—the people impoverished by the war, without the means to educate their children; the church building having been used as a hospital by the soldiers and in a most dilapidated

and neglected condition, and no church services held for months at a time.

She also gave a glowing description of the natural beauties and advantages of that part of the country—its grand and imposing mountains, crystal streams, and forest of noble pines and oaks; its incomparable climate and life-giving air; and the exceeding cheapness of all the real necessities of life.

All this appealed directly to the mind of the artist, the missionary, the lover of nature and of his fellow-man.

Here was a land in which he could live on the moderate income which he had from his publications and go on and paint his great designs; here he could use his means to the best advantage, and here, being independent of any remuneration for clerical services, he could do the most good for his Church and for his people.

The cry “come and help us” seemed to echo in his ears, and after his return to Tarrytown and a consultation with his wife it was decided to make the move.

## CHAPTER VIII.

In April, 1869, with his family of three children and his father and mother he set out for his new home. A tedious journey it was then—to Washington, D. C., by train; stage across the city to the wharf at foot of Seventh Street; steamer down the Potomac River to Aquia Creek; by the old Virginia Midland Railroad to Salisbury, N. C., and from thence over the Western North Carolina Railroad to its terminus at Hickory (then “Hickory Tavern”). From this point to Lenoir the journey had to be made by “stage.”

Hickory was reached about noon of the second day, and, after a dinner of ham, eggs, and corn bread at the “Tavern,” a double log cabin then kept by “Snediker,” all climbed into the rickety stage and were slowly dragged over the 20 miles of miserable road by two sorry and raw-boned nags, relics of ante bellum days, to Lenoir, the future mountain home where it was hoped so much good could be done and so much artistic work accomplished. Lenoir at that time was an educational center for that section of the south, and several schools were there maintained. Its people were impoverished by the war and everything was in a sad state of dilapidation and neglect, but here were culture and refinement; petty strife and bickering,

so common in the average small town, were here unknown; the place was as yet untouched by the spirit of commercialism, and those of every sect and opinion lived together in peace and harmony. *All* were poor, so poverty was not considered; all needed help, so each one helped his neighbor. An ideal place indeed it was for such work as he proposed to do in art, an unlimited field it offered for him as a missionary; considering all this, and that his new home was in the midst of the most beautiful scenery in the world, what wonder the artist was enthusiastic over the prospect.

The whole party went to Miss Norwood's plantation home, "Oak Lawn," and were received with open arms. Here they remained until the household and studio goods, shipped from New York, arrived, when they took up their abode at the rectory, a most unique little building standing in a grove of gigantic oaks and white pines.

It seemed as if the time had at last arrived when his mind was to be liberated from carking care and from a burden of liabilities which, though small in themselves, had yet been insurmountable in the years of struggle behind him, and that at last in peace and quiet he could take up the execution of his great works and bring them to completion. He at once began to build a studio large enough for the proper execution of such work. But just here, when scarcely six months in Lenoir, and before the studio was completed, came the blow which deprived him of his income, destroyed all his hopes, and left him again in a hand-to-hand fight with uncertainties, having loaded himself already



with Church and educational work in his parish which could not be shaken off, and having also the terrible drain of lawyers' fees to meet. Among other things, a mission school had been established several miles in the country for the education of the poor whites. He had depended on his income from the publications. Mr. James informed him that there was no longer anything to be expected from that source. He wrote (Nov. 18, 1869): "The robbers have copied the 'Rock of Ages' in all sizes and for all prices and defy me to my face, and they say that as soon as I put 'Charity' on the market they will do the same with that."

To show the far-reaching effect of this blow to him is quoted below a letter written by one of his parishioners and signed "Gratitude."

### "MR. OERTEL'S 'ROCK OF AGES.'

Artist-Clergyman in his Southern Home—Faith exemplified in a life.

[Correspondence of Laura Lenoir Norwood in the *Journal of Commerce*.]

"LENOIR, CALDWELL COUNTY, WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA,  
February 5, 1870.

"In a late number of the *Journal of Commerce* there is an account of the lawsuit in regard to the copyright of Johannes A. Oertel's picture, 'The Rock of Ages,' and the decision of the court in Mr. Oertel's favor. Perhaps, as a lover of art, you felt some interest in the case, and I think you were glad that the decision of the court secured to the gifted artist the proceeds of his own work.

"The losing party in the suit (Mr. Wood) is advised by his lawyers to appeal and carry the case into another court or another term of the court, and if he does so the decision may be reversed, or, if it is affirmed, the expenses of the suit will be heavy, and almost more than the artist can sustain.

"I see in the artist's life a far more beautiful example of the

power of faith than any picture can ever teach; and if you could see it, too, you would think some of your time and strength well spent in saying a word that may very possibly, as I believe, prolong a life so devoted to good works, as well as so honorable in the record of American art.

“We who see Mr. Oertel’s daily life among us do not need to buy his lovely picture of ‘Faith.’ For the painter of ‘The Rock of Ages’ is the rector of our little church; our faithful, loving pastor, who came to us as an unlooked-for blessing (when we were too poor to have a minister), and asked that he might do us good for Christ’s sake alone. The income derived from the publication of the picture in question (though it would seem very small in New York, as he is only paid for the copyright), was sufficient in our cheap country to support his family in the simple way in which they live, and also to minister to the wants of many poor and friendless ones who have learned to bless his name. We hoped that in the beauty of our scenery, our delightful climate, and the quiet and peace which he loves, Mr. Oertel might find some pleasures in return for the many advantages which he gave up to become our missionary; but we did not expect him to share our poverty as well as our loneliness, and to endure hardships which, alas, we can not relieve! For, indeed, we are truly poor now, and the years since the war have done nothing yet to build up our desolated country.

“You do not want to hear of this, and we do not wish to complain. Our lovely mountain country is too remote to feel the waves of returning prosperity, but we have learned to endure patiently many hardships and to look calmly on the graves of our buried hopes.

“You who live in the midst of so much brightness and motion, and feel the bounding of the pulse of life through a great city, can not imagine what it is to be as we are. If you did know it, you would perhaps realize what a blessing Mr. Oertel’s faith has brought to us, for he believes the word of our Saviour, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. And he gives us the comfort we most dearly prize in his faithful and loving ministrations.

“You perhaps know that Mr. Oertel is a clergyman of the Episcopal Church, but no one to hear that he is both artist and minister would think that he could accomplish so much good in the latter character as he does.

“Real devotion and unsparing self-denial for Christ’s sake

are so rare in our time that one must see the results of such a life in order to believe in it.

“The members of this parish feel themselves unworthy of the treasure which they possess in such a pastor, and the earnest and beautiful sermons which go straight to the hearts of his people are made more effective by the thought that they are generally written in the silent hours of the night, after a day of hard work in a profession which certainly taxes the brain not lightly. Heaven knows we would gladly save our pastor from some of the hardships which he endures for our sakes, but it seems that there is no selfishness in his heart to which we can appeal. The poor, the sorrowing, the troubled are around him, and he will love them and help them; the ignorant are here and he will teach them; and his gentle wife is ever ready to aid in every new labor of love. Is it not enough that he must bear on his heart the burdens of others, that all beyond a mere maintenance is freely given to the cause of Christ, and that his life is one of constant toil, but must his means of living be taken from him now, when the locks are whitening on his temples?

“He has struggled through long years of poverty and trial, true always to his high ideal of Christian art, and true to himself in the childlike simplicity and unquestioning faith which have upheld him, and is he not entitled to enjoy what is his own, and was so dearly earned?

“Is it only a question of money that will be decided in this suit when the appeal is taken?

“GRATITUDE.”

Great as this disappointment and serious the situation, it must be met.

If he must “depend on his brush,” as Mr. James said, he would “make it fly,” and Mrs. Oertel at once appealed to friends at the North for assistance in their parish work. “But oh,” she writes a friend, “the Church work and everybody besides so needs hard cash that I can not help wish for it. Our work so grows upon us that we are perfectly appalled. The mission school list has now increased to about 50 names; we have Sunday school out

there, too. I go out three times each week, and that makes a weekly walk of about 17 miles. We do so much need teachers for this and other schools, both white and colored. We have now in these schools nearly 200 under instructions. Oh, for more fellow-workers!"

Thus it was that the minister's wife met this emergency, by thorough coöperation in all of his undertakings, by personal self-sacrifice and unremitting toil, and be it remembered all was a gift, all was done "In His Name," without money and without price. Not only this, they continued to give from their slender means. None who asked went away empty handed so long as there was anything left to give.

When he had money, during the first months, he was what might be termed extravagant, but not in the indulgence of himself or family. He writes in one of his letters, "I have lent Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ \$400 to buy a farm. It is a great privilege to be able to help so worthy a man." This was "lent," but so far as is known was never returned and never asked for. Groceries were ordered in quantity from New York and the poor country folk came to the rectory for their coffee, sugar, medicine, etc., as they would to a store, except that at the store they would have to trade in some of their meagre stock of produce—a chicken, some eggs, or medicinal roots dug in the mountains—here it was freely given, and in the pastor's wife they found a ready listener to all their tales of woe and were always sure from her to receive words of encouragement and sympathy.

When the crash came and the flow of money stopped, these pensioners did not; nor did they seem to understand how it could be that there was not the usual sack of coffee and barrel of sugar from which to supply their needs. They continued to come as usual with empty baskets, which seldom if ever went out of the rectory grounds in the same state. Notes like these frequently went from house to studio: "Johnny, give B. a dollar to buy some 'shucks' for his cow." "Give H. some money to-day; they are all sick," etc.

Considerable in the way of contributions for the parish was sent by friends at the North, both in money, clothes, and various articles which it was thought might be of use. One kindly disposed lady forwarded a "case of Shaker bonnets" for the mission school children. Those who know the "po' whites" can picture them wearing "Shaker bonnets." The people of Christ Church, Tarrytown, having put in a new organ in the church there, sent down their old one, the same instrument mentioned by Washington Irving in one of his letters. It was a complete wreck, but Mr. Oertel with his own hands rebuilt it, making new pipes, a new wind chest and bellows, and then a carved and illuminated case. It was placed in the church and is there doing duty still. He also made for the church a carved reredos and altar. This was his first attempt at wood carving. He did not have to learn to carve; he just did it. As he once said, "It is perfectly simple; what I want is in the wood; all I have to do is to cut away what don't belong there."

DESCRIPTION OF THE REREDOS IN ST. JAMES' CHURCH  
LENOIR, N. C.

[Written by Clinton A. Cilley.]

“Rev. Mr. Oertel on Christmas day placed in the chancel of St. James' Church the result of nearly two years' labor, and presented it to the church.

“The work consists of a painting and its frame. The painting, on a background of gold, shows the Saviour offering bread and wine to a male and a female communicant, and is characterized by the same depth of religious feeling and faithfulness of rendering that in his former paintings have given the distinguished artist so high a rank among the professors of Christian art.

“Beautiful as is the picture, however, it is more than matched by the exquisitely carved and elaborated frame. This is an architectural design, and reminds one of the portal of some mediaeval cathedral. There are the arch and pillars of the doorway, the buttresses, the sloping roof, the lofty spires, and the cross that crowns the structure. Over the picture, forming the arch, is a strikingly natural representation in chestnut wood of grapes and heads of wheat, the fruit, the foliage, and even the tendrils of the former being carved with an exactness that would be surprising even were the material better adapted to a work of such infinite delicacy. The slopes of the roof are adorned with crockets, seemingly alike, but in truth each in some slight particular varying from the other. On each side of the roof are pinnacles; back of them stand

two angels with wings folded as if they had just alighted there; and crowning the whole towers a double cross.

“On every part of this masterpiece, composed of over 400 pieces of wood, chestnut, oak, poplar, holly, cherry, beech, and pine, where work could be put it has been lavished. Every part susceptible of ornamentation has been beautified by the touch of carving tools wielded as deftly as the artist’s brush.

“Flowers of many kinds are here; the rose and cactus blush in cherry and the tulip blooms in yellow poplar, while over various parts of the structure the climbing ivy throws its veil. No carving of so lofty design or so skilful workmanship beautifies the chancel of any church in America, and the costly cathedrals of Europe can boast of few ornaments as splendid as this.

“No description can do it justice, and to see it will well repay a visit to our mountain town.”

In the meanwhile the necessities of the parish seemed to make it imperative that he should take priest’s orders. The bishop especially desired it, and he finally yielded and bent himself to the preparatory study. He was ordained by Bishop Atkinson, August, 1871.

In addition to the parish at Lenoir he had two mission stations at which he held services on alternate Sundays. The “Chapel of Peace,” the mission before mentioned, 3 miles south of the village, and another station in the Yadkin Valley, 8 miles distant. This Chapel of Peace was built by contribution from friends at a distance and voluntary work

of the people. When nearly completed it was wrecked by a severe storm, but, undaunted by the disaster the rector and his helpers rebuilt it. This work from its inception was attended with the greatest difficulties. First a day and Sunday school was started and soon had an attendance of over 40 scholars; this was held in a ramshackle old log schoolhouse. The teachers were all voluntary workers, and one might have thought that such a chance for education would have been welcomed by all; but there were many who opposed the movement. All sorts of stories were circulated amongst the poor ignorant people. "The children would be taken away as soon as sufficient hold on them was obtained, and killed." Another story was that they would be taken to town and "made to worship the golden calf." Such was the depth of ignorance and superstition among these poor people.

The farmer who owned the land on which the schoolhouse stood at last refused to allow it to be used for the purpose. Then it was that a move was made to build. Friends at the North contributed liberally and by dint of persistent effort on the part of the rector and his faithful people it was at last completed and a school maintained for many years.

In order that those of his parish might have the advantages thus afforded and in the general interest of education, he decided to establish a school for girls. This was done, and the first session opened February 26, 1872, Miss Mary A. Massenberg teacher of the English branches and Miss M. Magdalena Oertel teacher of French and music, under the name of "St. James' School for Girls."



It was the intention of the rector to advance the interests of the school as rapidly as possible, and to make it a diocesan institute. By this was meant that the grounds and buildings contemplated should be deeded to the diocese and be subject to the authority of the bishop and such trustees as he might appoint.

In this undertaking no effort was spared to reduce expenses to pupils to the minimum. It was continuous self-denial on the part of all the workers concerned in the interest of Church education.

The rector gave his time and contributed also in money; his wife opened her house to the girls and cared for those who boarded there as for her own, having nothing in return save the bare cost of board, based on the lowest estimate, and which in fact often failed to meet expenses.

The teachers worked for a mere pittance, Miss Massenberg having only \$100 per year, her board and lodging being contributed by the rector. His daughter had no regular salary, turning back most of what she received into the fund for the building up of the school.

It was opened in the vestry room of the church, but by superhuman efforts a school room was built on to the rectory, and though still unfinished was occupied by the end of the first session.

In 1873 the name of the school was changed to "St. Euphemia's Hall," as it was not for St. James' parish alone.

During 1874 it was under the direction of Rev. C. T. Bland. About a year later the whole scheme had to be abandoned for lack of funds and support.

A failure? Yes; from one point of view it was. It struggled into existence, its existence was a constant struggle, and it died for want of strength to live.

But when it is considered what was accomplished during the time of life can it be classed as a failure?

Many of the girls received education and training absolutely free, and but for this would have had none. Indeed, no one was turned away; if they could pay the moderate amount charged for tuition and board, well and good; if they could not, the school and the home of the rector were open to them just the same.

It is impossible for those who were in that school and in that home not to have carried the teaching and influence through life to their own benefit. Here again must "bookkeeping be kept by double entry; one for this world, one for the next."

The rector and his wife never regretted having made the effort, much as it cost them.

Contributions were at times made by interested friends, but the main burden of the undertaking was borne by the rector and his devoted wife and daughter.

Had he received from the Church at large the coöperation the movement deserved, the result would have been quite different.

Parish duties now took much of his time. The strain has been so great, of study and disappointment—study to prepare for his examination for the priesthood and disappointment in regard to his publications and the outcome of the lawsuits which

deprived him of the means to carry out his plans both in art and for the good of his people—that his health gave way and he suffered desperately with his head, so much so that physicians feared softening of the brain. And what wonder. Even his iron constitution and strength which enabled him to handle dumb-bells of 50 pounds each as if they were toys could not stand what he forced himself to do. For instance, after a week of work from 6 a. m. until early morning hours, he presided over the Sunday school at 9 o'clock on Sunday, held services at 11 o'clock, rushed home to a hasty lunch and then mounted his horse for a ten-mile ride over the mountains to the Yadkin Valley, where he held service at 3 p. m. and then rode home again, often arriving late at night. This was his “day of rest”!

His sermons were usually written on Saturday night and it was often daylight on Sunday morning before he came in the house to rest. No call of distress was unheeded by day or by night, in fair weather or in foul, over rough roads, mountain paths, and swollen streams, on horseback or on foot, he visited the poor and needy, giving comfort, sympathy, and help.

He had made something of a study of medicine and so doctored the body as well as the soul, giving in this as in all else to all who asked or needed.

In writing of his condition at this time Mrs. Oertel says:

“His brain is in very bad condition; he schemes continually, in such an impatient way; everything annoys and irritates him; he works, works, works,

and plans, plans, plans in the fiercest and most excited manner. I fear softening of the brain."

Dr. Perkins told him "You must rein in your horses or they will run away with you" and this they seemed to be doing.

But his work was not yet done. He changed his manner of working, took more sleep, and at last recovered.

Still he continued to do double duty, keeping up with all the details of parish work and at the same time doing everything possible with brush and pencil that would bring in the money so sadly needed.

His friends urged him to rest and take a trip into the higher mountain country. To this he consented, and spent some two weeks on horseback riding through that magnificent region.

In later years he wrote a description of this trip under the caption "On horseback through the mountains" from which it is well to quote a few passages, as the artist shows in these pen pictures quite as plainly, and with as much strength, as ever with brush or pencil.

"There they were," he says, "the Grandfather, the Roan, the Table Rock, Hawksbill, and the Black Range. I had been wont to gaze often across the many miles at their ethereal summits, lifting themselves with a giant repose and power high over their companions, often with that peculiar wistful emotion that seizes the mind when alone on the ocean shore on a still day and an unbroken mystery of deep blue like the mantle of eternity spread upon the far outreaching waters.

“Mountains and sea have a certain kinship notwithstanding their opposite character. They beguile the susceptible soul into similar moods. So does the clear unfathomable sky. So does the mighty firmament with its miracles of glory. Whatever invites the mind to excursions into vast expanse, draws it onward, out of itself and away far off to where the distance hides the unknown and maybe the unattainable, stirs up a strange and irresistible longing, a sad delight, a delirium of wakeful dreaming, feeling from the night of our earthly prison with the antennae of the spirit for news from the unseen world.

“Do you know why in the symbolism of color blue is the emblem of truth? It is the blue we look into when striving to penetrate the distance, the ocean, the sky. But what we gaze into seems to recede more, to grow deeper, to become more unsearchable.

“The peaks on the horizon, massive and yet unsubstantial in their glorification of transparent blue; the indigo line of the sea that cuts with a straight razor edge your inquisitive stare into what lies beyond; the vast empyrean that seems so near and only tells you when at night the remote myriads of nebulae astonish the astronomer as he watches through the powerful telescope that no one has ever yet looked to its limits—these all conceal the knowledge which in part only they reveal.

“Blue signifies mystery. What is remote, withheld from the vision and hidden, is wrapped in a veil of blue, the ‘daughter of darkness and of the

light'—emblem of truth, which is made known and yet forever disclosing itself.

“And so in the wondrous trinity of colors it signifies the Divine Spirit, the Revealer of secrets, the Giver of knowledge, the Fountain of wisdom, the Incomprehensible, Unknowable, the All encompassing.”

He had as guide and companion a genuine old-time planter who was enthusiastic over this mountain country, and owned a considerable estate among those “fixed billows of the earth.” Of him he says: “Now this excellent and educated gentleman was just the guide I wanted. None other than an enthusiast can be your best leader and teacher in any matter. Beware of machine men when you wish to learn. They will give you, with all honesty in the giving, nothing but husks. It is all they have and are capable of knowing. They stick to outside as if it were covered with burrs or pitch. The secret to read the inner life—the soul—of things they have not the talisman to discover. But my friend was aglow from head to foot with this subject. He was in love with it—and people can not be in love without a heart. Those mountains spoke in majestic tone to his affections. They had been his faithful companions for many years. They showed him their hidden beauties. They whispered into his ear their tales of stored-up treasures. He knew each twist in the links of their tremendous chain, the intricate sinuosity of their passes and paths and roads, the names of their cliffs, the flow and individuality of their sparkling waters, their varied, abundant verdure, and the

signs they hang out around their summits as prophecies of sunshine or storm. He also was communicative without garrulity, a traveler accustomed to the horse, attentive, polite, acquainted with the manners of the people and easily satisfied with their fare and accommodations. I was fortunate in having such a guide."

Mr. Oertel was a great admirer of the horse, fond of riding and at home in the saddle. After describing his mount on this occasion he says: "And when a man feels the living moving power under him that obeys his every wish—the untamed woods about him, a promising sky overhead—and has just enough money in his pocket for moderate fare and an excellent feeling of independence and manly energy does not quicken his pulse, put a rod of steel into his back and fire and gladness into his eye, he is not fit to travel among the ramparts of liberty nor ride the noble beast of war and the desert, but deserves to have his joints cracked, his bowels churned, and his soft brains beaten like batter on the back of a vicious mule that now and then can salute his brother with low-dropped jaw by his renowned philosophic exclamation."

He speaks first of the timber growth, which he describes as being "of a size that dwarfs the woods about New York into respectable shrubs."

"Think," he says, "of the gorgeous rhododendron shooting up snake-like trunks to the height of 16 and 18 feet before the glossy spear-headed foliage expands itself in clustered masses with purple magnificence of bloom on the end of every branch! And then imagine whole slopes covered in

June with that wealth of royal splendor; the somber blush of sunset cloud spread out on mountain side; hemlocks stretching between the main spurs of the "Grandfather" for a number of miles and which my experienced guide computed of an average diameter of 4 feet; some prostrate colossals over which, 20 and 30 feet from their roots, we could scarcely see as we attempted to surmount them; the spindling weeds of the lowlands here constituting a forest smiling the praises of the generous bosom that nourishes them.

"Our first objective point was the Grandfather mountain. For many months I had seen its imposing outline toward the setting sun. It heaved up over the lesser ridges with a commanding, wide-spreading, angular severity,—a salient feature in the wavy blue that could be traced from the Virginia line on the North to almost that of South Carolina in the Southwest.

"The name it bears is not a mere fancy; indeed I do not know but there is in that name a poetic appropriateness, whether intended or not, more far-reaching than it has in the mouth of people who use it so often. Seen from the south or north, the long profile of the mountain exhibits in a clear-cut outline the features of a bearded man. It is a remarkable face: the high intellectual forehead; the nose of projecting aquiline strength; the distinctly marked moustache shading a firm mouth; the chin rising from a bold depression and ending in a long beard—a grand, calm, majestic face, up-turned to the sky as if the enormous giant were lying in solemn repose on his back, the undulating



length of his body stretching westward for near a hundred miles in the continuation of the "Blue Ridge." It is no mere knob or piece of rock, but a whole mountain somewhat higher than Mount Washington in New Hampshire, a face of truly colossal, godlike dimensions such as Milton scarcely fancied when he extolled the tall stature of his prince of fallen spirits; dwindling into dwarfs the Genii rising from the uncorked bottle in the Arabian Nights, or the fabled bird of the Talmud that stood in the deepest part of the ocean with the water reaching only to his knees. The gods and heroes of the Iliad are microscopic pygmies compared to it. That is something of a face, tossing up its features for about seven miles, with a horned helmet at the upper end of several miles more. You will grant that old North Carolina contains a veritable and most venerable giant!

"And think how long he has lain there and looked up with the same unchanging profile at the silent stars! The nations of the earth are mere ephemera to him. Their boasted empires are institutions like the dissolving pictures of a stereopticon. He counted his many untold ages already when the Sphinx began to raise his mysterious head and the pyramids were piled against the sky.

"Brief four thousand years have left upon their flinty sides the traces of decay; but he reposes now as green and strong and young as when he saw the day on which creation smiled first upon the pure primeval human pair. The sun's determined fire that beat into his face with each recurring summer scorched there no scars. The bitter blasts of winter

for all these centuries have not disturbed his solemn calm. Ten thousand tempests raging in untamed fury over him could not so much as cause one wrinkle on that mighty brow. The lightning spent, the thunder still, the clouds roll off and leave him gazing in primitive serenity as ever he had done.

“However often and again the flames like monstrous serpents run up his sides and lay the forest waste, they only singe the down upon his cheeks but can not harm the unmoved giant’s form. The earliest kiss of morning ray bathes him in rosy light, and the departing king of day robes him in purple melancholy. He smiles or he is sad, or stern and dark and lowering, or covered dreamily as with a veil for sleep—but there is always the same grand godlike impassiveness of line; his moods are things of surface only that ruffle not his majesty of mien.

“And pray of what might he be thinking? What does he see with all that steadfast upward look? Most certainly he contemplates not anything of earth! That gaze must be a silently adoring seraph’s in waiting before the ‘great white throne.’ What are to him the noisy strifes of men? What care has he for change of kings and politics and for the schemes that surge the millions here below?

“Their history resolved its tortuous troubled length around the globe, a trail of blood and woe, of toil, and tears, and death, unheeded all by him. The wild red man that tracked in ages past the panther and the wolf across his brow; and now the white that pops the rifle on his face at deer and

prowling bear, are both to him alike. He marks their habitation with stalwart ruggedness, and keeps his watch in awful solitude. His thoughts are up on high. He never turns for aught on earth but with an everlasting glance he looks full hard into the infinite—by day and night, in storm and calm, from age to age, with only one long, great, unfathomable thought of dread Divinity.”

In describing the ascent of this grand peak he speaks of the last quarter mile being the roughest part of the work “requiring a sharp, determined conflict, like many another enterprise in the battles of mind and matter, that reserves the most formidable opposition for near its summit.” \* \* \* “The dark and solemn balsam fir was now the dominant growth. It veils the mountain’s brow with massive shade—a somber gloom of earnestness becoming to the contemplative mood of ‘Grandfather’ who rests as on a pillow upon the sportive shades the changing woods put on far down around his base; the downy, mellow, delicately varied gown of infant Spring; the emerald fulness and fresh, exultant strength of Summer; the gorgeous symphony of tint that paints the robe of the expiring year; and the sweet nunlike grey of Winter that holds in cloistered seclusion for a few short months impatient, budding life. But that mighty Face above wears one unchanging hue of darksome green. The innumerable company of closely serried pines are the only fit emblem of its calm, strong stability of mood. And as the eye drops down the vast sweep and mounts up again at the further crest that begins the formation of ‘Grandfather’s’ face, the

pointed cones crowd as thick as grass and all their millions bend with one obedient impulse to the south, not infrequently blasted by the power that rules up there with rude violence, the northwest storm.

“Every tree-top inclines fixedly in one direction and tells its story of struggle and battle-scarred endurance. The pine is the only tree for such a life. God made it for the hard places of the earth.

“At last the lessening pines let the sky appear overhead, and a sharp turn through the dense brush brought us out upon the summit.

“Did you ever step upon the giddy edge of a high mountain in that sudden way? It is very much like launching bodily into space and sends a thrill of surprised ecstasy through the frame, an electric tingling in every nerve as if all at once the solid ground had vanished from under the feet and one were floating in air.

“Above, below, and round about, everything is blue. The mountain base itself looks unsubstantial. It is swimming on a heaving sea.

“There was but just room enough for our small company of three among the rocks and bushes where the absence of pines left a free outlook. I had a seat of heather as springy as can be found on the mountains of Scotland; rather a luxury among the North Carolina ranges where it grows only here and there on the lofty summits.

“There I sat and looked—and the look was almost supersensuous delight. But do not expect a rhapsody on what I saw! What idea can the most picturesque word-painting convey of such a scene

unless you have beheld something similar? And if you have—then—well, recall vividly the sight! It will not be exactly like the one from ‘Grandfather’; but it will refresh in you that altogether unique sensation, that of lifting up out of common existence, that cutting loose from the lower dust with all its leaden cares and petty doings, that full-breathing, soaring energy of soul which is answered by every fiber of the body; that daring of spirit all at once conscious of its own broad pinions despite the clay still riveting it to the earth. You will know the leaps of a hundred miles straight out made by the joy-intoxicated eyes; the delirious plunges downward into vast abysses of amethyst and sapphire; the giant strides that skip with the glad freedom of youth from peak to peak, across the long-rolling ridges, among the leagues of complex sinuosity in the valleys.

“You will know also that with such an illimitable horizon about you, among such colossal surroundings, you feel very little indeed, more disposed to true humility of soul than you thought possible when disporting below among your kind in their assemblies where fashion and vanity flutter and scheme for a brief glance of recognition; for up there on those silent heights one is in a two-fold sense breathing a purer atmosphere—and nearer heaven.

“And then, if possible, get for 15 minutes by yourself; be all alone where human voices can not reach your ear nor other influences disturb, and a something super-earthly will steal upon you, an over-mastering awe as of an oppressive mystery, at

once grand in its manifestation of power, and soothing like a benediction of peace from the deep sky overhead. One comprehends why the Saviour of men should have chosen the lonely mountain top for prayer—and there continued all night.”

A visit to the falls of the Linville river called forth the following:

“A waterfall is always strangely interesting and attractive whether it slides down over a many-colored rocky incline with lispings splash; or skips in fan-like cascades of silver thread from rounded ledge; or pours a single stream of light from a dizzy wall, collecting its misty rain in the pool below; or leaps out with a bold bound for the plunge into the darkness of a chasm, it has its own mysterious charm of energetic life.

“Let it be a little rill only, trembling into flakes and spray in the joyful descent, or the cataract of a mile in extent, rolling a thundering flood with awful majesty over the yawning abyss, there is a fascination in the unceasing commotion, the daring precipitancy, the silvery gleam or glitter or flash, the spray unfolding like a vestal veil, the spiritual form so stable in general feature, so everlastingly changeful in the detail of its swift-moving parts. Even the waste water of the commonest milldam, a thin, glassy sheet split into many ribbons with careless frolic as to their evenness of width, shares with the most romantic cascade in shady glen, or the wild fury of a river’s headlong rush into a thousand feet of frowning gorge, the same interest that is always new and intense only in different degree.

“Water is the lifeblood of nature. Its pulsa-

tions on lake or ocean, in meadow brook or mountain torrent, in modest rivulet or gliding expanse of an Amazon that drains a continent, correspond too nearly with the throbbings and variable moods in man's own veins not to touch his liveliest sympathies. And therefore he will undertake long journeys and climb dangerous places with toil and fatigue just to feast upon the sight of a waterfall and let its living beauty or grandeur electrify the forces of his nature to bound and toss and leap in harmony with the wonderful element."

The first artistic work done in the new studio was a set of paintings for the Church of the Heavenly Rest, Fifth Avenue, New York City. As Church work they were painted for a mere pittance. These pictures are five in number. The central canvas is 13 feet high. It bears the figure of the Saviour as our High Priest in Heaven. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." He stands upon the clouds, in the full robes of the High Priest; His hands spread out, showing the sacred wounds; on His head a mitre of gold; and a golden censer in His right hand, from which the smoking incense ascends. As the figure is lighted from above, the shadow beneath, by the outstretching of the arms, forms a cross in beautiful significance under his feet *now*.

The face is solemn and earnest; the eyes uplifted and truly full of intercession; the whole image very intense in expression. It is 8½ feet in height. The other four figures are 6 feet high. They are attendant angels, representing the Cherubim and Seraphim. The two which come next the

center—the Seraphim—are draped in white and *red* and with uplifted hands and adoring faces personify glowing, rapturous love. The two outer ones—the Cherubim—are draped in white and *blue*. They stand with folded hands in passionless meditation, eternal knowledge and eternal truth expressed upon their countenances.

These paintings were on exhibition at the studio for several days and the announcement of an art reception made quite a stir in the little community. The schools were given one day and all came—teachers and pupils. Many persons came from great distances—20, 30, and even 70 miles—on purpose to see these pictures. This did not mean coming comfortably seated in a railroad car, but traveling on horseback or in vehicles over rough mountain roads, fording dangerous streams, and undergoing much fatigue and exposure, the more so as the weather was persistently rainy all the time.

The next work was “Darkness and Light,” a young girl reading to an old blind man. This was presented to Bishop Atkinson, of North Carolina.

There are no entries in his record of works produced for the years 1870-74, but his letters show that in spite of his numerous duties as priest the artist was by no means idle. A design of the Crucifixion was made which was published as a steel engraving. “When I Rise to Worlds Unknown and Behold Thee on Thy Throne” was painted. The wild ocean spreads below, the rocky cross is there, the figure is loosened from it and rising above it, with outstretched arms and enraptured face; and, in the clouds, amid a flood of light is a vision



of Christ on His throne, surrounded by His angels. He expressed himself as thinking this picture better than "The Rock of Ages," but would not reserve the copyright because the purchaser had suggested the subject.

The series of designs illustrating William Cullen Bryant's "Waiting by the Gate," begun in Westerly, was taken up and finished. Of these the poet wrote him, "You have indeed made a poem out of my poor verses."

There were eight in number, one for each stanza, and were sent to Mr. James in New York, who had reproductions made and placed them on the market.

Of the result of this Mrs. Oertel writes:

"I think it is easy to see why they failed. No one has said anything against them as works of art—indeed they are highly praised; but they are about Death and the fashionable crowds who frequent the picture stores pronounce them 'terrible.' The truth is, they have sermons in them and the multitude will not be preached to that way."

## CHAPTER IX.

In the early part of 1873 he made plans to go to Europe.

It was quite evident that little could be expected from the sale of his pictures, especially such subjects as he wished and most cared to paint, these coming before the public as painted in America and by an American artist.

At the same time he believed that if such works were offered as having been painted abroad they would be viewed in a much more favorable light.

Also it appeared that abroad such works as he wished to produce would be more appreciated and there, especially in his native country, he would receive the encouragement and support denied him here.

He therefore determined to go to Dresden and there locate for a time and endeavor to make money to pay his debts and place himself in a position to go on with his greater works.

An arrangement was made with his publisher to furnish the funds necessary for the journey and to supply a small amount monthly to meet current expenses.

However, after he had made many preparations for the trip, Mr. James informed him it would be impossible for him to furnish the funds promised.

He then determined to make the necessary amount himself and set out on a tour of southern cities to paint portraits, going first to Rock Hill, S. C., the home of one of his former pupils, Miss Annie Jones, afterwards Mrs. Robertson, of Columbia.

From there he writes Mrs. Oertel: "If I am not successful in making a sufficient amount to keep up our school and have a surplus we shall, though in utter sorrow, have to break up family and perhaps home. I tremble at the thought, but the sad work has already begun, and God only knows where it will stop. I greatly fear that the gloominess of our affairs has not yet reached its apex."

"And later, from Salem, N. C.:

"It truly appears that our cup of sorrow is not yet full, though it has been filling near the brim these three years; but let us bravely hope still, even to the last.

"If I am obliged to continue portrait painting, or anything away from Lenoir, I must resign my parish.

"Your last letter read as solemn as the sighing storm in the cedars of Salem graveyard avenue. Is it the prelude of our farewell from Lenoir? I fear we shall shortly be driven to that, for how can we hold out under the circumstances? How can I prevent it, even if all my earnings go into that vortex?"

During this period of portrait painting he also did much ministerial work and in the evenings wood carving, as he had taken his tools with him for the express purpose.

He went home for a week at Christmas, 1873, and then returned to Salem. From Salem he went to Charlotte, N. C., where he had an exhibition of a number of his paintings, including "The Final Harvest," which had been on exhibition for some time in Raleigh. He was much discouraged by the life he was compelled to lead and the class of work he had to do.

In his letters to his wife he made plans of various kinds to "save the school." One of these was to offer his studio building for a schoolhouse if the bishop would pledge support, and it was determined to put the matter before him at the convention soon to be held at Wilmington.

He also decided to give up the European trip and work to pay his debts and make a new start. Though a considerable sum had been realized from portrait painting it was all absorbed as fast as made by paying pressing debts and keeping up the school.

May 8, 1874, he writes: "The hymn of poor Newman has been ringing much in my head—'Lead, kindly Light'—and particularly the line 'I do not ask to see the distant scene, One step enough for me', so good-bye conjecture and speculation and welcome faith and hope."

May 22, from Wilmington he writes: "I am not encouraged about school affairs. I think we will have to fight that out pretty much alone. We can hope for no help from the bishop. Probably, the best course is what you (wife) suggest, to carry it through the present year."

While in Wilmington he was requested to take charge of the parish of Dr. Watson (afterwards

bishop), and did so for three months. After this he resumed his portrait painting in Charlotte.

Every effort was now made and every bit of energy put in to the paying of debts—debts which had not been incurred on his *personal* account but in an effort to build up school and parish. Alas, the odds against him were too great for even the Herculean efforts he made to overcome, too great in spite of the patient and resourceful wife who bravely faced the desperate situation at home and in his absence bore the brunt of the battle. An insight into the cause of much of the difficulty is given on reading a letter written by Mrs. Oertel to a friend February 16, 1874:

“You know we have the school here; last session we had the teacher, her niece, and four school girls boarding with us. As three of them, the teacher, her niece and one of the girls were ‘dead heads’, and the other three left without paying one cent on their bills, you can imagine that my financial condition has not been the most prosperous.

“We have fought valiantly for the school the past two years; if He will accept and bless the work, well; if not, why, then, well, too; He knows best.”

Many things in this wandering life were hard for him to endure. “I am getting very tired,” he says, “of my present life. Visions of art float ahead and of a congenial atmosphere which I everywhere so sadly miss, among a people who are very good but can give me nothing I need, nor sympathy with my efforts in the manner I require.

“Iron fetters hold me down and chafe my soul, and were it not for other thoughts, that this life is

a discipline and a man's identity not closed or finished with his departure from earth, I should feel truly despairing while the years fly so swiftly and I see so little of life's plans accomplished. Patience, submission; oh how much are they needed! How hard are they to practice! How slowly are they learned in true spirit!"

He was deeply grieved at the situation in the parish where he had worked so hard and sacrificed so much. "How far off," he says, "and yet how near my poor parish seems to me, the work I did there, the people who compose it; and it seems also as if I must remain associated with it and still be the guide and teacher and the builder up in that primitive mountain land.

"What is to become of it? What is to become of the poor I have helped and whom I can help no longer?"

In the months spent at Wilmington his brush was not idle. He painted a large landscape of an old southern home surrounded by towering live oaks and in the foreground a trellised scuppernon vine so common in that section. Also he made many marine sketches, going as often as possible to the ocean beach.

"I have spent," he says, "a night on the ocean shore alone and stood on the roaring brink in the dark, lonely, and feeling the pitiless mystery before me like the fateful future into whose unfathomable extent we peer, a dark infinitude knocking at our hearts with rolling surf that crawls on as if to swallow us up and thunders of things strange and unknowable."



A ROUGH SEA





This great sea with its ever varying moods, its "things strange and unknowable," made a deep impression on him and he began to paint a large canvas, "After the Struggle, Peace."

Another seashore picture was painted, "Homeward from the Marshes," cattle coming up from feeding in the marsh land in the evening light.

He left Wilmington the first of December, going to Greensboro to continue portrait painting there. He became in a way reconciled to the life he had to lead and tried to see in what he had done all the good possible and to comfort himself therewith.

In letters to his wife at this time he says:

"What I have done for this year past appears indeed very little to the purpose, and yet perhaps more real good has been done, more seed sown, more of helping here and there which none other could do as well or in the same way, than if Mr. James had furnished me the money to sail off in grand style with a flourish in the papers.

"I am sent here and there, sowing seed, exerting some influence, and whether in future settled or not if I have grace to labor faithfully there will be fruit not to be ashamed of. Better men than myself have been wanderers, St. Paul, and all the apostles among them. Yet their lives certainly were not lost. I am now settled in the belief that this earthly life of mine may have to be passed in humbly doing what men call "small work," jobs like a journeyman carpenter, day work for day wages; not in the execution of vast designs of a far-reaching character, lifting my name among the world's great and daring spirits to be inscribed

upon the annals of fame and known in the front rank of enterprise and achievement. I may have the thoughts, but they must be to myself only; I may have the boldness, but it must be carried like a reserve strength for enduring hardship. It is well then to look into the unbounded activity of a life yonder. When a misgiving steals over me—as it does—that I am making a practical failure of my career, and I study the manifold windings an invisible hand leads me, and the real divine object of human life, the consummation after the eyes close to the sun, I feel calmly reconciled and ready to do any work faithfully which to-day this unseen Power lays in my path, doing the same to-morrow, and after to-morrow, just as a child would do in trust, and then worry, anxiety, and fear and disappointed hopes all vanish like shadowy specters of night when the heavenly light breaks into the gloom. I can then be reconciled to anything and my eyes open to the untold blessings contained in this very denial, and submission and peace calms down the agitated deep of my soul.”

With the certainty that the work in Lenoir must be given up and the struggle against fate abandoned came a kind of relief and a looking forward to the future with more hope and complacency.

“We have both of us,” he writes his wife, “fretted ourselves too much in times past. We have disquieted ourselves about what was still ahead and sometimes things which never came to pass. All this is wrong. It consumes strength, resolution, and peace. We must do so no more. The rough places must be gone over, the deep waters crossed,

the steps attained by labor and toil in the striving for the bright land beyond. It is enough that the end be glorious, though the race be hard and trying and long, and God will increase our power if from the heart we trust in Him."

Feeling that he could never resume work in his Lenoir parish, he at last resigned, December, 1874, and the parish and school passed into the hands of the Rev. C. T. Bland. He wrote regretting that he could not be present at the last, and said to his wife "God bless you for your heroic exertions in my former parish, and especially during my absence and this last Christmas season." Being absent at this time was particularly trying to him as during the years he had charge of the parish Christmas tide was made, as it should be, the great feast of the year, and in all that was done he took an active part.

The little church was always most elaborately dressed with evergreens; usually an ornamental screen of his design was made with his own hands for the front of the chancel, and all the young folks gathered there in the evenings to help cover it with spruce and laurel. There was the Christmas tree to decorate and all the simple little presents for the Sunday-school scholars to arrange. Then at the old rectory all was bustle to prepare the feast of good things to which all were invited, and on Christmas eve the young folks went out and sang carols from house to house.

All this came up in his mind as he spent this Christmas away from his parish and his family and among strangers and realized that it must now be reckoned among the things of the past and that he

was no longer the pastor of his beloved people whom he had served so faithfully.

To show what this Christmas time was to him and his devoted wife is quoted a portion of a letter written by her in 1884 to *The Church Messenger*, published in Charlotte, N. C. Mrs. Oertel wrote for this paper for some years under the name "Lada."

"Dear old Christmas! Hallowed feast! With a magician's wand thou bringest out of the past the trooping memories.

"I see a group of worshippers in a village church on the far-away foot hills of the Blue Ridge in the Old North State. It is Christmas Eve. I see this group after the service stand talking around the stove near the door, until, when the rector's wife announces her determination to leave, notwithstanding the effort made to prolong the conversation, one of the girls seizes the bellrope and rings out a merry peal upon the night air. I hear the rector utter some chiding words, but they do not have very much effect on the high spirits. I see the rector and his wife go toward home. They are astonished that the rectory parlor seems brilliantly lighted, a cheerful fire upon the hearth, the lamps burning, the room decorated with evergreens, and everything—sofa, piano, tables, and chairs—piled up with beautiful and useful things, while an illuminated shade over the lamp on the center table greets them "Merrie Christmas." Not a soul is to be seen; all is silent save the cheery crackle of the fire upon the hearth, and then they know that the peal upon the church bell was to warn the fairies who had wrought this transformation to flee. It is

Holy Innocents' night. I see the same rectory blazing from one end to the other with lights and dancing fires upon every hearth stone. The doors are wide open and I see coming up the winding road from the gate through pure white fresh-fallen snow a long procession of old and young, rich and poor, all in one happy band, coming from the enjoyment of the Christmas Tree at the church and making the snow-laden pines shiver to their very tops with the volume of glad voices shouting the melodious strains of 'Wonderful Night.' I see good cheer spread in abundance. I see, ah! I can see no more for the blinding tears."

As he was now no longer in charge of a parish he began to work harder than ever with brush and pencil, and besides the portraits on which he was engaged made many designs for more important work to be executed in the future to which he again looked forward with hope and confidence.

He had made a design of "The Shadow of the Rock" and writes he had "frequently tried to improve the figure. Last night it came to me. How my best things have always been a gift."

He improved much in health and strength, no doubt because the burden of the parish and school had been lifted from his shoulders and he was at the time making enough money to supply immediate needs and had besides good prospects of more remunerative work.

Of this he says: "And while the artists at the North are reduced to the verge of want, I, strange to contemplate, in a country without art and money, am having orders ahead and a reasonable prospect

of being able to go forward on the laudable and happy road of paying the debts of more disastrous years."

Several important designs were made at this time, "Isaiah on Mount Horeb," of which he made a finely finished and deep-toned drawing, and "Ezekiel," or "The Vision of Dry Bones." This was afterward painted and will be later described.

February 15, 1875, he received a call to the assistant rectorship of the church at Wilmington, but declined, "for," he said, "how can I pay my debts if I go? How can I follow art at all? I am not a free man to choose."

Most of the work on his important designs was done at night, as the portrait painting consumed all of the daylight. It was to him an irksome task, with his mind so filled with children of his own creation which he so longed to produce! He thus gives vent to his feelings in a letter to his wife (Mar. 18, 1875): "I go in the 'painting room' and look with horror at the row of stretchers gaping their backs of canvas with my name on each at me as in ghastly grin at the labor I, poor fellow, had to bestow on their opposite sides. It reminds one, this wretched sight, of the organ grinder you once saw in Tenth Street, New York, one fearfully hot day, drawling out dolefully the air 'Jordan is a hard road to travel' and some lounging chap tosses him a penny. What a pity that artists and clergymen have to eat and drink and need money like other folks; that they can not feed themselves and their families on beauty and morals.

"If the business I am now engaged in wore out

only brushes they could easily be replaced; but I have to be watchful it does not wear out my mind much more and leave it in a blank condition. It is not particularly enriched by the process."

Early in the spring (April) he went over in "Stokes" county to paint horses, and while there wrote he had held the first church service ever seen or heard in that county.

In the latter part of April his daughter and younger son left Lenoir for a visit to friends in the State and, as his elder son was already away at school, Mrs. Oertel was left alone and he planned to return.

"Eight long weary months," he says to her, "since I have had the light of your face. We have tried to be doing good, and by Divine grace have, I believe, effected our desires; but it has been at fearful expense to ourselves. I myself do not reckon it, but we are now by His own hand broken up and warned away from Lenoir, and since He has thus set us in motion on this course and race for freedom, I mean to keep on the run until I have crossed the Mason and Dixon line."

## CHAPTER X.

He returned to Lenoir May 24, 1875, and moved his furniture into the studio where he and his wife lived for some time. He at once began to plan for important art work and determined to risk painting, "The Shadow of the Rock," but the general conditions and surroundings were not conducive to the freedom of thought so necessary to its successful execution. Though living in the studio, he and his wife had to go to a neighbor's, half a mile distant, for meals, which made a serious break in his days. Then the separation from the children, the scattered condition of his household, and being forced to remain in his former field of labor and see day by day his cherished work fade away and die and be unable to raise a hand to save it was hard to endure.

"As for the parish," writes Mrs. Oertel, "we feel much like standing by the bedside of a dying loved one and watching each breath grow fainter; disintegration and decay seems to be written over the door."

Besides this, he had been out of the art world for years and constantly drawing on his own mental resources without opportunity for study or aid of any kind whatever.

He felt this keenly and so feared to trust him-



self to go on with the large work in his present condition that he made plans to go to New York and paint it there.

This, however, he was forced to relinquish for lack of funds, though about the same time he gave \$50 toward the support of the mission school and paid over \$1,300 on his debts.

It was no new thing for him to work under every difficulty, so he began, June, 1875, to paint, as best he might, "The Shadow of the Rock," 8 by 10 feet in size, with the intention of sending it to the Centennial Exposition soon to be held in Philadelphia.

This is from the text:

"And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Isaiah 32:2.

On the left-hand side of the picture stretches the awful waste of the desert. It lies under the glaring noon-day sun, yellow, shimmering with intense heat, stones strewn about, their keen edges sharply defined beneath the fierce sunshine, and along the distant horizon the death-dealing sand storm is sweeping up with a terrible fury, a "weary land" indeed!

On the other side of the picture, covering nearly half of the canvas, there rises a rock so high that the top is not seen. At the base, from a cleft in its side, there gushes out a bubbling spring of bright water. All around the rill formed by the spring, emerald green grass gemmed with flowers, oleanders in full bloom, with other shrubbery in luxuriant profusion, cover the otherwise arid soil.

The shadow of the rock is thrown in the immediate foreground by the meridian sun, and it suggests the form of a cross.

Herein is contained the powerful teaching of this design. In this shadow lies a youth, oriental in face and garb. He has evidently, just at the last moment of endurance, escaped from the blazing sunshine and the oncoming wind and tempest; he has cast himself at full length upon the living grass and presses hands and cheek against the cold moist rock, while his large dark eyes are lifted in unutterable thankfulness. At a distance away, upon the sand, lies a figure that for some reason has failed to reach the Refuge, and one feels that destruction must soon overtake him.

The one who has gained the shadow shows by the expression of exhaustion in the whole figure, the cut and bleeding feet, and parched lips, that his race for life has been a severe one.

The parable is plain to understand. The desert—this sinful world; the rock—Christ; the spring—the living waters; the shadow—His full life-giving salvation. On the one side—danger, destruction, death; on the other side—rest, refreshment, safety, life. “So run that ye may obtain,” and “and that Rock was Christ” are the legends on the frame.

It was for such art as this that Mr. Oertel fought his whole life through, a hand-to-hand fight with the materialism of the age.

Painting this picture exhausted all his resources, but he felt it his duty as an American artist to do something toward the showing of American art in the great exhibition, and doubly so as a Chris-

tian artist to place a work there to testify to Gospel truth.

For some days before it was sent to Philadelphia it was on exhibition at the studio and almost everyone in the town and surrounding country came to see it. The people were so proud to have such a work go to represent their town that they insisted on paying the expense of sending it to Philadelphia.

It was sent to the Exposition and attracted a great deal of attention, though only 15 words of explanation or description were allowed in the catalogue.

It was shown in New York at the National Academy exhibition in 1877. Mr. Oertel had an understanding with the hanging committee about it before it left Philadelphia, and they expressed themselves glad to give it place. The place they gave it was one where it could hardly be seen at all. A critic, in an article on "Christian Thought in the National Academy" said: "In wandering through the galleries of the Academy, with all the variety of color and effect upon its walls, and the display of technical ability, a thoughtful mind can not but be struck with the meagerness of idea in the works which our painters put before us. As the true end and aim of art should be to instruct and teach, to lift the soul from this earthly level to purer heights of spiritual contemplation, to place before the eye facts and ideals lofty and elevating in a tangible form, one would expect to find a larger recognition of this principle in the exhibition of the National Academy; but looking for this, and Chris-

tian thought especially, I find but few representatives.

“The most important work of the character, No. 108, ‘The Shadow of a Great Rock,’ by J. A. Oertel, to which the hanging committee have indeed proved themselves executioners, is hung in the corridor above one of the large doors! \* \* \* The excellency of the rendering of details can not be seen in its present position. It is only those who saw the picture under more favorable circumstances at the Centennial who can know what they are. \* \* \* This picture is a sermon of powerful Christian teaching. Can that be the reason it was hung so near the sky?”

Another work which deserves mention was exhibited at the same time: “Elijah on Mount Horeb.” It is a powerful rendering of the grand old prophet in his hour of deep depression and almost despair, when he exclaimed (I Kings, 10): “And I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away.”

Next was finished “After the Struggle, Peace,” begun in Wilmington, and this also was sent to New York for exhibition.

It is a grand and imposing picture. It transfers you almost bodily to the lone low shore on which the restless waters beat. You can almost hear the roar and hiss and see the mad foam crawl up to your feet. Darkness settles upon the deep, and the light of the departing sun glows only in the long-stretched army of the sky like a battlement of glory, conducting the eye to the restful blue overhead. But below there is commotion and strife and

the mystery of danger and suffering and death, for there lies, just cast out, a piece of a wreck, and a sealed bottle washed upon the sand—the tale of some lost crew upon the mighty and treacherous deep.

In this manner he proposed to teach more than how the surf breaks upon a shallow beach, and make it a poem of life, of death, and of eternity.

Again came up the question of how he should attain his object of painting the “series,” and all sorts of schemes were alternately discussed and abandoned for the same reason—lack of funds.

He felt that Providence had so far restrained him from the work, as he now felt ready both in mental discipline and technical knowledge, which he was not at the time the designs were given him.

“But now,” he says “the time has come, if ever,” and Mrs. Oertel writes: “I would go to California or the South Sea Islands, or any other corner of the world if I was convinced that by doing so I should advance the possibility of this great work. No sacrifice I could make should stand in the way.”

However, nothing could be done without money and he again started out painting portraits, going first to Raleigh, while Mrs. Oertel went to visit her relatives in New York (May 22, 1876).

So at last Lenoir was left behind and the years of struggle in the attempt to benefit and help his people were now only a remembrance. The breaking away had been gradual, but because of this all the harder. As he expressed it, “It is in some

respects like the mercy shown the dog by his owner when he cut off his tail by inches to save pain."

In Raleigh he was engaged on all kinds of work, little of which was to his liking, and he vents his feelings in letters to his wife. In May, 1876, he wrote:

"An old chronic and periodical desire has again seized me this spring, and at times I suffer terribly from it, the more so because it seems as if I must bear it in patience without much prospect of a cure. It is that miserable *art fever*, and it comes on worse with every attack because I am getting to be more and more starved out; consequently I have less power to resist. It shakes me from morning to night and is a daily visitor—not an intermittant.

"This last week I worked very hard, but it was to purpose. Once a while, you know of old, there comes to me such a fit of activity and then the labor of two or three days is compressed into one."

July 16 he wrote from Raleigh to his wife:

"And now let us see what my log book has marked down for the past week. Speed, 12 knots an hour; advanced well the picture of the 'Man in the Boat'; painted in a day and a half a very fine fruit piece for Mrs. Battle as a present, nearly finished a small fruit piece for myself. Dead calm prevailing (as regards wind, for my speed is per steam, you must know, not being able to use the sails of pecuniary advantage by absence of breezes of fortune). Weather murky, damp, and threatening; sky covered and preventing observations; drifting with powerful undercurrent in an unknown direction, afraid shoals near but can not see

them; keep watch in top and fire signal guns once in a while without response; no use of rockets, as air is too foggy and thick; hope to get sight of something this week, but uncertain; have nearly decided to alter course and steer westerly.

“An advertisement in the papers in flaming capitals would certainly be the proper thing: ‘The greatest artist of all North Carolina in this city! Extraordinary chance! Unparalleled advantage, most wonderful bargains! \$75 a head for the most striking and beautiful likeness done to the life. Would deceive a man’s own dog and run his wife distracted. Now is your time, positively the only and last chance; go at once and secure your fortune; wake up to the magnificent opportunity and save yourselves the pangs of everlasting regret,’ etc.

On August 4, 1876, he returned to Lenoir to pack and ship some of his goods and take final leave, “have another inch of the tail removed.”

From here, on the 23rd, he writes Mrs. Oertel, now at her old home in Madison, N. J.:

“The date of our silver wedding (minus the silver) is September 4, and we ought to be together on that date. We have had many ups and downs in the last 25 years, and now we are back where we started—without a home and beginning once more.

“The poor people of the parish came to say good bye; they send love to you. I suppose many a broken prayer goes up from these poor creatures on our behalf. Alas! this stricken parish!”

## CHAPTER XI.

September 1 (1876) he left for the North, spending some time in Madison, and Glen Cove, L. I., where he visited his friend, Rev. John C. Middleton, then rector of St. Paul's Church.

On October 17 he took a studio in the Y. M. C. A. Building, New York City. Of this move he says: "What else can be done I am unable to see. All is a subject for trust, and not for sight." He had been seven years in the South, isolated from artistic intercourse, and knowing of art life only by occasional clippings from the newspapers sent him by his friends at intervals. He soon realized that the spirit and fashion of art had drifted farther than ever away from him. He found some of the best artists spending their strength on illustrations and decorations which to his mind were trivial and unsatisfying. His serious turn of thought, his ideas of elevation in art, seemed all out of place. A few of the old names were left, but only a few; from these he received a hearty welcome, but withal he felt a stranger; a stranger personally to the multitude of new artists who had meanwhile arisen, a stranger to the style, method, and aim of prevailing taste.

Certainly this move was, as he said, one of trust and not of sight. The first night in his new room



was without fire, though it was quite cold. He had only a few of his things and slept on the floor, "with paint box for pillow and some light robes, used for draping, for cover."

"It seems like a monstrous venture," he says, "to go into such a room—and such expenses—with \$15 in one's pocket. I have felt for some days very sober and anxious, but yesterday, coming down on the cars, I asked the serious question whether if \$500 were in my pocket these despondent thoughts would rule me? Whether in that case it would not be, after all, the money my heart trusted in to help me through instead of the Great Banker in Heaven, my almighty and ever-faithful God, and, conscience stricken, I humbled myself and begged forgiveness and grace and faith to trust implicitly always and with a cheerful courage in whatever trial of patience and endurance might come."

And so he began this period of his career (1876) which was to result only in fruitless effort—in dire distress, poverty, and privation over which it is best to pass.

It is not desired to weary the reader of these pages by a rehearsal of all the trials, care, and disappointment which fell to his lot; nevertheless, in writing of a life which was for the most part struggle and privation, much must be told; at least such incidents as directly affected his artistic career.

Many failures were due without doubt to his own errors of judgment, though who can say what the result would have been had the opposite course been followed? Most of such,

however, can be traced directly or indirectly to the tenacity with which he clung to his ideal and religious art.

For this was the sacrifice made, and even when disposed to murmur at the hardships he was called on to endure he had a sublime faith in Almighty power and over the troubled waters of his soul came the voice of his Master saying "Peace, be still" and there was a great calm.

So as year succeeded year, each bringing to him new trials and difficulties, each bearing him nearer the end of life yet sternly withholding that for which he strove, did this faith and trust bear him up and give him strength to rise above each succeeding surge which swept over him and strike out toward the calm water beyond with renewed vigor.

Nothing was accomplished in the New York studio, and, after spending the winter there, early in the spring (1877) he sought again the retirement of a country home.

Attracted by the prospect of the society of valued friends, he made his new home at Glen Cove, L. I., and was soon by vote of the vestry offered a complimentary position as assistant minister of St. Paul's Church, which he accepted, glad to render what assistance he could to his cherished friend, the rector.

At this time the Stewart Memorial Cathedral at Garden City, L. I., was being built, and Bishop Littlejohn proposed Mr. Oertel's name to the architect as the proper man to make designs for the windows and other artistic work. In this he was seconded

by Dr. Middleton, then warden of the cathedral schools.

He became very enthusiastic over the prospect and even made some designs, but Judge Henry Hilton, who had charge of the whole matter for Mrs. Stewart, refused to consent, putting a stop to any further operations.

He fitted up a sort of a studio in the carriage-house of the property rented and began to paint. Only two important works mark this period, "The Holy Grail" and the reredos he erected in St. Paul's Church "to the glory of God and as a testimony of his heartfelt appreciation of the many kindnesses and delicate attentions he had received from the members of the congregation." The seed thought of the painting of "The Holy Grail" is contained in the well-known stanza from Tennyson's "Sir Galahad."

"A gentle sound, an awful light,  
 Three angels bear the Holy Grail,  
 With folded feet, and stoles of white  
 On sleeping wings they sail.  
 O blessed vision, Blood of God!  
 My spirit beats its mortal bars,  
 As down dark tides the glory rides  
 And starlight mingles with the stars."

But merely to give embodiment to the poetical idea expressed in these lines would not satisfy our artist. He never could give the image supplied by the mind of another without draping it anew from his own storehouse. So the picture stands completed, not the beauteous vision the poet laureate brings before the knight, but as showing the *sacra-*

*ment of the Holy Eucharist in the keeping of the ministry of the Church.*

The three angels who bear the Holy Grail are clothed in the vestments of the altar service. The central figure in the alb and chasuble of the celebrant, and representing the bishop, looks up with a face full of rapt adoration at the Holy Burden lifted high above their heads. To the right the angel wears the surplice of the priest. He, too, gazes upon the mystery he helps to bear, but with more of anxious deference in the expression of his countenance; while the angel on the left side has the dalmatic, or short surplice of the deacon, with the stole crossed under the left arm. He assists with one hand in bearing the Holy Grail but the other is pressed upon his breast, and his gaze is downcast and full of the deepest reverential awe.

The Cup is blood red upon a base of gold and jewels. It emits seven rays; three from the top symbolizing the Trinity, the four pointing downward being the number of earth; in all seven, the seven spirits of God, and the number of heavenly and spiritual perfection.

The three figures with their wings make a star-like form and are lighted from the cup, which is glowing with light and blood red. The background is a dark, star-studded sky with fleecy clouds below. This is a most remarkable picture and the lighting such that it impresses one as if it might still be seen if the room were darkened.

The reredos is a piece of exquisite carving filling the whole back of the chancel. The wood is chestnut with an admixture of holly. It contains

five paintings in oil and some illuminations, the whole telling the story of the Incarnation in a full and comprehensive manner.

This work was all done during the year 1877 and early part of 1878. During the rest of the year nothing of importance was produced. He had many pictures on hand for which there was no sale, and he had not the heart to paint more. Poverty, failure, and disappointment had worn him out, and he was in a serious condition physically. His brother, Dr. Oertel, advised a change and suggested that he go south again. So on the 3rd of May 1879, the thirty-first anniversary of his leaving the Fatherland, he set sail with his wife and two sons on one of the Old Dominion Line steamers bound southward to North Carolina.

After some months spent in the old Lenoir studio and among his former parishioners who loved him so much, his health improved rapidly and he was eager for work; so it was at last determined to make a final settlement at Morganton, 16 miles from Lenoir, in an adjoining county.

Buying a few acres of land on a most commanding site, where an unrivalled panorama of mountain view surrounded him, looking into seven or eight counties, and comprising the grandest elevations this side of the Rocky Mountains, he again made a studio home.

Here once more he cherished the hope of going on to paint his great designs.

For a time he was rector of the parish church—unwillingly, but consenting to the position because he felt that duty called him; but later he resigned

the rectorship and returned to art, believing that his true mission was there and that he must preach the glorious truths of the gospel by form rather than words, being none the less a preacher by the difference of the medium of communication to the people.

The first painting of note produced in this studio was "The Good Shepherd." This does not represent the earthly human shepherd according to the conventional idea, but assumes that what our Lord did while walking on the earth He is constantly doing and by the same means. He still goes out into the darkness of this sinful world with the love of God and the power of His Atonement to seek and save that which is lost.

In this picture the act is presented as fully completed. Leaving the dark world behind Him, and with the meek and thankful burden upon His shoulders, He has entered upon the golden confines of Heaven as in triumph, exclaiming, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep."

A crown of 12 stars—the foundation number of the Church—with the Cross as their center, encircles His Head, and the tricolored numbers symbolize the Trinity, and His own Divinity. The royal mantle is on His shoulders while the other robes are merely the suggestive red of love and white of holiness. In His hands and His feet the stigmata declare of the death on the cross once for all suffered for mankind, and His arms with the shepherd's staff—for He is "the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls," and the chief Shepherd—form a cross, the symbol forever of our redemption. This

is sought to represent a summary of all the truths contained in the subject of "The Good Shepherd" and bring to the mind in one glance the character of the blessed Saviour and the accomplishment of His mission.

"The Ark Restored," painted at this time, is one of his best works. It is from the sixth chapter of I Samuel, where the five Philistine lords watch the kine drawing the ark as they take their way down the hill toward Beth Shemesh. It is fine in color and full of dramatic action. This picture was placed with a dealer in New York and the price set at \$1,000. Soon after it went on Mr. Oertel received a telegram from the dealer asking if he would take \$600 for it. As usual he needed money and could not afford to pass the offer, so he replied that he would. After expenses for frame and commission were deducted he received \$450.

The dealer would never tell to whom the picture was sold and the artist always believed it brought the full price and that the dealer pocketed the balance. It is not known to this day who the purchaser was.

Another painting was made here which deserves mention. This was painted for Mr. Barns, of New Haven, Conn. The subject was the three women on their way to the sepulcher on Easter morning. They walk out full faced toward you, their eyes tear stained and the soul of sadness upon their brows. You feel that they walk in silence, saying only "Who will roll us away the stone?" Behind them rises Calvary with the three empty crosses

outlined against the dawn and above that a cloud all along the horizon, but over it an exquisite expanse of sky palpitating with the dawning light, and above the crosses flames the morning star—telling that the stone is rolled away.

Mr. Hyde, during this year (1881), attempted to make an arrangement with the Art Association in Boston which would enable Mr. Oertel to go on and paint the "Series," and for a time it seemed as if his efforts would be successful.

Nearly 30 years had elapsed since the designs were made, and always had he kept them in sight. Mrs. Oertel writes (Sept. 19) "When I look back at his patience, at his faith in the future that God would give him to execute these works, when I remember what inspirations they were, I feel as if the time must come, and if it has not come now it does begin to look hopeless." He also felt that surely now the time had come and said that if the present plan came to nothing he feared he would be "a failure in art and have to worry out my life the best I can."

However, when the plan of Mr. Hyde did fail he did not despair, but set about devising a new scheme to attain the desired end. His daughter Lena had been teaching for some years in the Leake and Watts Orphan House, New York City. His elder son had cast his fortune with his and assisted all he could, but still as they were now situated the big works could not be attempted. So much was at that time said and written of the possibilities of easy living and making money in Florida that the idea was evolved that here might be a chance to get



on a footing independent of art so he could be free to carry out his plans.

He had some little correspondence with several residents of the state and of course received every encouragement to come and locate. In answer to his inquiries in one locality he was told that the business in which there was most immediate money returns was lumber and that the growing of oranges would soon bring a fortune. That was it; he would have a saw mill and an orange grove; the boys could run the mill and make the living while the orange trees grew and he would be free to go on with his artistic work. Accordingly, in the spring of 1882 (Mar. 24), during the absence of his elder son, he set out for the Promised Land, full of hope and enthusiasm, taking with him his younger son and dog "Prince." As Mrs. Oertel wrote, it surely was "Innocents abroad." On his arrival in Florida all was enthusiasm. The new and strange country fascinated him. His artistic eye saw only the beauty of moss-draped pines and gigantic live oaks, of crystal springs and placid lakes. He believed all the stories told him of the wonderful future of orange culture; one had only to plant trees, watch them grow a few years, and then catch the gold as it fell in showers from each bending limb. His letters were all filled with glowing descriptions of the beauty, healthfulness, and natural advantages of the country. Alas! he was soon to learn that there was another side to life in the Flowery Land; that the climate "so mild and healthful to man" was also favorable to the existence of innumerable insect pests, and that it was a

far cry from the orange seed to the gold dollar; also that though figures are not supposed to lie they do so when it comes to estimating the capacity and profits of a saw mill.

However, he located at Orange Spring, Marion County, where with his sons and Mr. C. M. McDowell of Morganton he went into the lumber business, purchased a saw mill, and broke ground for an orange grove.

Before joining him in his new home Mrs. Oertel went on to New York to visit her relatives and attend to art business there.

May 1 she writes of an attempt to have some works published. She went to see the head of the Scribner house and showed him the works. "He asked," she says, "are they copies of any of the great names?" I said "Oh, no; they are entirely original." "Well," he said "if they were copies of any of the great names, they might be made to go; but as *originals* they are worthless." "What can one do with such sentiment as that?" She also adds: "The pictures in the Academy are hung by the neck until they are dead. The large one, 'After the Struggle, Peace' is consigned to the 'Rumplekammer' of the concern, down in the cloak room among a lot of flowers and trumpery, and "The Child Jesus" has a negro picture to right of it, a negro stealing whiskey beneath it, and a gay thing full of unrest to the left of it." On the above it is useless to comment. The only wonder is that he continued to work at all or had any heart to try to bring his art before the public.

Mrs. Oertel left New York to join the family in

Orange Spring on June 16 (1882), going by steamer to Jacksonville, river boat to Palatka, railroad to Johnson's Station, and "Florida phaeton" (a two-wheeled cart) the remaining 6 miles. Judging from her written description of this trip her first impressions of the new land were anything but favorable; it is very humorous and interesting, but lack of space forbids quoting here.

A hard and toilsome life she came to, one where physical strength was needed above any other asset; this she had not, but courage and endurance she had, and she bore the burden uncomplainingly through all the long campaign which followed.

The saw mill was set up, logs hauled, and the first timber cut was for the new studio which he began to build at once while still enthusiastic over the country and the prospects. The boys helped him get the heavy timbers in place, but except for this the building was the work of his own hands. Very little art work, however, was done. He re-made the design for the "Dispensations of Promise and the Law" and considered that it was "vastly improved"; also he recomposed "The Era of the Holy Spirit." The original design—the 12 apostles stepping down from the clouds in obedience to the command "go ye into all the world," etc., he made only in the clouds, while below he placed a composition almost as extensive as the first one.

He also did considerable toward elaborating the last of the "Series."

During his stay in Orange Spring he held services in the Methodist Church, which was seldom used. Lena came down from New York in the fall

and helped in this with the music. A small organ was carried over from the house every Sunday and she played and sang the hymns. After Mr. Oertel went North, his wife and daughter continued these services for nine months. She says: "I wrote to Dr. Weller, the principal clergyman of the diocese, and asked him what he thought St. Paul would say to it" (the reading of the service and sermon by a woman). He replied, "Under the circumstances, I think St. Paul would say, 'Sister, go on,' so on I went."

It soon became apparent that a permanent stay here was out of the question. The business could not be made to pay as was expected; the boys worked hard, but were dissatisfied and did not care to remain; the life was hard on his wife and indeed hard on him. His health failed and his enthusiasm ebbed to the vanishing point. He suffered intensely from the numerous insect pests. Ticks, chiggers, fleas, sand flies, gnats, and mosquitoes abounded, and all seemed to have a special thirst for his blood. He was in constant misery from their bites and stings, and as his flesh was irritated so was his mind. He said he "felt so humiliated, being a prey to vermin."

Mrs. Oertel wrote to "Edward" (March, 1883): "He can not stay here. The insects make life perfectly unendurable for him.

"Imagine him before his easel, the gnats in his eyes, the mosquitoes singing about his ears, the fleas working next to his skin, the ants on his palate—and meanwhile the roaches eating up his books and pictures." And so, feeling that a further

stay in Florida was useless and that nothing could be accomplished either in business or in art, he returned north, leaving Orange Spring alone and with a small trunk and his paint box only, April 8, 1883.

The boys had already returned to North Carolina, going up the coast in a boat built by themselves from their own lumber.

Mrs. Oertel and Lena remained, as there was as yet no other place to go, nor funds to go with. The mill had been sold to some orange growers, but on account of the failure of the orange crop that year they were unable to pay for it. So once more his family was thoroughly scattered and he cast adrift to make what landing he might and begin the struggle anew.

Begin anew! and in his sixtieth year!

What wonder that at first, though his aim was still the same and resolve unshaken, that he felt despondent.

He went first to Washington, taking a studio there in the Corcoran building, where he lived and worked. His condition of mind at this time is best expressed in his own words to his friend Edward Hyde:

“What of the Series I have for so long determined to execute at my own expense, scorning help and the sacrificing of my own independence? It now looms up to me as a foolish notion. The Fates have knocked into flinders every scheme of mine to achieve this independence in some other manner unconnected with art. The last one, the Florida dream, must go with the rest, and thus I am thrown

back into my old and wearisome experience, with a despairing sort of feeling at the heart because, every effort failing, there is only left the drudgery of toiling for a precarious living by what is almost hateful work and seems devoid of aim as it is killing of aspiration. And as to help—where is it to come from and who is to give it? Is there such an ideal man living, the miracle of his age, whose soul could be fired with a grand conception to sufficient warmth and trust as to risk his money on an undertaking subject to so many contingencies? And suppose such a man not altogether impossible, how can so obscure an individual as myself, and who can boast of neither influence nor active friends of the mercenary kind, ever hope to become acquainted with him?"

Thus it was that he was again forced to resort to painting portraits and "pot boilers," though he managed to produce quite a number of better works during the same period, "The Seasons," using the groups from "Father Time and his Family"; "Footprints of the Storm," a large landscape from studies made some years before in Venice Center, N. Y., after a tornado had swept over that part of the country. "The Walk to Gethsemane" and then two large canvases of the Four Evangelists for St. John's Church, Georgetown, D. C. The sluggish and laborious working that characterized his forced efforts left him so soon as anything of this kind was upon his easel; now it was bold and rapid. "Give me," he says, "a big canvas and a broad manner of treatment, and I am perfectly at home. It's this miserable consideration of texture, and



THE WALK TO GETHSEMANE





technicality for itself's sake, and diminutive canvas—and perhaps equally diminutive subjects—that dwarf my energies.”

These pictures were painted for about what it cost for material but that mattered not; they were for the Church, it was the work he loved and for which he was best fitted, and he did his utmost to make them all they should be.

He also painted the symbols of the Four Evangelists upon the walls of the church.

During this period he did considerable modeling in clay.

He modeled his design “The School of the Prophets” in figures 18 inches high and planned to do the same with sections of the “Big Series.” But here the balance wheel of his life (Mrs. Oertel) came in and checked the speed he was gathering. “It seems to me,” she writes, “you would undertake too great a task in modeling in ever so sketchy a manner for the big pictures. I can see the advantage, but the *time*, man; where is it to come from?”

It was thus in all he planned; he never considered the work involved. Did some church want an altar or reredos and stipulate the sum they could pay, he immediately made a design which to execute would require work worth fifty times the amount. It was easy for him to put it on paper; the labor of execution was never considered.

The church work done, though at no profit, immediately whetted his appetite for more. He believed in this line—decoration and painting for churches—he might receive recognition.

“So you see,” he says, “I am in work for churches above my shoulders—but not my eyes or brain. Measuring these I could employ several pairs of hands with profit.”

He was now in the same position as he had been so many times before. Of this he says:

“Many years of experience only repeats itself in my life, namely, plenty of hard work and very slim compensation of the kind that would relieve my family from care—and often want. Yet you know I am in the position of starting anew in life, and perhaps when my fourth score years begin I shall have reached a development growing out of the three that have gone before.”

Efforts to make money by the sale of a lot of small pictures resulted in failure and a bill for auctioneer’s expenses. “But,” he writes, “this reestablishing is no mean battle, which deserves to be fought to the end and my backbone is not broken yet by a good deal. You know I can not be put down.”

On November 3, 1883, he reached the “three score” years of his life. A poem written him on this date by his wife will not be inappropriate here.

### “THREESCORE.”

Threescore:

So long ago, my love, this day I see  
 Life’s golden ladder was let down for thee—  
 Round upon round it rose before thy feet,  
 Up, up, to where the clouds swift winged and fleet,  
 Hid with their deep impenetrable mystery

The end.

No earthly eye  
 Nor mortal lore,

Could pierce the shroud that wrapped the path to be,  
 Nor know, whether it led to death's dark night,  
 Or to that region of perpetual light,  
     Heaven's shining shore!

“Threescore :

So far away from youth's keen eager gaze  
 This point thou hast attained, by devious ways,  
 The clouds mysterious, crimson gleamed and gold,  
 And visions fair lurked in them fold on fold :  
 Thy spirit's wing by power of genius nerved  
     Was strong !  
 Heaven's precious gifts  
     From boundless store,  
 Thy soul grasped after, and thy faith ne'er swerved ;  
 Firm trod thy feet, thine eyes' clear upward glance  
 Caught glimpses through the rifts of blue expanse  
     All star gemmed o'er.

“Threescore :

So many rounds, my love, thy feet have trod  
 Struggling and climbing nearer to thy God,  
 The clouds, so crimson hued to youth, would oft descend,  
 Wrap thee in gloom and direful woe portend ;  
 And evil birds of hell thy trembling soul  
     Affright !  
 Thy voice could scarce  
     Mercy implore.  
 Mid lightnings flash, storms rush, and thunders roll  
 Bruised, beaten, baffled, and thy nerveless wing  
 Seemed for a time a shattered, helpless thing,  
     Powerful no more!

“Threescore :

From this fair height, my love, look bravely down,  
 See how the storm clouds are beneath thee thrown ;  
 How at thy feet the fateful lightnings play,  
 While o'er thy head shines Heaven's resplendent day ;  
 Earth's woes, grim storms, Hell's hosts, man's hate, their worst  
     Have done !  
 These battles fought  
     Fear nothing more,

Immortal fountains wait to quench thy thirst;  
 If all the conflicts of the past have failed  
 In power to crush, go on with courage mailed,  
     The peril o'er.

“Threescore :

Look up, my love, look up; toward the sky  
 Stretches the golden ladder wide and high;  
 Another score of steps each brighter growing  
 In lambent light, with heavenly music flowing,  
 And white-winged Helpers sent to cheer and guard  
     Thy way!

The shining rounds  
     Of precious ore

Lead on and upward to thy great reward;  
 On to the “Father’s House,” the “crystal sea,”  
 The land so fair where “many mansions” be,  
 Where years are counted not, nor sight grows dim,  
 And rings perpetually the seraph’s hymn;  
 Bathed in transcendent light, immortal truth,  
 Eternal beauty, and eternal youth,  
 The yearning soul with peace Divine be filled,  
 Each wish accomplished, all as God has willed;  
     And thou canst Him adore  
     Forevermore.

J. A. O.

“ORANGE SPRING, FLORIDA, *November 3, 1883.*”

“Friend Duffield, in the specimen from him among our rare letters quotes Emerson as saying, ‘We should give each other what we make, the artist his picture, the poet his poem.’ As on many similar occasions you have brought me your picture, so now I bring you my poem—crude and hasty, but as Mrs. Barnett wrote of Robert Browning, ‘a pomegranate, which if cut deep down the middle shows a heart within blood tintured.’ This

is all I claim for it, and to it I add my love and blessing.”

His youngest son Eugene obtained a position in the Navy Pay Office at Washington during this year and came on and joined him, and on January 1, 1884, his wife also came back from Florida and they took a house in Georgetown, D. C., and once more had a place to call home.

They had not been able to collect their scattered household goods; part remained in Lenoir, part in Morganton, and part still in Orange Spring. Mrs. Oertel, in after years, often laughed at the remark of the man who moved what they did have into the Georgetown house. “D—ndst people I ever moved,” he said as he came up the steps with a big frame; “aint got nuthing but books and pictures; where be they goin’ to sleep, and what be they goin’ to kivver with, I dunno.”

It was a problem, but it was met, as others had been, by all kinds of makeshifts. Picture boxes were converted into tables and bureaus and other boxes did duty as chairs. At least part of the family were again together.

Again struggle, disappointment, and privation were too much for him and his health began to fail.

Mrs. Oertel writes a friend (Feb. 8, 1884): “If he could only go to New York so that his brother, the doctor, could see him; a little while out of this house might do him good, but that means \$20—and a poor fellow has to die sometimes for want of that.”

No doubt he would have died but for the help of a friend, who was a friend indeed in many ways,

Capt. Thomas H. Looker, of Georgetown, then pay director of the Navy.

Looking back on this time those interested can never forget this noble friend, now passed to the great beyond, and thus pay tribute to his memory. The star in his crown earned by his kindness and generosity to this one of God's servants will never grow dim, and he has heard the Master's voice saying, "In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these, My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

On March 22 he went on to his brother's in New York for treatment, but although reduced to a shadow he continued to paint. As he said of his work there, it was "the picking up of inconsidered trifles"; nevertheless and in spite of his rapidly failing strength he made some fine things. Among them was "The Indian Scout," 10 by 16 inches, painted for Mr. William Russell. A solitary Indian scout in war paint on a white pony, arrived at the banks of the stream just after a glowing sunset, perceives the smoke of a campfire a little ways off. He is bending low on his saddle bow with lance in hand, peering savagely forward. His horse shows the same spirit as its rider. Also "The Poor Man's Doorkeeper," a billy goat on the hard stone in front of an humble dwelling.

The early part of April, while he was yet able to be out and had strength enough to walk, he attended an exhibition at the National Academy, and of this he writes his wife:

"I saw nothing else but what previous years have shown. All the striving is for technical superiority. The same paucity of thought, lack of

invention, and want of intellectual and spiritual elevation does evidently characterize this as well as previous exhibitions, judging from what I read and hear.

“The more need is there for an Elijah or John in the wilderness, crying aloud for repentance from dead works and belief in the Gospel that has power to raise the dead. And as God has assuredly given this mission to me, His priest servant, it is my duty to strive with all my power to fulfill to the utmost the work of an evangelist—and I shall be sustained in that work.”

On April 14 he had a relapse and was then confined to the house. His brother wrote that he had no hope of his recovery; yet he continued to do some work, make plans for the future, and write cheering letters to his wife.

By May 1 he was confined to his bed and there seemed to be no hope he would rally.

It was then that his brother discontinued the use of medicine and began treating him with cold water applications. In a few days improvement was noted and on May 8 the doctor wrote Mrs. Oertel that he considered him out of danger.

His first letter in some days, written his wife on this date, says: “A miracle has been wrought. I have been snatched from the very jaws of death.”

In a few days more we find him out buying artist's material, and on the 20th he set out for home and again took up the struggle. He returned only a skeleton, with an insatiable appetite. As soon as he came to meals he devoured with his eyes all on the table and seemed to grudge each mouth-

ful eaten by the others. As he afterward said, while eating one meal he was speculating on what he was going to get the next.

His worn-out body had to be entirely rebuilt. While in such a state it was impossible for him to do anything requiring much physical or mental effort; yet he must work, so he determined to paint small pictures for small prices and paint them well, and see if that would not be a temptation to the public to buy.

This he continued to do for some time and found a limited market. Even very rich people were content to take from him for a few dollars what should have brought a hundred or more.

This kind of work was done only while he was regaining his strength, but no less than 25 of these small things were painted—"In a Big Storm" (horses), "Through the Hammocks in Florida" (cattle), and like subjects. Later he attempted things more to his taste and made designs for "The Seven Sleepers" and "Charlemagne," both of which were afterwards painted. He reproduced in monochrome "The Four Evangelists" and painted "Under the Holy Rood," which was presented to the Theological Seminary, Nashotah, Wis. Soon after Christmas (1884) he fell on the icy pavement of the steep hillside on High Street, near his home, and again fractured his right wrist. This put a stop to art work of any kind for some time.

With all these discouragements, what wonder that he seriously considered giving up art for a time and taking a parish? This, however, when it came to the pinch, he could not bring himself to do,



though several places were open to him which would assure a living for himself and family. Instead he drifted into art work which was to take him a long time to execute.

This was the designing, constructing, and carving of a reredos for St. Stephen's Church, Fourteenth Street, Washington. With his wrist still weak, he began work on this March 31, 1885, estimating that he could finish it in three months, but it consumed more than double that time. This was not a gift, but only a nominal price was received.

#### REREDOS FOR ST. STEPHENS.

The idea embodied in this reredos is that of the Church built upon the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone.

The Lord is represented over the altar by a lamb carved in wood, nearly life size. It lies upon a mound of earth and around it the flames are creeping up. It is in high relief, on gold ground. There is a high pointed arch over the altar, on the top of which is the cross, elaborate crockets on the gable, and on either side, on pedestals, under hoods, the Old Testament Symbols—The Paschal Lamb on the cruciform spit, and the brazen serpent. On one wing stand the figures of Isaiah and Jeremiah; on the other, Ezekiel and Daniel, painted on separate canvases, figures about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet high. All across the top extends a panel. It is in three pieces but makes a continuous picture 18 feet long—the 12 apostles as “seated on 12 thrones.” Then on the top are four angelic figures carved

in the round with spread wings, these over 3 feet high.

So prophet, apostle, and angelic hosts are represented, with the "Lamb that was slain" in the center.

Around the altar is a wide carving—wheat and grapes in front, holly on one side, morning glory on the other, emblems of sacrifice and resurrection. An arch in front is supported by the symbols of the Four Evangelists carved in the round. The Alpha and Omega are also introduced and the words incised "I am the Bread of Life" with the Holy, Holy, Holy on the Retable.

On July 15, 1885, he was informed by letter that he had been elected assistant minister of the Parish of the Incarnation, which position he accepted.

Though there is no record of the exact date, the "Shadow of the Rock" was presented to the University of the South during the fall.

Early in 1886 Mr. Hyde wrote, suggesting that his friend come to Boston. He believed he had a scheme which would enable him to go on and paint his great designs.

Some of his friends also suggested his removal to Sewanee, Tenn., that being church headquarters for 14 dioceses.

It was plain his object could not be attained by remaining in Washington. Where should it be next? For many reasons the latter course was decided upon.

In a letter to Mr. Hyde (Jan. 25, 1886), Mrs. Oertel reviews the situation very completely.

"2065 HIGH STREET, GEORGETOWN, D. C.,  
January 25, 1886.

"MY DEAR EDWARD:

"Your two letters head the mail income for the week. Thank you for your kind, unselfish efforts.

"It does not seem as if Mr. Oertel *could* go to Boston unless perchance—or rather providentially, for there *is* no 'chance'—there should be some solid reason for his going. Of course, if your scheme should succeed, he would do his part faithfully; but I must tell you as the truth that he has no faith in it.

"The long years since you were with him, 17 or 18, have been full of painful disappointments and he is no more the enthusiast you knew. Not that his art enthusiasm is in any way cooled—oh, no—but his enthusiastic expectations from the Church or the world in the furtherance of his great designs are pretty well killed out. He can *give away* as much work as he pleases, it is gratefully accepted; but when a *living* income is expected from it, then it is quite a different matter.

"For instance, you find a reredos in St. James' Church, Lenoir, N. C., of which he was rector; this was a gift. Then in the church at Rock Hill, S. C., you will find an elaborate credence table, 6 feet high, also a gift. Then in St. Paul's, Glen Cove, L. I., a large reredos—14 feet high, 13 wide, containing four paintings, and much elaborate carving—this, too, a gift. Then in St. John's Church, Georgetown, three panels 14 feet high; for this the brotherhood of the church paid for the materials and paid the artist \$50; and so on down the line.

"Now, dear brother, you see in all these years Mr. Oertel has come in close contact with many in high places, and it has needed no mediating friend to make his claims known either to ecclesiastical or moneyed influences. Dr. Morgan Dix, the champion of Christian art in the church, has known him for 30 years. Bishop Littlejohn knows him intimately; he has also been for years the so called *intimate* friend of William Fogg, for a long time President of the Union League; also of Henry E. Russell, a very wealthy man, friend and neighbor of the Vanderbilts, etc.

"*The outcome of all is that his best friends in most cases buy his pictures, under pressure, at low prices, and the church will take what he can give.* The Centennial picture is the property of the 'University of the South', at Sewanee, Tenn., where (D. V.) we are going—a gift to them.

"This is the way the dear man has gone through the world,

giving on all sides, his ministry a voluntary one, only accepting a small remuneration now and then where absolute necessity made it imperative.

“Mr. Oertel has given much time to the study of architecture and used to be styled ‘diocesan architect’ when in North Carolina; has built or remodeled about a dozen churches in that state—this, too, all a gift. His is a curious life, Edward, a story of self-sacrificing endeavor which is not often told.

“It is hard to rouse him to any belief that *his* efforts will ever be recognized by men in high station, either in a Christian or a monetary point of view. Nothing but the *existing fact* would make him believe it.

“Don’t be discouraged because I take the matter as I do. I must tell you the truth as it is. I think if Mr. Oertel saw any indications of *real sympathetic help* he would gladly avail himself of it; if it came to him as money speculation I do not believe he could be moved to any action in it.

“I think, dear Edward, that it is the Lord’s hand which has been ever in the way—why I can not see—or, I ask myself, is it the Devil who sees that in defeating the performance of this work he is making a great stroke of policy in his own interests? I confess to much bewilderment on the subject.

“It is not for us to choose our way, it must be His way; ‘at evening time it will be light.’

“God bless you for your faithful love and remembrance. Don’t be too much disappointed if your plans fail again, but be satisfied with His overruling. We might make mistakes He can not.

“Now God be with you.

“Yours, as always,

JULIA A. OERTEL.”



FIGURE OF CHRIST  
Christ Church, Dayton, Ohio



## CHAPTER XII.

On February 25 he again left for the South and after a few weeks spent with his son Frederick at Morganton, N. C., went on to Sewanee, Tenn., March 23.

Here arrangements were made for the building of a house with studio on "Morgan's Steep," a most beautiful situation on the cliff overlooking the valley 2,000 feet below, and he was very enthusiastic over the prospect.

Soon after his arrival he began work on a reredos and altar for the Church of the Incarnation at Washington which occupied most of his time for over a year. This is 23 feet high and 20 feet wide, very elaborate in construction and richly carved. It contains six paintings. In the center and above is Christ as the High Priest, painted in color. On either side are inserted in carved frames monochromes of the Nativity and the Crucifixion, and below these, almost life-size and also in color, are the Four Evangelists, two on a canvas. This was not entirely completed until the spring of 1888.

One of his best works was done here. A colossal figure of "The Christ" for Christ Church, Dayton, Ohio. It is placed above the font and stands in an attitude of blessing. This has by some been pronounced the greatest figure of Christ ever painted.

A picture was painted called "Peace on Earth" for Clifford A. Lanier, brother of the poet, in response to the following request:

"Please catch from the Invisible some shape of spirit, and, enmeshed on canvas, embody his form for me that I may have a memorial of you. Yours, sincerely, CLIFFORD A. LANIER."

After a visit to his studio in September (1886) Mr. Lanier wrote for a Nashville paper the following article:

### "THE ARTIST OERTEL."

#### A VISIT TO HIS STUDIO.

"It is not possible to reproduce the gracious ease and cultured simplicity of Johannes Oertel, painter of 'The Rock of Ages', 'The Shadow of a Great Rock in a Weary Land', 'The Climber's Vision', 'The History of the Redemption', 'Prophecy', 'Dispensations of Promise and the Law.' Light gray eyes burn with the steady fire of vivid intellectuality. His garments idealize the prosaic garb of this century; his gestures betray a subtle mixture of strength with delicacy of touch. A long beard of soft gray-black completes the charm of a manly and dignified presence. In our visit to him he alludes to the want of space in his crowded atelier, and shows with pride the drawings of the new picturesque cottage which is now building for him on the brow of 'Morgan's Steep.' He arranges chairs for his guests (one of the chairs is the product of his own skill in joinery), talking the while. A gleam of humor illumines his face as he parries a deft compliment from Mrs. T. Protesting with a gentle earnestness against the blindness of the many, mournfully recognizing that they are few who see the 'beauty of holiness' or love the 'holiness of beauty,' talking quietly of his own work, vehemently of God's; gesticulating rather with the arms of the spirit than of the body, criticising and praising a brother artist as a brother. Oertel preaches us a lovely sermon on the dignity and divinity of humanity; for this artist, painter, sculptor, musician, carpenter, is above all a preacher. Everywhere you see the results of sin's warfare against the soul symbolized. This Bunyan of painters shows the historic progress



of man from the birthdawn of Eden through the ages, assailed at every epoch, fighting, fainting, triumphing, warned by prophecy, cheered by promise, soothed by love, soiled by sin, led to battle by the might of captains, taught by the majesty of wise lawgivers, scourged by selfish heroes, harried by the demons of greed, wrestling with Apolyon—on, on through the ages, on till the devout imagination must climb the ladder of patient consecrated effort and strain the faintly illuminated eyes to get a glimpse of the bright morning light, flashing radiance yonder from the future as each to-morrow's sun flashes and shall flash a pure white glory of day athwart this mountain's brow. A design of this picture, 'The Dispensations,' which is so far-reaching and so crowded with forms that it should be called the *spiritual history of man* from the creation, and the *destiny of man's soul*, was once hung in an American gallery and the newspaper critic chronicled that there was nothing that season worthy of his condescension to criticize.

"Oertel will not fight under the infidel banner of 'Art for Art's sake'; immoral, unmoral, unspiritual, helpless, faithless art is the Saracen against whom his sword of the cross is drawn.

"He says that one of his unfailing impulses is 'Would you know whether you can do anything or not? Do it!'

"Passing from the brush to the sculptor's model, then to his musical instrument, and thence to his turning lathe and carpenter's bench, whence his books wooed him to study—always busy with fair imagination, he is defended against fatigue. No garrulous complaints escape him; he mournfully recognizes that a devout love of art belongs to the minority. It is said that those who know how to make commercial copies of the well-known picture 'The Rock of Ages' have made a large sum of money by their sale while he has received nothing. Of this he did not speak.

"A dry catalogue of the teeming conceptions of this artist is a label tagged upon the spirit. Here is surely a soul faring through the world with religion in one hand and beauty in the other. He is a painter of human figures. He is gazing into futurity from the height of the eyes of a man and seeks to climb the spiritual ladder as high as a man may go.

"In smiling protest he had exclaimed what a victim he would be did he attempt in so brief a time to set forth the work of a life. Now lest the perfect mirror of gracious courtesy may be blurred he walks down the winding path, chatting of the

natural beauty of the place, of the way to find it, of the young people, of the particular suggestiveness to the lover of natural beauty of some of these prospects, of his new house now building and its domestic appanages, of us and our whereabouts, till the gate of exit swings against his interesting figure. Sincere courtesies wave 'good afternoon,' and thus ends the lovely scene (one scene of a reverent artistic Passion Play) of a half hour with Johannes A. Oertel.

“CLIFFORD A. L.

“SEWANEE, TENN., *September, 1886.*”

So passed the first year of his residence in Sewanee. Little time had been given to the consideration of new designs; it was all spent in the hard toil of carving and carpenter work—done because it was necessary to meet the expenses of his family. His daughter's health had failed and she had come to live with him, hoping that the mountain air might be of benefit; but on the contrary the climate and electrical conditions in that high altitude depressed her greatly, and this was the main reason why he later gave up his home there.

When making the woodwork for various churches he was often urged to employ some good carpenter to do the heavy joining but seldom did so. He followed no set course and could not tell another exactly what he wanted done. He had a design to go by, yes; but there was no certainty that he would follow it to the letter; perhaps when he came to make a certain part he would wish to change and improve it; he must be left free to work it out his own way.

One of his former pupils once wrote him requesting instruction in flesh painting and asked him to paint several heads in progression to show

the process used. His reply was: "I can not do it. It is like asking me to paint my soul. I paint flesh as I feel it at the time, sometimes in one painting, sometimes in several." Here is shown the same freedom from any rule, his own or another's, that characterized all his work.

In February, 1887, his friend Rev. Dr. Beckett, principal of the female seminary at Columbia, Tenn., was taken ill and requested him to come and fill his place for a time. To this call he immediately responded, taking charge of the ministerial work in parish and school.

He practically gave up art work during this time, doing only a few smaller things as he was "continually lecturing and speaking." He took a great interest in the work at Columbia, and, when Dr. Beckett at last returned and relieved him, left with regret. He seems to have found there many congenial friends and on leaving, April 27, wrote his wife:

"My stay here has been a remarkable episode with a great deal to impress it on my mind and that of those with whom I have been associated."

From Columbia he went to Nashville, having commission for some animal pictures there, and for a time occupied part of the studio of Mr. Chambers, a Nashville artist. He was much pleased with his reception, and writes: "People here wonder that a man of my ability should be poor; and I wonder myself. To be sure, I may not sacrifice principle to any degree; but plain duty on one side can never conflict with principle on the other."

"Just now," he goes on, "my sheep pictures are

touching a certain public; sheep are harmless things and remind me of the sheep in Christ's flock. I will then regard them as symbols and fancy myself painting disguised religious allegorical pictures." While in Mr. Chamber's studio they painted a picture together, called "Evensong," a girl driving home a flock of sheep in dim evening light. He painted figure and animals; Mr. Chambers the landscape.

This seems to be the only instance in his career when such a thing was done except that by request of George Innis he several times painted figures and animals in the landscapes of that artist.

Leaving Nashville early in May he returned to Sewanee and resumed work on the Incarnation reredos, which was completed by fall.

On account of his daughter's health and other causes he determined to leave the mountain, and the last of September moved to Nashville.

On October 30 he went on to Washington and put up the reredos and altar in the Church of the Incarnation. There it stands to-day, and except by the few who attend the church is never seen. Visitors and sightseers by the thousands come to Washington every year, yet few, if any, ever see this remarkable piece of work, remarkable in design and execution and still more so for having all been made by the one man. Design, carpenter work, carving and painting all done by the same master hand. If this was in Europe, tourists would travel miles to see it and wonder at it. Here it is almost buried. Why is this?

The record shows that for this work—which



REREDOS AND ALTAR  
Church of the Incarnation, Washington, D. C.



took over a year—he was paid the princely sum of \$700. For this the purchaser can not be blamed. He was offered a certain sum and as usual counted not his own labor but gave it freely in the cause for which he worked.

Returning to Nashville he for a time took charge of the department of wood carving, modeling, and figure composition in the art school there.

With the year 1889 came affliction. Early in January (4th) his beloved daughter passed away and on the 20th of the same month the wife of his son Frederick, then living at Washington, D. C., was also taken.

His home being thus broken up his son gave up his position in Washington and came to live with him, and from that date until his death their lots were cast together.

Then was put to the test a scheme which had been often discussed, the manufacture of church furniture as a business. It was thought that if the clergy of the Church knew of him and his work they would give him the preference in any contemplated church decoration, either painting or carving. Circulars were sent out to the clergy informing them that he was prepared, with the assistance of his son, to design and execute reredoses, altars, fonts, etc., and it was hoped by this means a trade could be built up which would insure a living and he would be enabled to go on with the "Series."

Quite a number of requests for such things had already been received, and these were made as rapidly as possible, an altar and font for a church

in South Pittsburg, Tenn., in oak; a communion table and pulpit in cherry for the Western Methodist Church in Nashville, and a large reredos for St. Luke's Church in Jackson, Tenn.

While the latter work was in progress he accepted a call from Halsey C. Ives, afterward art commissioner for the Chicago fair, to take the position of instructor in art at the school of Washington University in St. Louis, and in the fall of that year removed to St. Louis and assumed his duties there.

The reredos for Jackson was completed in St. Louis, and as there had been no response to the request for work of that character no more was undertaken.

Only a few important paintings were the result of this year's work, most of it being taken up with carving. The principal ones were "Victorious," an Indian who had just killed a grizzly bear—which had fallen across his dead horse—shouting in triumph to his companions who are coming up in the distance. This was painted in monochrome and a drawing was made. It was afterward published in lithograph.

"The Sands of Dee" from the poem of that name by Charles Kingsley. This was a striking picture, a Scotch lassie coming up the shore "calling the cattle home," the "creeping tide" coming in, bringing with it bits of seaweed, and over the waves the "blinding mist came pouring down and 'hid the land.'" This picture was sold some years later to Wood & Co., publishers, of New York; and "A Royal Pair," lion and lioness,





"THE SANDS OF DEE"





EZEKIEL'S VISION



which became the property of Gen. G. P. Thruston, of Nashville.

During his stay in St. Louis his time was occupied mainly in teaching, and only two large works were produced: "Christ known by His Breaking of Bread at Emmaus," a canvas 4 feet 6 inches by 6 feet 10 inches, painted for the Rev. W. F. Brand, S.T.D., Emmorton, Md., to go as a memorial into the chancel of his church, and "Ezekiel's Vision of Restored Israel," from Ezekiel 37: 9-10.

This is one of his best compositions. It has never been exhibited, and remains the property of his sons. It is 50 by 70 inches. It was afterward repainted, but will be described here.

It represents the "Valley of Dry Bones." The figure of the prophet occupies the center of the picture and around him rise up those into whom had come the breath of life in obedience to his words, "an exceeding great army." Some in half-dazed wonder are just rising, many are already on their feet and joyously awaiting their loved ones; husband is joined to wife, mother to child, and many gaze rapturously upward to the flood of light which streams from heaven over all.

The only bit of color is in the draping of the prophet. From the rock on which he stands a stream of water flows, and reflected in its surface is what flames in the sky above—the Cross, this teaching that it is by this sign that Israel is to be restored.

The figure of the prophet above is draped; all else is flesh painting, yet the figures stand out as if they might walk from the canvas. Even a person

knowing nothing of art may realize the technical difficulty of painting so many nude figures close together and producing this effect.

Toward the last of his second year of teaching he felt the strain of it and the lack of the freedom for independent work. He must have expressed his feelings in writing to his wife, then in New York, showing that his spirits were at a low ebb, and as was always the case at such times she came to the rescue, writing:

“April 16. Do not let the Devil succeed in the overthrow he strives for; go on and do your best; he has not been able to keep you from making a noble record for the right, with all his malice and opposition. I think that instead he has driven you to put the works in God’s House, which will ever witness for Him, that you would never have made had you achieved worldly success; and may be they preach quite as forcibly as anything else you could have done.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Oertel's engagement in St. Louis terminated in the fall of 1981 (September) and he again came East, this time locating with his son Frederick in Vienna, Fairfax County, Va., a small village about 12 miles from the national Capital.

For a time he used one of the small rooms in the house (12 by 14) for a studio; here he painted only one picture of importance "The Prophecy of Balaam," but made an elaborate carved baptistry for the Church of the Incarnation in Washington. The room was much too small to admit of putting such a large thing together, and it was made in sections and never set up until put in its place in the church. In speaking of the difficulties he had he said: "I certainly am doomed again to build a cathedral in a closet." However, it was accomplished as such things always were, no matter what the difficulty, by patient work and, as he said, "various contrivances which I adopt as I need them."

This work has much elaborate carving, including four figures 3 feet high cut in the round. There is one painting showing the Ark upon the waters, with the dove bearing the olive branch, and the rainbow in the clouds, typifying the cleansing by

water of the baptized as the earth was cleansed at the flood.

In the spring of 1892 (March 7) he took a studio in Washington (Seventeenth and G Streets N. W.), and it was of great benefit to him to be in touch with his artist friends, especially Mr. Richard N. Brooke, Mr. J. H. Moser, and Mr. J. A. Messer. He was elected president of the Society of Washington artists at this time.

As his first work in this studio he painted in monochrome the four prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—for Rev. Dr. Brand, Emmorton, Md.

He speaks of having a visit from "Dr. Audsley, of New York," and goes on to say: "He (Dr. A.) says my room is a revelation, etc., showing versatility he had seen in no other artist—and adaptability that seems able to do anything, to be equally powerful in every branch (and I mentally ask Why not?) so he did not know which I could do best, etc.—and all that. Now I have heard things of the sort before, they are very assuring, and keep up my spunk but do not alter the hard facts of the position. It is true all the same that I am poor, obscure, that the public do not buy my pictures nor seem to care for them, and the best of my years have gone in vain effort to make more than a bare living. And still there may be a duty remaining—that of continuing the battle; 'I aint dead yet' you know. My trouble is too much to do, too much willingness to do it, too much resolution, and too little time and strength. And again, no means for adopting such plans as are recommended





CHARLEMAGNE



for coming out before the people and compelling recognition."

Then followed quite a number of works: "The King of Truth," "The Morning Sacrifice," "The Supper at Emmaus," life size, for Dr. Brand; "The Good Shepherd," for Church of Incarnation, Washington; "Going on Picket," winter scene before Fredericksburg; "Pursued," army train with guard; and "Charlemagne." This latter is 2 feet 8 inches by 3 feet 4 inches in size, from the well-known legend of Charlemagne asleep under the Odenberg, ready to arise and do battle when the day of Armageddon arrives.

The grand figure of the old king lies asleep in a great carved chair, his crown upon his head and the trusty two-handed sword between his knees, supported by his left hand. His robe is cast loosely about his shoulders and the flowing white beard sweeps nearly to his waist, a grand and imposing figure, in perfect repose yet with latent power. At his feet lies his cross-blazoned shield, on either side a crouching lion (emblematic of power). The figure on the side of the carved chair has trumpet in hand ready to sound the alarm, and from above comes a hand to turn the hourglass standing on top of the chair, showing that the time is approaching.

Early in 1893 his friend Rev. Dr. Brand was taken sick and requested him to come over to Emmorton, 2½ miles from Bel Air, Md., on Sundays and hold services for him. This he did for some weeks, but in the meantime he had accepted a commission to paint some large pictures for St.

Mary's R. C. Church, Washington, to be completed by a certain date, and it consumed too much of his time to make the trip each week, so he determined to do the work there.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Consequently the last of July found him located at Bel Air, Md., where he was given the use of a room in the courthouse for a studio, and on August 5 he began the big pictures; September 15 the three large ones, each 5 feet 9 inches by 11 feet 3 inches, were completed. While painting these he wrote:

“I must, for want of time, pull up alongside of the ‘old masters’ in point of rapidity of execution, and probably the paintings do not suffer in the process. Keeping at white heat is often an advantage, while deliberate slow performance degenerates often into mechanical finish.

And on September 15: “I have finished the pictures. I labored under formidable obstacles; not the least of these was the *poisonous green* of the jury room in the Court House, done in oil, that being the only place in town affording light enough, although only about ten (!) feet distance from over lifesize figures. However, I struggled through and came out victor, not the first experience of the character I have had to make.”

The subjects are all different aspects and stages of the Incarnation; the center, that of the Madonna, the ancient “Theotokos”, simple in treatment, above 7 feet high; to the left, the Judgment of the

Serpent in Eden (Gen. III, 14, 15); to the right the Vision of Isaiah when sent to King Ahas, Isaiah VII, 13, 14. Besides these there are four paintings 5 by 6 feet in monochrome decorative panels; subjects, "The Annunciation," "Nativity," "Presentation of Jesus in the Temple," and "Finding of Our Lord by His parents."

To E. L. H. he writes: "You are right in being indignant that my own communion does not keep my brush sufficiently employed, but, my friend, it is the old experience, "a prophet is not without honor," etc. Moreover, you know that I have not the gift of advertising myself and wares, and who can succeed nowadays in a temporal sense without that? Let the bubble "reputation" float along. There are plenty chasing the glittering nothing and I will not swell the silly crowd. The good Lord has kept me and fed me these 70 years and will so keep me the years that remain. I do the work that comes to me, in serious honesty, and leave the result in His gracious hands."

After finishing the four monochromes, November 18, no more important work was done that year except the completion of an altar, begun during the summer, for St. Peter's Church, Fernandina, Fla.

Still being needed in the Church work at Emmorton, he remained in Bel Air and little by little seemed to take root.

His wife and son pressed him to return to the Vienna home, but he was obdurate and refused, insisting that his work was there while in Vienna there was nothing for him either in the church or art. Mrs. Oertel held out against his remaining



SUCCESSORS TO ROYALTY





and would not consent to leave her son and his two children and join him as he wished.

In spite of all this he remained, and not only that, but built a small studio and settled down to work. This is the only instance in his life where he absolutely refused to listen to counsel either from his wife or son. In one of her letters to him Mrs. Oertel said: "I consider your call to Bel Air a family calamity."

His first work in 1894 was four paintings for the Emmorton church, each 3 by 7 feet—"The Sacrifice of Abel," "Melchizedek Blessing Abraham," "David Playing before Saul," and "Moses Striking the Rock."

Then followed many smaller works, the principal ones "Successors to Royalty," lions, and "Sunny Pathways."

He was as eager for work as a boy when the new studio was completed, and determined to paint again for exhibition in New York. Of this he says:

"But he who enters that city for competition has a murderous fight before him. The Vestals in Gerome's 'Gladiator' represent the heartless spirit of the 'judges' in those exhibitions. Their thumbs are all downward and they cry for blood.

"Grave doubts assail me. The question rises like a warning ghost before me, whether after all and in spite of my very youthful resolution to conquer again a standing professionally, I am not hopelessly superannuated and such a result beyond my power and the possibilities of the case? Even a Bismarck is laid on the shelf and a Gladstone compelled to resign, and perhaps the task I had set

myself is more difficult to achieve than theirs who have continued in the mid-channel of prosperity and public acknowledgment while I emerge as an old man from obscurity into a race that is rushing into opposite pursuits.

“This race will not even permit me to bear any testimony. I can get no hearing in the market place and am pushed back within the church doors. Therefore it may be that the experience has the meaning, dimly hinted, that inside the church doors I shall remain.

“All the work I have had of late has been for the Church. God can send more. I have no knack at advertising myself, can't do it, but must quietly wait and hope.

“Perhaps other men also have to go from the stage of life here leaving what they considered their main work unfinished—hardly begun. With me it is plainly the case. What had not entered into the original plan had to be done, and what was the chief aim remains a fragment only. Evidently the present generation has grown away from me and I from it, and we no longer fit together. This is painfully apparent and perhaps the part of wisdom would be to submit and retire within the narrow circle where still there is affinity and some chance for usefulness.

“These conflicting suggestions run through my head and they do not tend to steady my energies. Very possibly no avenue of escape to freer action can be discovered, and whether I give up the battle against odds or with set teeth go on with the struggle, I shall have to yield so much to circumstances

as to secure a living by whatever can be picked up along the way."

When the pictures for the Emmorton church were completed he wrote his wife (Mar. 5):

"Another load carried to its destination and laid down, and I can turn in some other direction to take up whatever the day brings along. With modifications the thing repeats itself to the end. Stage after stage is left behind and at last the goal is reached. Wayworn, bruised, and tired we get there, but what matters it—for when the gate opens the character of the travel will be totally changed."

At various periods his friends tried to bring his name before the public and so assist him, but not the slightest effect was ever observed to result from such efforts. After an article about him had appeared in the Philadelphia Times (Mar. 17) he comments on it thus:

"Whether this 'writing me up' does more than reminding a few people I am alive is questionable. From all there never has been a really practical business result, which may be owing to my deplorable lack of capacity for improving an opportunity for temporal advantage. There is no 'push' in me. The good Lord has given me other faculties, but utterly denied this; and I shall have to the end to bear the consequences of fitting so awkwardly into an age possessed with the advertising devil."

His effort to "found a home" in Bel Air was an honest though from a practical standpoint a misguided one. Instead of founding one he left the only real home he had—that of his son—and placed himself again adrift. When for a time fortune

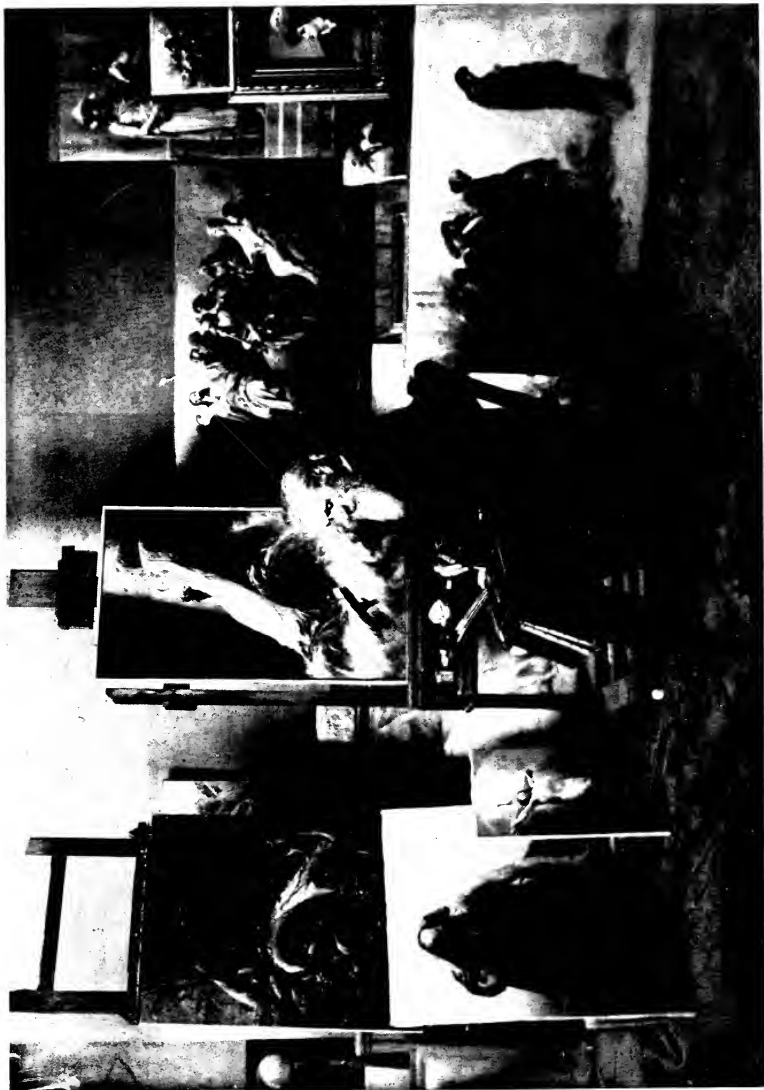
smiled and money began to come in he was prone to be optimistic as to the future and feel sure it was to be immediately followed by more and made his plans accordingly; then, when suddenly the tide turned, as it always did, he often went to the other extreme and was very despondent.

“Aye, aye,” he says, “it is a curious life I lead! Drift, drift, drift—these 40 and more years, truly a wandering in the wilderness without proper home, a living in tents, a nomadic existence. But shall the wandering not cease? Has the time not come with my three-score years and ten? If not, when will it come?”

“More than once I have determined to plant myself for perpetuity, but could take no hold upon the soil. One might think I had slain my brother and the curse of Cain was upon me. But instead was I not rather like the Patriarchs who could own not a foot of their promised land save where they bought to bury their dead? or like a missionary apostle, going about sowing seed in many a field that afterward grew and bore fruit?”

“Now once more I have started the endeavor to found a home, so late in life, and it seems so difficult of accomplishment. Yet it must not be given up; it may be still possible.”

The above is quoted to show how deeply he felt the position in which he now found himself. He did not seem able to see that this move had been purely a matter of will on his part and had not been forced upon him as some former ones had; nor had there been any basis for considering that the change of location would be of any benefit. However, so







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he saw it and had deemed it his duty, and when his son for business reasons had to leave Vienna for a time, finally going to New York, Mrs. Oertel gave in and went to make her home with him in Bel Air (Aug. 10, 1894). Ill advised as this move seemed to be, yet in the Bel Air studio was begun the work designed 40 years before, the work for which so many moves had been made and so much sacrificed, the central point in the circle of his life around which all his doings clustered and were in some way connected—"The Great Series."

His sons were now able to relieve him of the necessity of making a living and leave him free to accomplish that for which he had waited so long.

During the early part of 1895 he was occupied mostly with portraits, animal pieces, etc., painting only two important canvases, a "Rock of Ages," 24 inches by 4 feet, the one before mentioned as made for his son, Dr. T. E. Oertel, in New York and "Evening Meditation," a monk leaning in cloister door, with breviary, looking out at the fading evening light.

In the fall of 1895 he began preliminary work for the painting of "The Dispensations," and in the spring went to New York to study and refresh his mind before entering upon the task of painting so large a canvas. From New York he wrote (Apr. 22):

"No doubt I shall go home with added strength and courage braced up. The sluggish current of my life has been stirred, and, like water tumbling over rocks in a rough channel, received fresh air and new motion and runs thereafter in a clearer

stream. The past weeks are something to ponder on, and the contact with other folk has been of help; old friends have brought up old experiences and induced many reflections, and perhaps words have been spoken that echo on into the future—even beyond the troublesome mortal hour.

“I have attended a reunion of artists and visited Grey, Brown, Perry, Rider, Thomas Moran, and Huntington.”

He often was perfectly oblivious to his personal appearance. When he arrived in New York on this trip he had on his head a most disreputable old hat which his son immediately confiscated, giving him a new one. A day or so later he went on a visit to friends in Glen Cove and when he returned he had on a still worse one, all slouched down in the brim and full of holes, and he did not know it was not the new one until his attention was called to it.

He had taken the first one he found on the rack when leaving, which turned out to be the one used by his friend when he worked in the garden. He always put on his hat by placing it on the back of his head and then giving the brim in front a pull, leaving it, as he said “with a backward inclination,” and it was not long before the hat itself assumed that shape—setting back with front of brim pulled down.

On his return the canvas was stretched for the big picture and he began the work which he had longed to do for so many years. Even while occupied on the large works, as he was for several years, he contrived to do many other things, both carving and painting, producing what alone would seem to

have been enough to occupy all this time. Most of what he did was given away. In writing of certain work which had been made for a church, for which he was to have been paid, he said: "It is like—I might as well make a bona fide donation of what I have done and cut short the idle speculation of ever securing even small returns in money. By doing this the business would be thrown behind into the past, and my mind practically relieved from any further thought and worry about it."

"The Dispensations" was exhibited in Washington, at St. Johns Hall, early in March and attracted considerable attention.

An offer of purchase for \$10,000 was received from Rev. Samuel Beiler, Vice Chancellor of the American University, Washington, this figure having been agreed upon as a fair compensation by several artists to whom the matter was referred.

Mr. Beiler at the time requested the Washington artist, Mr. Richard N. Brooke, to give him his opinion of the painting, which he did in the following letter:

"DEAR SIR: After very careful study of Mr. Oertel's picture of 'The Dispensations of Promise and the Law' I am fully confirmed in the conviction that it is a great work of art and a very distinct and notable triumph over the difficulties that must necessarily be met where large masses of figures must be grouped with exact regard to the literary requirements of the subject.

"Looking back I can recall no painter (out of quite an extended acquaintance) who, in my belief, would have met all these requirements as fully and at the same time preserved a harmony of color, and excellence of composition, as I consider Mr. Oertel has done in this instance.

"I have passed, in the aggregate, hours before this picture, and believe I have expressed the opinion of every serious artist

who has seen it, and I could give technical reasons for my judgment, if necessary.

"It appears to me one of those rare cases in which the something needed to be said has found the one man possessed of the necessary equipment to say it clearly and conclusively.

"Hence I trust this notable picture will find its appropriate place in some institution where it may become a public heritage, and do the good of which I believe it to be capable. It seems part of the nature of things that this should be so.

"RICHARD N. BROOKE."

The following article was also written by Mr. Brooke for the Washington *Evening Star*:

"THE DISPENSATIONS OF PROMISE AND THE LAW."

"A GREAT HISTORICAL PAINTING.

"EDITOR EVENING STAR: During part of last week there was placed on private view in St. John's Parish Hall, and is now on its way to the Nashville Exposition, a canvas well worthy of this caption, and than which no more notable work of art has been produced in America within the experience of the writer. Since no adequate notice of this artistic event has reached the press through the usual channels—due doubtless to the attitude of the artist himself toward this particular work—would the Star permit me, speaking from the professional point of view, to give to this noble effort the public importance it deserves?

"Modern painters have been accused, not unjustly, of having abandoned the field of great composition, of having caught the prevalent spirit of haste, or, when they undertake large canvases—which under such circumstances they do too frequently—of attaching more importance to the technique of parts than to the painter's own subjective vocation to his conception, which is the essential basis for great pictures. None of these things can justly be said of the artist and picture in question. To a correct understanding of both it may be necessary to give some account of the motives and circumstances leading up to its production.

"The painter, Rev. Johannes A. Oertel, is not, as might be inferred, an amateur, but one who, before entering the ministry,

had already risen high in his profession, and whose brush, as this picture will attest, has lost nothing of its powers through having been dedicated to the cause to which he has given all his talents.

“Born in Bavaria in 1823, he began life, like many eminent artists, as a steel engraver, receiving his first impulse toward composition from Kaulbach, at Munich.

“He came to New York at the age of 25 and afterward entered the ministry while at the height of his success as a painter. His subsequent life for nearly 40 years has been passed in various charges, chiefly in the South, often officiating in edifices designed by him and partially built by his own hands, for he is not only a gifted architect but also a skilful carver and worker in wood. Throughout his labors as pastor he has still continued to be a prolific painter, keeping well in touch with all that is best in current art and perhaps the gainer through being far removed from the contact and influence of its passing fads. Every one will recall his picture of the ‘Rock of Ages,’ of which the steel engraving is well known the world over and has carried more of benediction to thousands of Christian homes than perhaps any single picture thus published.

“The present work, while no less serious in intention, is immeasurably more important as an artistic achievement. The first composition was made for it more than 40 years ago; to paint it has been the dream of a lifetime. But it has been only within the last three years, and when the artist had quite despaired of ever attaining his desire, that circumstances have been so arranged as to permit him to carry it into execution.

“The picture illustrates the Mosaic Dispensation and comprises the entire period of Old Testament History, the central figure being Moses, around whom are grouped the lives of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the Kings, with minor groups representing the offering of first fruits, the sin offering, thank-offering, the Babylonian captivity, the overthrow of the gods Moloch, Baal, Ashtoreth, Dagon, and their votaries, the punishment of the scoffer, the altar of sacrifice, the High Priest, the Ministering Angels, and, over all, radiating its light upon the scene of which it is the source of illumination, the Shekinah.

“To group 140 figures successfully is an achievement; to do this with a strict observance of the historic (literary) relation and importance of each part multiplies the difficulty; but to accomplish both without the result of an unpleasant line or a

single disturbance of the color harmony is a decided triumph for an artist. This Mr. Oertel has succeeded in doing to a very marvelous degree. This is not to say that Mr. Oertel's picture is without any discoverable flaw, or that its method of execution would suit every follower of every special line of technique. Of what picture ever painted could that be said? But Art criticism stands upon a broader basis than this, and one soon learns that the standard of merit of a picture is not its conformity to every variety of mind, but the sum total of its excellencies. Regarded in this light, I can recall no picture produced in recent years (and I think I have seen most important canvases) which met all the difficulties of composition more uniformly as to arrangement of line, light, color, balance, relative importance of groups, centralization of the interest—and all this with a strict adherence to the fundamental conception of the subject—than this has done.

“And, after all, the value of a picture is the power and spirit of its original conception; all else is the mere scaffolding; if this be wanting, no quality of execution can elevate a commonplace idea.

“Space would not permit a detailed description of the literary meanings of this composition, even were it possible to describe in words the complicated relation of its various groups. I can only point in passing to the following features, which will address themselves to all observers (for the picture will probably return to Washington), viz.: The splendid sense of light throughout the canvas; the feeling of atmosphere which places each group at its proper distances; the fitness and character of the types, such as the prophet Daniel, David, and others; the charming color and technique of the heads in the middle plane, such as Samson, or Joshua; the perfect perspective of the figures upon different levels; the dramatic power of the action in the foreground groups; and the agreeable, almost sensuous sense of color, quite rare in works of this character.

“The problem of dealing with larger masses of figures in costume has always been so to arrange the patchwork of color spots as to avoid unpleasant juxtapositions. In this the artist is usually satisfied if he has succeeded in producing ‘harmony of analogy.’ Mr. Oertel has met this difficulty in a bold and somewhat original way. Keeping one predominate tone, such as sage green, in one group of figures, passing by a skilful transition into the prevalence of rose or violet in the adjoining group,

and so throughout the canvas. And thus the eye is led by an agreeable rhythm and harmony of color from group to group, each having its distinct characteristic.

"Nothing could be more beautiful in color than a certain minor group in the middle distance made up of halftones, which serve as a rest to the eye after passing over another group of which reds are the keynote. This method of treatment is relieved of any suggestion of monotony by the introduction of small notes of contrasting color, such as the touch of red given by the helmet plume in the foreground.

"All these points of merit will in time speak for themselves, but after several hours passed in the study of its merits, it appears to me both timely and proper to state publicly what I believe to be in substance the opinion of all serious artists who have seen it.

"Mr. Oertel has accomplished something of note in art, and his work should find some fitting place in one of our great educational institutions or galleries of pictures, where it would serve as an example of persistent and successful endeavor apart from its great historical value.

"RICHARD N. BROOKE.

"WASHINGTON, D. C., *March 27, 1897.*"

Mr. Beiler's offer was refused by the artist for a number of reasons, the chief one of which was that the picture was one of a series and should not be separated from the others which he intended to go on and paint. Of course Mr. Beiler could not guarantee to take the others, even if he desired them, as they did not exist and there was no certainty that Mr. Oertel would live to produce them. So the picture remained the property of the artist and was sent to Nashville, Tenn., to be exhibited at the State exposition then in progress. Later it was sent to Baltimore and placed on exhibition there.

He went immediately to work on the second of the "Series," "The Redeemer." This was prac-

tically completed by the end of the year, but in addition he did much other work.

“The Evening Sacrifice,” “Our First Parents, over against Eden, at Evening Sacrifice,” “The Martyrdom of St. Stephen,” 7 feet 7 inches by 9 feet 3 inches for St. Stephen’s Mission Chapel, St. Louis, Mo., “The Expulsion from Eden,” were the paintings produced, and a carved pulpit and lectern in oak were made for Emmanuel Church, Bel Air.

The year ended with disaster of a nature that for some time clogged the wheels of the household and hindered art work as well. Mrs. Oertel, on Christmas eve, when the family were all gathered together in anticipation of enjoying the holidays, fell downstairs and sustained serious injuries. For weeks little else was done but care for this, the most important member of the family. Her recuperative powers astonished the doctors; though with broken arm and ankle and numerous strains and bruises she rallied from the shock rapidly, sat up the third day and had her picture taken, and never ceased to direct and advise those who so depended on her for counsel.

The third of the series was not at once attempted. He put the finishing touches on “The Redeemer” during the first months of 1898 and painted, life size (54 by 100 inches) “Jesus or Barrabbas,” and the last of April finished a grand lion picture called “The Desert King.” The “Jesus or Barabbas” was sent to the ‘Academy’ in New York “for possible exhibition.” When “The Dispensations” was on exhibition in Baltimore



(May) he visited that city and while there delivered several lectures on art and Christian symbolism.

While there he met an old Bavarian friend, Dr. Volk "whom," he says, "I found busy—by gaslight—on some silver chasing, in the manner—and what is yet far superior—in the spirit of those men with whom art was a God-given inspiration, a simple love pursuit, their life a joy in unselfish labor; the world, its applause and rewards, an almost unknown quantity. His works excited my surprise and honest admiration, the more so because he is self-taught and does this work after dark until 12 or 1 at night with immense industry and perseverance. It is a great encouragement to meet such a case in this our degenerate, shallow days, and the memory of it will help me in hours of difficulty and struggle such as are my lot not infrequently. The genuine art spirit is yet a possibility after all, and I thank the Lord for even *one* instance, as an example that links the great past still with the present, despite the blatant, gaudy, irreverent, and flighty doings of the madly experimenting youthful rabble of the day.

"Opportunity to see some new things, though not in the shape of paintings, and to have some talks on art matters will furnish me stimulus for some time to come. Ah! and so often I have felt the need of it. Isolation and solitude may be favorable to productiveness, but continued perforce too long stagnation sets in and a paralysis of virile action not over good for works for art. Situated as I am it is a hard battle in which often I go to the

ground, though others may not see the defeat, and almost despair."

Of the attempt to have the "Jesus or Barabbas" exhibited at the Academy he wrote Mr. Hyde (Mar. 15):

"The modern New York art world has once more given me unmistakable evidence that I would be a deal wiser for hauling in my sensitive antennae for aye and retiring into my little shell as the only fit place for a presumptuous professor of the Crucified and forever stay there. That despised, thorn-crowned Nazarene is no more welcome to-day than he was 18 centuries ago.

"By the inclosed photograph ("Jesus or Barabbas") you can see with what subject I have dared to test the discriminating judges of the National Academy, 'The Committee of Selection,' and this very day notice came from my agent that the picture had been returned to him. To be sure it is exactly what I anticipated. Such things have no longer a place in modern exhibitions. The Academy is revolutionized—dear old foggy affair—and got into the control of Parisian-taught youngsters; the former respectable, sober, conservative institution is gone. Well, I shall in future act on the lesson. My wife suggested I should write to you making inquiry whether a chance can not be found in Boston for exhibition. Your judgment may tell you whether there are any chances whatever in intellectual Boston. I myself do not know.

"I confess to have gotten at fault with the world. Somehow we do not agree. What is more, I do not *want* to agree. You have no idea what an

apathetic fellow to the world's blandishments your old friend has got to be. Diogenes in his tub, with the great Alexander before him, is no circumstance in comparison. Well, I have with admiration read the maxims of the heathen stoic philosophers, and would it not be a shame for an instructed Christian to be outdone in indifference to the world by them?

“Haven't we better ground to stand on and an infinitely superior example? Why, there is absolute luxury in this delightful independence, and those New York fellows have no conception what a wealth they have contributed to it. If they knew, chagrin would make them recall my picture.”

A glorious independence for him it truly was no longer to be by reason of financial conditions at the mercy of the “Committee of Selection” for daily bread.

As the time drew near for the exhibition in Baltimore to close he began to feel the responsibility of having these large works in his possession. It was not his intention to keep them for any length of time, and after due consideration he wrote the following letter to the Bishop of Tennessee.

It may be explained here that on going to Sewanee in 1886 he had been transferred from the Diocese of Washington to that of Tennessee under which he still remained.

“BEL AIR, MD., *April 16, 1898.*

“RIGHT REV. THOMAS F. GAILOR, D.D.

“MY DEAR BISHOP: The substance of this letter has by intention been written long ago. But what I desire to say now needs introduction by a brief history concerning three large paintings which together form a series.

“It is no exaggeration to say that the first embodied design—

the second of the series—came to me as a veritable vision, without conscious preparation or forethought, 45 years ago.

“The second also was given me in a similar manner a few years afterward, and subsequently carried out as a large crayon drawing from which some photographs were made in 1864 or 1865. But until three years ago, by want of means and other causes, their execution on a becoming scale was delayed and quite mysteriously hindered.

“It never seemed to me probable that in this country, and with the popular taste inclined as I knew it to be, there would ever be an opportunity of sale. The pictures would have to be made a donation to some public institution, a free gift for general benefit.

“An opportunity for sale was indeed presented for the first in the series while for a few days on exhibition in Washington, D. C., and before it went to Nashville, but the offer came from the vice chancellor of the ‘American University’ (Methodist), and the terms of payment proposed of \$10,000, the sum named by a competent artist as ‘merely a respectable compensation,’ gave no sufficient guaranty and had to be rejected. Otherwise, without any participation of mine except by passive yielding on account of their urgency, two efforts were made to secure these paintings, first to the Cathedral established at Washington, and then at New York by interested clerical friends. Both failed as I anticipated.

“I viewed these failures as a divine indication that the course for many years existing in my own mind was what my Master intended, and that, as the subjects were freely given to me, so they should when adequately embodied be freely consecrated to the Lord’s service.

“I therefore now offer them, through you, to the Theological Department of the University of the South.

“The Series *should go together*.

“Although each composition is a unit by itself, yet they tell a connected story—the Story of Redemption; the first, the Old Testament preparation; the second, redemption as practically applied to the individual man during a time of probation; the third, the Era of the Holy Spirit, the Church Idea.

“A fourth one has originally been in my thoughts and partially noted down, namely, the consummation of the divine scheme in the future of God’s Church until the end. But inasmuch as this is still prophetic and not already historic, the

three may be suffered to stand by themselves for the historic fulfilment of the Divine Plan of Redemption in its comprehensive features.

“As such the series, I devoutly trust, will be no invaluable aid to students by a graphic delineation of important facts of theology, and if at Sewanee they accomplish this mission I shall have very sufficient compensation.

“The first of the series is at present in Baltimore, and only for a few days more. On that account I deem it a great favor if you let me have a decision, either of acceptance or the contrary, at your earliest moment. A few words will suffice. I do not know whether you can act alone, or have to confer with the vice chancellor, but in either case an early answer would direct my necessary movements here.

“One condition only I would beg to make, namely, that in case you accept the gift for the University the institution should assume the cost of transportation from Baltimore to Sewanee. It can be only a few dollars. Painting and frame are in separate long boxes, the painting rolled, with stretcher in one, the frame, home made, and in sections, in the other. By paying freight at the other end I imagine better care can be insured of the goods.

“This preliminary step settled, the next ones, like the furnishing of a description and sending of the second painting, nearly done, can be arranged in due order.

“By writing this letter a load of shifting quantity has been dropped from my shoulders.

“When the destination of these works, for so long carried as a solemn obligation, has been fixed I shall be as a man who has performed his vow and relieved his conscience.

“My friend Bishop Quintard has gone Home. I now with heartiest devotion greet you as my Bishop, and myself subscribe as your servant in the Lord,

“JOHANNES A. OERTEL.”

On receiving this letter Bishop Gailor forwarded it to the vice chancellor of the University and received the following reply:

“APRIL 25, 1898.

“MY DEAR BISHOP GAILOR: Your letter of 22d inst., inclosing one from Mr. Oertel, is duly received. We certainly appreciate

Doctor's Oertel's most gracious consideration for us, and will gladly defray all expense in connection with the shipping of the pictures. We should value them very highly, and will give them the very best space at our disposal.

"Please to convey to Doctor Oertel our high appreciation of his gift.

"With warmest regards, yours, very faithfully,

"B. L. WIGGINS,

"*Vice Chancellor.*"

At the same time the vice chancellor wrote to Mr. Oertel:

"APRIL 25, 1898.

"THE REV. JOHANNES A. OERTEL,  
*Bel Air, Maryland.*

"REVEREND AND DEAR SIR: Bishop Gailor has communicated to me the contents of your letter to him, and I wish to assure you of the high appreciation of the University for your most generous offer.

"The University will gladly defray the expense in connection with the shipping of the pictures, and we shall place them to the best advantage on our walls.

"Your other picture, 'The Shadow of the Rock,' is hung in our newest building and people come from a distance to see and admire it.

"With high regard, yours, very faithfully,

"B. L. WIGGINS,

"*Vice Chancellor.*"

Bishop Gailor's letter to Mr. Oertel follows:

"MEMPHIS, TENN., *April 29, 1898.*

"MY DEAR MR. OERTEL: I thank you with all my heart in the name of the University, and as one who learned to regard your life and work with reverence in the old days for your thought of our dear Sewanee. I had to write to the vice chancellor before I could formally accept the gift, and now I inclose

his letter. The board of trustees will of course make a formal acknowledgment at its meeting in August.

“Assuring you of my cordial regard, and with affectionate greeting I am,

“Most sincerely, yours,

“THOMAS F. GAILOR.

“THE REV. J. A. OERTEL,

“*Bel Air, Md.*”

## CHAPTER XV.

On receiving Mr. Oertel's letter in regard to the possibilities of exhibiting in Boston, Mr. Hyde immediately began to investigate and found the man H. Jay Smith mentioned before in connection with the "Rock of Ages." When Mr. Smith heard of the large works Mr. Oertel had recently painted he became very much interested and at once made arrangements to go to Bel Air to see them.

Before he could do so Mr. Oertel had another accident, which again for a time put a stop to art work. He had been repeatedly warned not to ride a "wheel," yet he persisted in doing so and had both bicycle and tricycle.

A letter written by Mrs. Oertel to her son in New York (May 4) tells the story.

"We certainly have become the record 'breakers' of Hartford County. Don't you remember, long ago, when Papa first got 'wheels in his head,' you said to me, 'If Papa ever attempts to ride a wheel he will break that right wrist over again'? You were a prophet. He has done it. Here he sits with his arm in splints, suffering like a dog, and—the wheel is for sale. He was about ready for it. Had just finished the big picture ('The Redeemer'), taken down the ladder, and cleaned out the room, so if Mr. Smith comes he is ready for him."



Mr. Smith arrived some days later. He was very much pleased with the pictures and at once made a proposition to take them for exhibit. He believed that in New England, Boston especially, they would be appreciated and attract attention.

Mr. Oertel was very skeptical as to the results of such an exhibition. "He is like a stag at bay," writes Mrs. Oertel. "He has had so many failures and disappointments that he is out of all sorts with the business world." However, he consented in the end to let Mr. Smith take the pictures provided the vice chancellor of the University to which he had given them was willing to have them go before they finally were sent to Sewanee.

This permission was given and the three large canvases, "The Dispensations," "The Redeemer," and "Jesus or Barabbas" were forwarded to Mr. Smith at Boston.

After Smith had placed the pictures on exhibition he wrote that as he was advertising them as by the painter of "The Rock of Ages" he wished he could have a copy of that famous picture to exhibit with them.

Mr. Oertel at once offered to paint one for the purpose, and did so, at the suggestion of Mr. Smith, making the life-size painting before mentioned. This was completed August 20 and sent on.

Mr. Smith was so sanguine of results, looking at it purely from the standpoint of a financial venture, that it seemed possible some degree of success might attend the undertaking. Mr. Oertel's style had greatly changed in the last years, and what he

now offered was vastly superior to the works of former times.

“You do not know how he paints now,” writes his wife to “Edward”. “The old brown style of the past is all gone; he has become a first class colorist. Don’t think it partiality in me—for he calls me his severest critic—but if you could see his present works you would be astonished. “The Gethsemane” and “Expulsion” are gems. He is just finishing a grand lion picture, and if he saw an opening for his paintings he would work like a steam engine. He executes most rapidly and has ideas by the score waiting the time when they can be painted, and new ones keep crowding on.”

Smith had also for exhibition at the same time “the most extraordinary nude ever exhibited in America” (“Rona”) and crowds flocked to see it, but the exhibition of the Oertel pictures did not prove the success that Smith expected and at first he said he thought it was because he did not know how to handle that class of work. After further efforts had been made he wrote:

“When I wrote you I had failed because I did not know how to handle the paintings I *should* have written, instead, because I did not know the New England people. I find the vast majority of people in this section care very little for orthodox ideas, and want subjects either of the nude, mirthful, or startling and sensational. People will not pay to see a painting unless sensational in some way.” On receipt of this letter Mr. Oertel immediately ordered the “Dispensations,” “The Redeemer,” and “Jesus or Barabbas” forwarded to Sewanee. It

appears that the latter painting was also presented to the University at this time, though there is no record of the action.

During the early part of this year he was busy making studies for the third of the "Series," "The Dispensation of the Holy Spirit," and began to paint on it in August. He writes: "I am working down from the top and for over a week have been among the angelic host; now among the Apostles—exalted company to be sure—and I have to use very pure color to express it. This picture will be my witness for Truth and a protest against modern unbelief." On August 8, 1899, he was notified that the degree of Doctor of Divinity had been conferred on him by the University of the South. This honor was accepted in the following characteristic letter:

"BEL AIR, MD., August 12, 1899.

"B. S. WIGGINS, D.D.,

*"Vice Chancellor, University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn.*

"MY DEAR SIR: But from Sewanee, I would not accept the honor the board of trustees has been pleased to confer on me by the degree of Doctor of Divinity, being conscious of neither scholarship nor learning sufficient for such distinction.

"It must have been offered, I must believe, as an indorsement by the board of the scriptural doctrine in my pictures being trustworthy interpreters, and as such I accept the great honor thankfully from the University that has my love and service, and let it be to me a stimulus more truly to deserve it.

"Yours, very faithfully,

"JOHANNES A. OERTEL."

During the fall he repainted the "Ezekiel's Vision," destroying the original copy made some years before. His experience since the first one was made had taught him that a large canvas, where

so many figures were grouped, should not be painted as it had been. He did not know how to properly handle it then; now he did—and it must be done over entirely.

In the spring of this year his son Fred, who was in the service of the Government, had succeeded in being transferred from New York to Washington and it was deemed best to again bring the family together in the Virginia home.

Accordingly, on October 4, "Owls Roost," as the Vienna house was called because of the propensity of the family to keep late hours, was again occupied, Mrs. Oertel and the grandchildren removing from Bel Air, though Mr. Oertel preferred to remain until he could complete the big picture on which he was then working.

His life while there, alone again, perhaps had best be told as he wrote it in letters to his wife.

October 23. "Day by day," he says, "I toil on, conscious that what at present occupies my heart, mind, and brush is not an unimportant contribution as a witness in behalf of the truth now so wantonly assailed by the modern spirit of anti-Christ. Daily I am bringing out with greater emphasis the supernatural element of the Church of Christ, its God-commissioned founders.

"I am now in hopes that by the end of this year I can close the substantial work on the painting so that little besides harmonizing will have to lap over into 1900; already I leap forward in mind, now and then, to the fourth, and arrange for the upper portion."

On his birthday, November 3, he wrote: "By

right of custom I ought to have sent a birthday remembrance to Fred, if I were not cowed into bashfulness by the ever-recurring confession of poverty by offering a picture. Why, the miserable drug—it's too plentiful and dirt cheap to give hereafter to any of my family. I am sick of them myself. \* \* \*

“As I have the happy faculty of almost as well looking behind as before, I undertook the barber business with my hair *in propriâ personâ*, and succeeded, of course, astonishingly well. Conquering persistent obstacles is one of the chief lessons the many years of life have hammered into me and ‘self-help’ is a prominent article in my creed of existence; or am I too old for unremitting practice: What would become of my art without it?

“I am called on often by visitors to explain the picture, now nearly done. Don't I wish I had the story of the explanation on tinfoil and a phonograph on hand, so that somebody else could grind it out for visitors without the necessity of my presence! What a blessed relief it would be. I think such an apparatus might be employed with benefit even by the Sewanee folk, and perhaps I will make the suggestion. And have I not cause for congratulation that in any event the lugubrious business will by and by pass to others' hands, who, perchance, see things I never dreamed of and embellish the story of redemption in a manner as intelligible and logical as the typical boy composition on ‘the sublime.’

“And now the birthday talk is done with and the light of the day departed and gone. How many

more—or how few—of these days, and what are they to bring of joy or sorrow, and what work to be yet accomplished? There is ever the dark riddle of the Future into which no anxious peering can avail to give knowledge besides the sweet hope a true faith does kindle and keep bright to steer our lives' bark by—and thank God for this. Let us through the darkness be cheered by the Beacon on yonder shore.

“With my picture I am coming on bravely. I am now putting to rights the front of scoffers, and gold and pleasure seekers, the Briggses and Voltaires and Tom Paines in the Church with the gold hunters and stock jobbers and usurers everywhere. When this corner is done and a revision of the Apostles, there remains only a general retouching and harmonizing.”

On January 20 he began to get ready to move and did some packing. “But ah me,” said he, “the accumulation of years. Going over the mass makes me feel a thousand years old, and it is such a sad and dreary reminder of a multitude of people, plans, and associations, all now in the dim and gray past and rising again like ghosts from trodden-down and forgotten graves. To have to rummage in the dust of ages and stir up the remains of long departed days, and think over again faded experiences, and communicate with the spirits that are gone—what a diary it is to read perforce over and feel so many hopes and pangs and disappointments again, and the hot determined struggle with adverse fate and changeful conditions that, after all, got the mastery and shaped one's course so differ-

ent from what was dreamed of and the fond heart had wished.

“A journal kept in words is cruel enough in conjuring up the buried past; but one in the visible forms of art, giving actual shape to each thought and object and clustered full of associations more vivid than speech of any sort is—to the man whose record they are, and who in the course of the years without design to say much has yet said far more than he intended—a most pregnant book of recollections, though no one besides can read as he can the strange cipher of his life.”

So he lived and worked. His letters speak of the many little things done for him by his friends who took pity on his lone condition.

Whatever acquaintance with the people may have developed during seven years' residence among them, sure it is that in no place of sojourning of the Oertel family in their wanderings over the broad land was more personal kindness shown them than by the good people of Bel Air, Md.

He sent a couple of animal pictures “In a New England Quarry” and “A King of the Desert” to the exhibition in Philadelphia, once more tempting the fates. They were accepted and hung but did not sell, and when returned he comments thus:

“It is something for me to be admitted even to the exhibition, considering the gantlet to run of some 20 “judges of selection,” and the hope of a sale is perhaps, all things considered, a crazy one and I am a deluded prehistoric fossil to indulge in it for a moment. By this time I ought fully to understand, taught by experience, that the Lord wants

me to count myself outside the world-crowd of artists, both by aim and practice, and commissioned to do a work apart and which can not be mixed up with the prevailing popular styles of thought, subjects, or execution.

“The naked vixen in the Corcoran Gallery that gave such offense is a common type of the art that now has an applauding public, and I can not be wrong in believing that with the evident decline and degeneration in religion and morals the art also must go down and become more trivial, showy, and given wholly to externals. What the current periodicals show is on the whole a just exponent of what the galleries contain.”

On February 10 he writes that the picture is finished, and goes on to say: “Probably I have made a good picture. I think so myself, now. ‘It is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.’ That is the inside of it. Without He supplying my well, I could never have pumped out of it such a stream of clear water, considering the desert of my surroundings. Where else did it all come from?”

The painting of this picture seemed to tax him greatly. For the first two he had much more preparation and had already made cartoons of the subjects carefully worked out; for this he had only a few sketches. When at last it was done he shows his state of mind and the strain of the work, especially under such conditions as he imposed on himself.

“I am tired,” he writes, “of the howling outside and shaking of windows. I am tired of the cold and snow. I am tired of darning stockings and



mending trousers. I am tired of cooking meals, concocting unheard of dishes, washing pots, thinking about victuals, running to market, and speculating on the next programme. I am tired of bolting eatables in 'solitary confinement.' I am tired of stove shaking and ash dumping and fussing with separating cinders. I am tired of being day and night and all the time between in a lonely hole amidst the same things gaping at me. I am tired of that big canvas and wish it were over the hills and far away. I am tired of being compelled to stare at it and pick out flaws. I am tired of the very idea of having by myself to pack interminable trash and useless rubbish and dearly pay for its removal. I am tired of this bachelor imprisonment and all its cheerless accompaniments, tired of this banishment, and many things more. There! That's a list of some of my grievances! If it is not enough, I can pile on indefinitely; but by this time, I am sure, your pity is sufficiently excited. Any human soul would have compassion on me.

"Now the big canvas finished, I have nothing to absorb my surplus energy and so must growl, at least for the present.

"Some days will have to go by before I can settle down to some other regular work. The carthorse habit, I have to confess, is in my bones, too, perhaps the more so as years increase; for old things and old people get knotty and gnarled and more difficult to move, and the arrival at every successive station exhibits more the desire to stop just there. Plodding like a plow ox is now more to my liking than romping like a pup."

But the "carthorse habit" was too strong to allow him to flag. In a few days he went to work making a frame for the picture so it could be exhibited in Washington, where it was placed (Mar. 8) for a short time in St. John's Hall, going from there direct to Sewanee.

March 18, 1900, the last move of his life was made, and at "Owls Roost" he settled down to spend his remaining years and finish his work in the new studio then being built near the house.

The principal paintings of this year, after the large one was completed, were, "Man" in his record described as "a nude male figure, sitting on a bit of cloud within a large circle of nightly sky, with stars, comet, and a new moon, wonder stricken. Painted for myself as an expression of the mystery of being." It is a remarkable picture. Man, alone in the great universe, naught to show from whence he came or whither he is going, supported only by the bit of cloud and naked. Is not this the position we all occupy? "Easter Morning," the Lord stepping forth from the tomb. This was a life-size figure on canvas 4 feet 9 inches by 9 feet. It was painted for St. Stephen's Memorial Church, St. Louis, Mo.

Under these conditions opened the year 1901. After a life of wandering at last, in his 78th year, he had a home. He could now look with complacency upon the years of toil and trial; he had climbed the height, and from the summit looked down on the devious and rugged path by which he had ascended with a calm and satisfied mind. Over all this he had been led as in climbing a great moun-

tain, from crag to crag, up dizzy heights, over foaming torrents, often well-nigh spent, but with eyes ever on the shining summit and trusting in his Master to help and support from day to day and year to year.

Three of the great works were completed; he was free to go on with the last. Why should he not say "All is well, the spirit of divine wisdom through whom came the thought of these works and who has graciously helped me in the expression knew how to frame what would appeal to the greatest number at least of sincere persons in perfect conformity to scriptural truth. Myself had very little to do with the process except as an instrument."

Early in this year he painted a large canvas, 4 feet 6 inches by 8 feet 3 inches of "Christ Knocking at the Door of the Twentieth Century." Rev. III, 20. This was also presented to the University of the South.

His belief that the end of the dispensation was approaching, that the "last times were at hand" when the great battle of Armageddon would be fought, shows itself again, as in "Charlemagne," by the painting of "Barbarossa" from the well-known legend that in the center of the Plain of Sennheim (or Cernay) beneath a great rock called the "Biblestein" sleeps Frederick Barbarossa who bore the title of the Duke of Alsace. He is shown sleeping with his knights around him, his flaming beard grown through the table on which he leans, "awaiting the hour of destiny, when he will arise and lead the armies of the empire to victory."

On April 16 he sketched the canvas for the last

of the "Series" and for the remainder of the year most of his time was given to that. Mr. Hyde was very enthusiastic over the "Series," and suggested that they should all be exhibited together. Mr. Oertel did not look with favor on the scheme, but consented that Mr. Hyde should request the loan of those already at Sewanee, provided he did so on his own responsibility.

Mrs. Oertel writes: "You do not apprehend the condition of his mind in regard to them. They have been made a gift to the Lord, not to Sewanee; and to try to use them to make money would be to him a sacrilege." However, the trustees of the University were not willing to loan the pictures, so that ended the matter greatly to his satisfaction.

The last of the "Series" was finished early in the year. Much to his delight "Edward" came down from Boston to see it and him and remained about a week. This visit was the greatest pleasure that could have been given him; days they spent in the studio together, these two—Master and pupil—who had clung to each other through the long years.

On June 2, 1902, after his return, Mrs. Oertel wrote him:

"I want you to know that the great work is accomplished! The last canvas was shipped on Saturday last, May 31, and the 50 years agony is over. Laus Deo! Such a long time, and how discouraging it would have been to look forward to if it could have been foreseen.

"What a blessing it is that the impenetrable veil hangs over our future, and how evident the reason of the delay. Even 20 years ago he could not

have made the works what they are now. Will it not be that way when we look back from the battlements of the New Jerusalem, will we not see in so many instances why our ways were overruled as they were, and we were not permitted to walk in the paths we fain would have chosen for our feet?"

After the big picture was sent to Sewanee he took no rest but continued with other designs, producing in succession several important works, a "Rock of Ages" which was presented to Mrs. Kate B. Cannon, of Kansas City, Mo., "The Wandering Jew," and "The Vision of Canaan."

"The Wandering Jew" is an independent interpretation of the legend. The despised Jew has wandered restless for nearly 2,000 years. The sun of the Dispensation is nearly setting. The ruins of the centuries are about him and the sinking sun casts his shadow ahead of him in *Cross form*. The painting expressed the artist's belief that the day of the present Dispensation is very near its close, and the Jew divinely recognizes the time has come to wend his steps back to the land of his fathers, seeking rest and perchance to revive his nationality. Of the truths bringing on the movement he is as yet profoundly ignorant, but a mysterious spirit impels him as the time draws rapidly near when ancient prophecies must be fulfilled.

"The Vision of Canaan" represented Moses where he is shown the promised land that he may not enter. It is a typical scene of wide meaning, of the old and the new covenant, the covenants of law and of grace, of the land this side of the mystical Jordan and the wider land that stretches beyond.

We all occupy a situation like that. We look, by sublime faith, beyond the dividing Jordan flood to our promised land. It is the gracious Lord Himself shows us the way.

This was also presented to the University of the South.

## CHAPTER XVI.

On May 30 the vice chancellor of the University wrote asking him to come to Sewanee and lecture on the "Series" and art. Accordingly, about the middle of June, he went. Those who have followed in this narrative his struggles to attain the end now reached can perhaps to some degree appreciate his feelings as he came before the assembly in Sewanee to tell them of his works, at last completed.

Of this he writes his wife:

"MY DEAR WIFE: It seems months since I left home—the more so because I have heard nothing from you—and yet the time is only one week.

"My usually quiet, uneventful life makes such a change appear like a revolution. Many faces turn up that seemed forgotten and wiped out with our memory of them, and it seems truly strange to have been remembered by them, so many years having passed since our living on the mountain.

"Of course that which touches me is of first interest, and the great event, speaking on my pictures is happily over. A marked success it proved. There was a crowd in the hall, and the board of trustees adjourned their meeting in order to be present. Certainly I never before had so distinguished an interested audience, nor was so warmly and cordially received. It was evident that my

labors were not without fruit, and I thank the Lord for the fruit of my toil. Bishop Gailor, in his happy manner, introduced me, and after concluding my address, which was without reference to my notes except the concluding sentences, the Bishop of Georgia made a call for a vote of thanks which brought all to their feet, and the Bishop of Florida concluded. Since then Dr. Du Bose and many others have spoken to me. But even this is not to be the end. Many desire more information, among them the divinity students, so there is promise that I have not labored in vain. It is certainly true that on the great world-public by my labors I have made very ephemeral impression, and they have practically ignored my doings and left me in poverty and alone. I care not for it. But here is a prospect of usefulness, for it, not fame, I have coveted, nor the gold that perisheth.

“Bishop Gailor also in his address said I had brought art to the mountain and educated a race of carvers in wood. You see the seed is not sown in vain.”

June 29, 1902, the degree of Doctor of Divinity was formally conferred on him by the Bishop of Alabama, and he writes:

“So the august ceremony has confirmed the honorary proclamation of three years ago, and so I am a full-fledged D.D. Wonderful! What would now my little mother say who always regarded me as such an extraordinary specimen under any circumstances? What if she and father and brother Fritz looked on unseen! Who knows?

“Well, perhaps there is more and sounder



theology in my pictures and some of my old lectures than even is known or recognized by the authority that conferred the degree.”

And to this Mrs. Oertel replied July 2:

“So you have come about to the climax of your career, the ‘Great Series’ done and *given away*, and yourself invested with the hood of a Doctor of Divinity. Yes; what would Grossmutter say? But more, what would Fritz say? (His brother Fritz was also a clergyman of the Church.) Well, it is not every man that struggles who is permitted to see the fruit of it all to such an extent, so we will be thankful. The way has been long and stony enough, and the top of the hill seemed unattainable—but you got there.”

It is quite certain these last words were not intended as slang, as probably she had never heard them so used.

July 7 he lectured on the “Revelation of the Beautiful” in the hall where the big pictures had been hung. “So that now the series are together,” he says, “and I also can see the accomplished struggle of many years in one room. It really appears as if your old man, in the evening of his days, were being looked upon as an individual of some importance and might be useful in the world, and that when the great world of art has forgotten my name and existence. It is better so.”

With the works already mentioned the rest of this year was consumed.

An immense amount of work was done during the next year, although considerably broken into by the serious illness of his wife. First came “A

Glimpse of Glory," an old man on top of a ladder, leaning against clouds, eagerly looking over to see what is beyond. He says: "I call it 'Looking in.' Various are the ladders set for us by God's kind providence during our time of training, by means of which we may get a glimpse of glory."

Next he began to repair "The Final Harvest," which showed the effects of time and frequent moves, but after working on it for some days concluded it was not worth it and discarded it entirely, stretched a fresh canvas and repainted it. It was made the same size as the original, in a 6-foot circle, but the canvas was square so the frame could be made so, as the original had been in a circular frame, which was found to be a great disadvantage and very expensive.

There followed "Mary Magdalene Embracing the Foot of the Cross," "The Expulsion from Eden," "Noah's Sacrifice after the Flood," two figures of St. Paul, one of which was sent the Rev. E. L. Hyde with the note, "Keep the painting in memory of your old friend and the delightful visit he had from you." "The Victor," a design treated as statuary, the dead warrior carried from the battlefield upon his shield, according to the Spartan mother's charge to her son when giving him that defensive arm, "Come with it or upon it," since the greatest disgrace to a Spartan was to cast away, in fleeing from the enemy, his shield, and which the apostle, admonishing the Christian warrior, calls "the shield of faith."

In August of this year (1903) he again visited Sewanee remaining about five weeks. He retouched

the big paintings and assisted in taking them down to be photographed.

He delivered six lectures, three to the students and three to the general public. "To the theologians were given what is instructive in the symbolism of the Mosaic Dispensation"; to the public, talks were on "the use of art, the paintings in the Roman Catacombs, and Ary Scheffer."

As the time for his return drew near he wrote his wife: "Now my visit is ending and I go back to hard work, to me the occupation that wears best and pays most. What solace there is in the persuasion that our work of whatever kind is, by devout intention, a God service—be it acknowledged and valued by men or neglected and forgotten. We can do no more in the world of toil and tears than faithfully sow our seed and let the Lord of Heaven, of the rain and the sunshine, take care of it against the day of harvest."

## CHAPTER XVII.

And so he returned to his studio and plunged into work. The main object of his life was accomplished, but he could not rest. His portfolios were filled with designs made in former years but never painted, and his brain continually evolved additional subjects. It was just as if he were driven. Work, work, work unceasingly, grinding out pictures. It was a general family joke how he was filling the studio with them—and they could not be disposed of except as gifts.

From his portfolios came timeworn sketches and designs, and they were rapidly painted; from the walls of house and studio were taken pictures to be revised and worked over according to what he considered the needs of each.

“The time has come with me,” he said, “that instead of constantly rolling out new things, many of them have to be left as sketches or incomplete productions to give accumulations of many years more adequate expression, so that in case they can be brought together they form as it were by a certain continuity of thought a harmonious gallery. I have come where many of the hesitations and timidities or ignorance of former years can be corrected and a good subject redeemed from inadequate expression.”

Immediately after his return he painted another "Rock of Ages" and a Crucifixion "It is Finished," and presented them to St. Mary's House, Sewanee. Then "The King of Truth," the thorn-crowned Christ in purple robe, seated.

Besides these there were many sketches and studies.

As the end of the year approached it seemed to admonish him of the rapid flight of time and his own shortening days and limit for action, and the pressure and speed were increased.

In a letter to Mr. Hyde (Dec. 8), after enumerating the various works produced during the year, he says: "There seems continually in my mind the resolution: '*I must work while it is day.*' How do I know that my strength or life will last very much longer? And, having only a limited measure, solemn duty requires that I crowd it with work to the utmost. My big room is comfortable. You will not have to be informed, by an obituary in the papers, that an old artist with sluggish circulation and more persistency than prudence was found one cold day frozen to an icicle in his too large studio.

"On the contrary, that same persistent individual proposes and expects to do a huge amount of work during the winter months and in spite of the shortened daylight."

It may seem strange to the reader that little is given in this narrative except the "work" done, but what else could be told of one whose life was spent in toil? Friends he had and visited, and a few came to his studio, but in these days, except to a very few, he seemed to grudge the time consumed.

Some little recreation and exercise he allowed himself, and persisted in riding his "wheel" in spite of former mishaps and repeated warnings.

He came to his meals after the bell had been rung several times and he had also been sent for and *told* the bell *had* been rung, and after the meal was over it was always the same "Well, I must get back to my work." He read much, but his mind ran in a rut. He saw in the doings of the world only signs of the approaching "end of the Dispensation," and became almost morbid on the subject. It seemed to him that prophecy was rapidly being fulfilled, and in his reading of current literature he searched out only such things as pertained to that subject.

The last work made in 1903 was a duplicate of "The Holy Grail."

What was done with this painting is not known. During these last years he became very secretive and often when he disposed of a painting, *i. e.*, gave it away, he would say nothing about it even to his wife.

The first thing attempted in 1904 was the painting of "The Death of Saul," or "The Judgment of King Saul," from 1 Samuel 31:36. This was an old composition, made years ago in pencil, which work he describes as "a veritable specimen of laborious exactness and rigid classification of former years." This is 31 by 53½ inches in size and painted in four tints only, from reddish brown to ivory black, and giving the impression of a monochrome.

Then from his easel came in rapid succession



THE DEATH OF SAUL





“Faithful unto Death,” “His First Going to Jerusalem,” “Abel, the Proto Martyr,” “Supper at Emmaus,” and numerous landscape and animal pictures.

To Mr. Hyde he writes, May 1:

“You know how secluded we live, and myself more than my family, the ‘Den’ in which my work is done being my field of toil and conflict; a kind of fate impelling me to work on while the opportunity is given and do my very best, never at rest until means as well as knowledge compel a halt.

“With that spirit driving me on, you need not wonder that yesterday I have again been at the ‘Final Harvest,’ taking out dimness of color and shadows and introducing more light and clearness and brilliancy of tint as it becomes a subject which reaches forward to where the glory of eternity illumines. In consequence the picture has, since you saw it, risen miles above the thick atmosphere we mortals must breathe, and, as to a comparison with the old canvas, it is simply a smoke-begrimed affair not to be mentioned.”

One of the landscapes, “A Storm-tossed Veteran,” is worthy of mention. A most picturesque old chestnut tree, lighted by the evening sun, behind it a storm cloud sinking away, and a piece of rainbow; on one side a yellow grain field with the grain shocked upon it, in the foreground a large limb freshly torn from the tree.

On July 5 the following formal acknowledgment of his gifts to the University of the South were received:

“UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH,

“SEWANEE, TENN., *July 5, 1904.*

“REV. J. A. OERTEL, D.D.,

“*Vienna, Va.*

“REV. AND DEAR SIR: I have the honor to transmit to you a copy of a resolution passed by the board of trustees at its recent session:

“‘Resolved, That the thanks of the board are hereby tendered to the Rev. J. A. Oertel, D.D., for the valuable paintings during the past year presented to the University, placing us under renewed obligations to our venerable friend for his many valuable gifts to the University.’

“I am, dear Doctor, with great respect, very faithfully yours,

“JAS. G. GLASS,

“*Secretary of the Board of Trustees.*”

It is to be regretted that for lack of space more extracts from his letters can not be given, especially those written to Mr. Hyde, to whom he was wont to express his ideas on art and religious subjects more fully than to anyone else, as, for instance, when he says:

“Our art has been for such a length of time wild and wayward experiment, the chasing after the novel and strange, that solid advance on lines of truthfulness has been impossible. The fever condition can only be followed by exhaustion. The high-pressure tension cannot be kept up for ever. It will wear itself out. Art, to grow and improve, must have contemplative repose.

“In this matter also I believe the point of crisis has been nearly reached and experiment has exhausted itself. To my judgment magazine illustrations are a fair and quite infallible proof of decline. Straws show which way the wind blows.”

The last work finished this year was a subject

that had waited over 30 years for him to have the time to give it expression, "The Church Militant," a canvas 41 by 64 inches. The Israelites on the holy war, the Conquest of Canaan, Joshua leading, priests with the sacred trumpets, Judah with the banner, insignia the lion and a star, Benjamin, Dan, and others. The Shekinah, overhead, the light of the picture.

Early in 1905 he presented a painting to "Dr. Bernardo's Homes, National Incorporated Association for Reclamation of Destitute Waif Children," London, England, but neither his record nor letters from the secretary of the association, acknowledging its receipt, state what it was.

Then came "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus." "This," he says, "is painted with a palette of great simplicity, having only a touch of yellow in it in one spot. It has a sleepy light, a different sentiment from others of my pictures, for why should not the color key correspond as much with the inherent character of a painting as form, action, and expression?"

In the evening he spent much time in carving and made two lions carved in oak for the episcopal chair of Bishop Leonard, of Ohio.

Next came "Moses, with Aaron," invoking the plagues over Egypt; not the plague of darkness only, as in the monochrome formerly painted. The background was changed from the dark sky to Pharaoh's palace and relieved the figures dark against the light, giving increased power and more mystery and suggestion. Of this he writes Mr. Hyde:

"Another added to the many unsalable can-

vases? Yes, indeed; well I know it. But what can a mortal do against Fate? I am doomed—or honored—to paint unsalable pictures, as my namesake (Simon) was to preach an unpopular doctrine of repentance to ‘Scribes and Pharasees’ many centuries ago. Not only so, but verily there must be attached a secret sign, or a smell, or other warning, to my pictures; that a believer, a ‘Christian dog’ has painted them, lacking the prophesied ‘Mark of the Beast’ (Rev. 13: 16-17), and so they are persistently unsalable.

“Yes, you know your old friend is a quite headstrong heretic with the world, in sharp antagonism with her ways, and, what is more altogether uncontrovertible, to her modes of thought and action.

“I think we might as well give up the effort to bring his pictures into market, be they religious, landscape, or animal, for all are stamped with a seal the world flatly refuses to acknowledge as current in her dominion.

“It is evident that my work, whatsoever its merit, is prevented from a display in the great exhibits of the world, and my name from taking a place among the lauded ones and honored by success.

“Let us drop all further effort in that direction. With a thousand thanks for your willing kindness and inquiry, relinquish further attempts.”

The above was written after an offer to loan the “Ezekiel” to the National Metropolitan Museum in New York had been refused.

In August he made another visit to Sewanee to varnish the big pictures, and then returned to his

studio, revising previous works and going on with new ones. Among those revised were "The Twelve Apostles," each on separate canvas, destined for an altar piece for the chapel of the theological department at Sewanee, the center being a crucifixion with the words underneath—"We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." "This," he says, "is a constant admonition to the students who worship there what is the purpose of their future calling."

Pictures were now piled all about him and stacked in rows against his walls, and yet he worked on. At times the humorous side of this struck him and he would joke about it. One of his letters to Mrs. Oertel at this time is written on a sheet of paper headed "Treasury Department," and he adds "of pictures, Vienna, Va.," and then he says: "The above is a description of a rightful title, or a flattery, according to one's personal view of the place from whence this is written (his studio).

"If money alone is treasure, or jewels, or other goods valued for their money's worth, then this poor room of mine has a low money standard indeed. However, if my canvases were valued like that of Chase's dead codfish, then I added only yesterday about \$400 worth to my collection by the painting of a bunch of grapes. In the twilight last evening the painting could not be distinguished from the model alongside."

November 3 he reached his eighty-third year,

but with health and vigor he kept steadily on. On this day he said:

“Another birthday! and a most memorable one. Is it on a down-grade, as the world thinks; or an up-grade, toward the golden portal of life everlasting?”

“Why not rather take the quick-fleeting years in the latter sense?”

In December he was called to Bel Air, Md., to see about an altar, reredos, and credence table desired by the people of Emmanuel Church to harmonize with the pulpit and lectern he made for that church while living there.

For the sake of serving the Church his resolution to do no more mechanical work and elaborate carving was broken. He never cared to do that kind of work, as it consumed so much time, and less thought could be expressed than on canvas. He was asked to give advice and make designs for the work. “All very well and easy for me, to be sure,” he writes, “but who that is competent would carry out my designs for less than a mint of money, and such a ‘mint’ the donors do not have, nor would be willing to spend. What, therefore, remained? Why, plainly that I make the articles myself.”

And so it was that at this age he once more plunged into the laborious task of constructing and carving in wood.

The credence table was first undertaken. On this he worked from early morning until late at night, as he wrote, “cutting or knocking chips from solid oak in the fashioning of an elaborate credence table; grapes and wheat grow from hard wood two



CREDENCE TABLE  
Emmanuel Church, Bel Air, Md.





inches thick, in many places cut clean through. Lamb and Geissler furnish no such carving, except perhaps for a mint of money. But then 'this 'ere child' is under the dominion of a different principle." This table is an elaborate structure some 7 feet high and 2 wide, of oak and cherry, deeply carved and all put together by his own hand.

This was work which should not have been undertaken at his time of life and with failing strength and sight, but no work was ever too arduous for him to undertake if he deemed it right to do so, and once undertaken it was pushed with all the energy and strength of his nature.

So with this, he was "up and at it" at 6 a. m. and far into the night could be heard the strokes of his mallet as he "cut away what should not be there."

"Were you ever a slave to your work?" he asks. "It is now my experience. This mechanic labor can not be done but by steady application, especially in the hands of an amateur, for I am no better. It is strange that I should have been led to undertake so much of it. But it was almost exclusively for churches. All I have now to do has come to me unsought, therefore, how could I reject it? Doing God's work is not only painting religious pictures. He is truly served by anything that can in good conscience be done in His name, as Luther has it when he speaks of a pious servant girl laboriously scrubbing the floor. Were it not so, small comfort would there be for the Christian drudges the world over!"

As he proceeded, this task become more and

more irksome. He longed to get back to his easel, and during the first months of 1906 he aged perceptibly. It was impossible to make him talk of anything cheerful. He could only see the signs of the "last times" and the terrible consequences which were to follow.

It was the same story which has been repeated with every piece of woodwork he had ever done, very easy to make the elaborate design, but the work it was going to take to execute it not considered. In June there came to him the great trouble of his life; the one who had stood by his side through all the struggle of life and had been his help, his comfort, his adviser and critic, who had encouraged and cheered where the way was darkest, and rejoiced with him when success crowned his efforts, his wife, was stricken with what from the first was known to be a fatal illness, though she lingered for many months.

This blow came when he was in no condition to bear it. Physically he had gone down under the strain of carpentering and carving 10 and 12 hours daily for nearly 7 months, yet he did not spare himself but kept up the pace set until the work was completed—the last of July. No sooner was his room clear of this work than he began painting on a canvas some 7 feet in length by 3 feet high, "The School of the Prophets," the design and color sketch of which were made in Florida. This, "The Sun of Righteousness Arising," "John the Baptist as a Young Man Watching," and several landscapes were completed before the end of the year.

In the meanwhile, November 8, he received a

letter from the Rev. Wyllys Rede, D.D., dean of the Cathedral at Quincy, Ill., saying that it was intended to place therein a memorial reredos and if possible he would like to have him undertake the work.

He replied telling of the 7 months of laborious work on the Bel Air reredos, and of his renewed resolve not to do any more of the kind, being now in his eighty-fourth year. "But," he says "here comes your letter. Should I positively decline?" At first he seriously considered accepting the work, but was forced to the conclusion that he was no longer able to accomplish so great a task.

However, in his reply to Dr. Rede he suggested that while he could not do the work he could make the design. He told him of the "Final Harvest," which would make a suitable center piece, and sent a rough sketch of what in his judgment would be suitable as framing. This design included plans for the other paintings, the Christ above "The Final Harvest," "the representative apostles of Jew and Gentile on either hand," all to be life size. "This," he says, "I could do, insuring to the whole absolute unity of design and character."

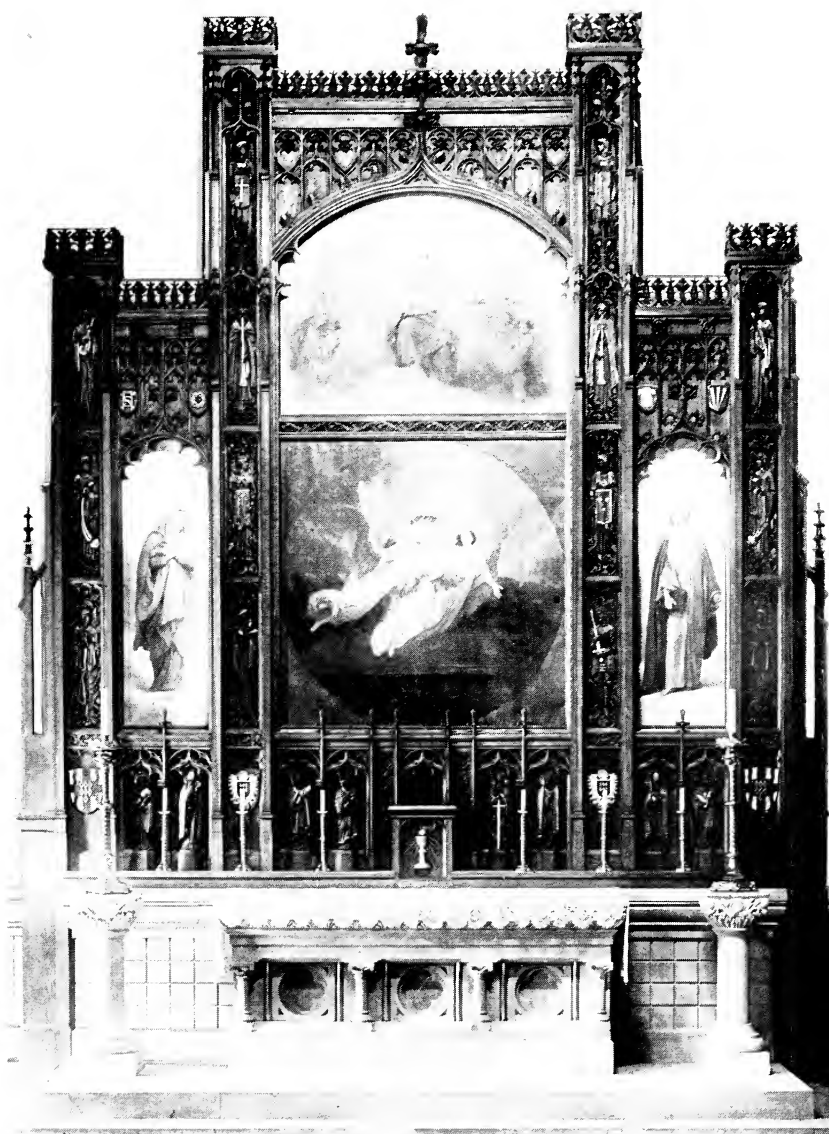
His offer as to compensation for all this was characteristic. Of the sum they had set apart they would pay for the woodwork and he would *take what was left*, "not for my own but for my children's sakes." Thank God at this time he did not need it—but he must still give.

Soon after his eighty-fourth birthday he began painting "The Burial of Moses." This represented the train of angels coming flying through a

defile in the mountains, Michael leading the procession—the body of Moses supported by four angels, our Lord holding the head—The Law buried by the Gospel. This, he believed, would be his last work. Ever since coming to this country certain numbers had ruled and reoccurred with unvarying regularity, the numbers 4 and 7 especially so. The belief that important changes would occur on these periods was as strong in his mind as that the sun would rise and set at the proper time. “Three times already,” he writes, “a period of 7 years in one place have happened, the *fourth* comes to the full next spring. Seven years since I moved from Bel Air and began work in this room. The seven years in it will not, it is my belief, be exceeded; something will happen to fit these seven years to my former singular experience. What? I know not, but a change I look for.

“My own labors in carrying out God-given ideas are coming to a close. I am now painting “The Burial of Moses.” I have no plans beyond that. Moreover, my health, so wonderfully good for the last 20 years is giving way, and no medical treatment has effected any betterment. Am I not to conclude that my days on earth are near the evening hour, that it were best to put my house in order, and indeed I have begun doing that.”

He was confident that the mystic seven would not be broken, nor was it, though the “change” was not what he expected. He was buried in his work and his mind filled only with it, and perhaps it was for this reason he could not see the change which was soon to come and which others could



REREDOS IN THE CATHEDRAL, QUINCY, ILL.



see was impending. Mrs. Oertel was slowly sinking; bright and cheerful on her bed of pain, she was still the light and life of the house as she had ever been. Her mind was still bright and active, a marvel to all who saw her; but it was only too evident to every one but him—that the end must come soon.

The design for the reredos at Quincy and the “Final Harvest” were sent on late in December (1906) and on January 3, 1907, Dr. Rede wrote him to proceed with the other three paintings.

This seemed to rouse him from the morbid condition of mind into which he had drifted; even his physical condition improved, and he began to work with all his old time dash and vigor.

The central (top) picture was about completed by the last of January. “It was not an easy subject to treat becomingly,” he says; “the Saviour on clouds receiving the fruits of His Redemption from the harvest field, the Holy Spirit above Him in the blaze of light coming from the Father, invisible above, but suggested strongly as a Presence; while on either side the suppressed light is filled with a multitude of adoring angels.”

In the midst of this work came the looked for “change” of the seventh year. It were best to take his own words to describe this, and its effect on him. To his friend “Edward” he wrote, February 13, 1907:

“First of all may I not have your forgiveness for the seeming neglect of letting you know at once of the departure to heavenly mansions of my dear wife on Wednesday, February 6, at 10:30 a. m.

She was laid to rest in the cemetery the day following.

“You know she had been ill since June of last year; \* \* \* it was a case of final wearing out and we buried a veritable skeleton. Under such conditions how could we be anything but thankful when at last came the release? On the day of sepulture I myself was so ill that to venture out of the house to the church and burial I dare not, so they carried the body to its resting place without me. \* \* \* Of course the face of nature has changed for me. We have been companions so long. Her departure seems unreal—difficult to take home—and I have had to go over the fact so often in answering letters of condolence; the story was stamped deeper with each note.

“Yet I am looking at the bereavement from the upper, the skyward side. It is not depressing to me, but the opposite. The will of my Lord and master is the best. I understand the conditions of human life, know the Christian’s promises, believe in the eternal God’s faithfulness. What more is needed for perfect consolation? Not the dream of a doubt is there ever in my heart—and therefore I travel on. Only a short piece of road will bring us to the same entrance into Paradise. \* \* \* In a strange manner I feel the ground from under me, as it were, moving away. The present physical world seems shifting and changing the relation of things, and the spiritual makes up the real substance—a present reality.”

Indeed it seemed that the “piece of road” would be short. He was very ill on the day of the funeral,



and the doctors gave no hope of his recovery, believing that a week at most would see the end. Instead of this he improved, and when some days later his son, Dr. T. E., left for his home in Augusta, Georgia, he went with him. It was hoped he would remain there some time and rest; but he could not, would not rest. The fire was still burning, the sun still shone, and, while it was yet day, he must work.

The life in Augusta was new to him; he cared not to meet strangers or to make friends. He had lived so long in the seclusion of his studio in the country with his works around him that it had become his life, a part of himself. He must return to it to spend his remaining days—work in it so long as strength permitted and die in harness.

He would not even wait to announce his coming by letter; no, he must go *at once*, and go he did, sending a telegram saying only “I have left Augusta; home to-morrow.”

When he returned his condition was such that it did not seem possible for him to do any work, but he went at once to his studio and was soon hard at it again, and began at the same time to improve in health and spirits. He could even joke—as in writing of the sale of an animal picture he said: “He carried away a pair of Devon steers, giving me only a piece of paper with his name signed. I was willing to make the exchange, for that kind of oxen may some day come back to me on another canvas *when the price of beef goes up.*”

The pictures for the Quincy Cathedral were finished, “Christ in Glory,” 4 by 6 feet, the central piece for the top of the reredos, and “St. John the

Evangelist" and "Mary the Virgin," each 2 by 7 feet for the side panels.

After this he contented himself with painting small figure pieces, landscapes, and animals of which some 25 or 30 were made by midsummer. The only important works produced during the rest of the year were two figures on separate canvases 18 inches by 3 feet 6 inches of "The Saints John." These were painted for his son, to be presented to the Grand Lodge A. F. & A. M. of Virginia, and they now hang in the Temple at Richmond.

The family now was scattered, only himself and son Fred remaining at "The Roost," and as his son was absent all day at business his time was spent alone in his room painting, reading, and writing. The idea that the "last times" were rapidly approaching was uppermost in his mind and in every letter—in fact every conversation—it was the theme.

To what it may point is of course a matter of opinion, but certainly he saw clearly the general demoralization of the world and society. "When I glance over the newspapers from day to day," he writes, "it does appear to me that the condition of mankind is rushing up with positive madness to the climax point of moral corruption and absolute godlessness, page upon page being filled with accounts the very names of which leave a smirch upon the unwilling soul.

"How can a race handling such literature remain pure and in unsullied godly frame? Moral corruption receives such constant food. To me no stronger argument is needed to prove we are com-

ing to the final 'dumping point'." What would he say to-day, and what have been the effects of this literature upon the mind and heart of the American public? Was he not right?

Repeatedly he said he would never again undertake any large work, but as spring came on (1908) he repainted "It is Finished" and later, when a call came from a church for several large canvases he undertook the work and went at it as he might have done 20 years before. These were for a church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, "Christ and Moses," the law-giver of the new and old dispensations.

They were over life size and much of them had to be painted while standing on a ladder. They were painted in 24 days and when his son expressed surprise at the progress from day to day he said: "I ought to be able to work fast after over 70 years of experience." No place seemed to be touched twice. Every brush full of paint went on where it should be the first time, and the work grew while one gazed. It was the hand and brain of the Master. In a letter written for the Providence, R. I., library early in 1909, his son said:

"Since the completion of these works he has not attempted anything of special note, and, by reason of failing strength, perhaps never will, but the un-failing courage and tenacity of purpose have won and though the years of youth and manhood were passed without the accomplishment of his 'life work,' it was at last done, and the message he wished to leave the world is before it. Now he lives among his many paintings and studies which crowd his large studio—satisfied—and only waiting for

the call, and to hear the 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'!"

"Few indeed there are who could say as he did, 'I have accomplished all I had planned to do.' The amount he did do was prodigious, and it is almost unbelievable that one man could have accomplished so much. Only the more important works have here been mentioned, not including the hundreds of animal, landscape, still life, portraits, and marines or steel engravings and drawings on wood which at various periods consumed much of his time."

His record of works produced during the years 1854 to 1909 (nine years no record kept) shows a total for the 46 years of 1,183 major works.

He worked in all branches of his profession, steel engraving, drawing, modeling, carving in wood, and painting in oil and water color, and in each executing with equal facility landscapes, animals, figures, marine, and still life. "But," as he said, "why not?" If the knowledge, and ability to execute one form, why not others?

As to his landscapes, Halsey C. Ives, standing before one of them in the Nashville studio, said: "If George Innes had painted that it would be one of his best." In animal painting his work was often classed with that of Rosa Bonheur and Landseer; his figure pieces, both as to composition and form have few equals; in his marine paintings, of which he made less than of any other class, note the power and beauty of "After the Struggle, Peace," and in still life is to be

seen a close attention to detail and most delicate handling of color.

In a letter to the *Sunday Post* in 1884 Charles Lanman wrote:

“It is now about 20 years since I expressed the opinion that, in the higher characteristics of art, Mr. Oertel was without a peer in the United States, and that opinion remains unchanged. It was founded on his rare abilities as a draftsman; his consummate knowledge of the human form; his powers of grouping figures in large numbers and thereby depicting ideal scenes teeming with thought and instruction, and his thorough knowledge of color.

“His skill in portraiture is also unusual; and his gifts as a painter of animals are simply marvelous. It has seemed to me, indeed, while looking through his portfolios, that there was no end to the variety of his studies, all of them teeming with beautiful thoughts and always betokening a most lofty purpose.

“CHARLES LANMAN.”

Sunday Post, 1884, Washington, D. C.

This “knowledge of the human form,” it may be said *all* form, was truly remarkable. In the execution of all his complicated figure pieces he never used a “model.” Once in a while he would call his wife or one of the children into the studio and pose them for a short time and, as he said, the glass often served him; but save for this, models he had none, nor needed them. In carving as well as painting he needed no copy; grapes, wheat, flowers, foliage and even figures cut in the round, came into being with no guide whatever save perhaps a few charcoal scrawls when first cutting into the wood.

He was a terse and thoughtful writer and an impressive and forceful speaker. His lectures and sermons bear evidence of careful study and

thorough knowledge of his subject. His language, spoken or written, was always carefully selected and expressive.

Although playing an important part in his life his work as a clergyman was subordinate to his art, or, it may be said, a part of it. His services in that capacity were so far as possible a free gift, and would have been entirely so but for the stern necessity of making a living for self and family. Even where compensation was accepted there is no instance where it was not returned tenfold in artistic work.

In his book "record of works produced" no special one is mentioned for the year 1909 although he was busy for the first eight months; instead is written:

"Some of my previously painted pictures, set aside as completed, I have taken up again to work over more carefully, correcting and strengthening many parts, so that the pictures become practically new ones and so the time given was usefully spent.

"But the confession has to be made, now in my eighty-seventh year of life, I do, after all, not work any more with the same dispatch as in the earlier times. There is more deliberation, less hurry, more critical severity than in former times, and so the works show no decline and in certain respects they are more deliberate. Thanks to God for all His help to the old man. May He in His grace receive my humble offering."

This is the last entry made in the book. His work was done.

He saw but few people this last year, and did not

go out at all except on Sunday evenings, which he often spent with Prof. Edwin Wiley and his wife at their bungalow near by. They were his best friends, knew of his aims and the work of his life, and to them he could talk on art, literature, and religious subjects, feeling himself understood and appreciated. Toward the last his mind failed; he could not remember faces or names, at one time even mistaking his son for Professor Wiley. Only a few weeks before the end Bishop Alfred Harding, of the Diocese of Washington, to whom he had expressed his desire to present certain of his works through him to the cathedral being built in Washington, came out to see them. When informed of the Bishop's coming he did not realize for what purpose and asked, "Does he hold service here today?" However, he dressed and went to the studio to meet him.

Once there among his cherished works all trace of bodily or mental weakness seemed to leave him and he appeared transfigured. His face shone as with a celestial light as he showed each picture and explained its meaning. Those present who knew his physical condition looked on in wonder and awe. His body and mind were incapable of the action displayed; it was his spirit, his soul that now spoke and moved among them; and when he stood with bowed head to receive the blessing of the bishop they almost expected him to be caught up to meet his Master as he had believed he might be—so utterly unlike a thing of earth and so ethereal and angelic did he appear.

After the bishop had gone he did not remember

his visit, and soon relapsed into his former semi-conscious condition.

By his expressed request three large paintings were later presented to the cathedral at Washington—"It is Finished," "The Burial of Moses," and "The Church Militant."

He lived now only in the past, speaking daily of his old friends, his father, brother, wife, and always ending with "They are all gone; it is time for me to go; I am ready." So he patiently awaited the call of the Master he had served so long and faithfully. It came December 9, 1909.

On the night of the 8th he slipped and fell, breaking his hip. The shock was more than his weakened condition could bear, and after a few hours he lapsed into unconsciousness and passed away quietly, just 24 hours after the accident.

And now the story is told. The aim has been to give history and description rather than criticism, and the object to set before the reader a Christian artist, a painter of *ideas*; always a good draughtsman and rich and fertile in composition, he later became a good painter, though he scorned the affectations of the fashion of the day and adhered to solid and substantial work. His aim was too honest to permit him to descend to artistic tricks by which to draw attention to his doings. If his works are received at all it must be for their intrinsic merit first, because of what they say to the heart and soul of the beholder; and second, because technically they are full of conscientious study. And it must be that when vague impressionism and trifling decorative art has had its day these works of noble



purpose will find an appreciative public and have a strong hold upon the affections of the true lover of American art.













