

Statuary and Painting No 4

We have not heard it whispered, lisped, hinted or insinuated at ever that these ~~new~~ speculations on the imitative arts are ^{absurd} too metaphysical for a News Paper, even at this picture-gazing season of the year; yet the writer more than suspects it to be the case. ~~before~~ ^{mind} A certain cultivated circle who have paid attention to the Fine Arts, and shall say no more after this number, but shall recommend the subject to some abler pen, and younger hand and shall, and shall ~~ever~~ condense what rests on his mind in the fewest words, without being scrupulous about the ^{exact} order unrearing period, and the time for commandments ^{yet given} the inside of our houses & gardens is not or shadecously nice in expression. We live in a down-pulling & rapidly up ^{way}

The heaviest burden on my mind may be known by ~~this~~ ^{any} answer that I prefer the school of Rubens, Van Dyke, Rembrandt, and Van Helst, or in one word, the Flemish or Dutch-school, being two names for one and the same body of Painters, to that of the Italian, generally speaking, as having more of Nature and less of Romance. The great Italian masters, Angelo, Raffaelle, Titian and Corregio, may be compared to Dante, Ariosto, Milton, and Shakspear taken as a whole, for we can pick out of them finer passages, and grander views than from any others; and these are transposed to painting, they constitute a style so splendid and expansive with all as not to be suited to the age of the art in this country, whereas the school of the Netherlands, occupying that small but fertile tract extending from Amsterdam to Brussels, including, beside those just mentioned Teniers, Vandervelde, Jan Steen, Van Huysum, and several others celebrated for their close copying of nature, by staying at home and painting with wonderful precision what they saw before ^{them} while the Italians painted subjects which their eyes never saw, except the "mind's eye" in imagination.

Painting is a delicate plant rising out of the ground from a pregnant seed sown in a good and congenial atmosphere where it is unfolded by degrees, and grows up slowly, step by step, first a miniature-leaf, then a tender shoot, a stem, next a stalk, whence spring lints, branches and twigs, and lastly Milton's "bright consummate flower." These are the regular steps of vegetation in producing its consummation a flower and fruit, and so it is in the growth of the artist's genius, provided he has air and sunshine: not but what some plants, like some painters grow in the shade, and that better ^{than}

than in a hot sun, as was the case with Rembrandt, a Dutch painter of great celebrity, who had an amazing power of imitating whatever was set before him. In taking likenesses, he was so exact in distinguishing the features and character, that his portraits appeared to be alive, and starting from the canvas. He had but little instruction from others, and owed his superior skill to the strength of his ~~natural~~ natural genius and great industry. He painted at first with great labor and pains but acquired at length great freedom and rapidity. He brings to mind one of our artists, too little known in his native place, yet Massachusetts never produced a better portrait painter. He exercised his pencil alone and unassisted on the backs and pannels of coaches before he attempted the human head. The young painter had heard of a palette but never saw one, and therefore invented one, by making holes in a piece of board in which he made holes to receive as many sennets tresses brass-thimbles in which he put his colours, and with this rude apparatus he made his essays on the human face, but he did not know how or where to begin, whether at the chin or the forehead; so he guessed, and guessing right he began at the forehead, and painted it with all his skill, he stroked the hair over it; then he painted the nose, next the eyes, leaving the mouth and chin to the last; and on going over the whole he made to those about him a wonderful likeness.

When this young and very diffident painter went with palpitating heart and trembling knees with his first head to Gilbert Stuart, he humanely advised him not to pursue it; for the great portrait painter saw as little into the powers of the young Charlestown coach varnisher as Fuseli saw into the powers of Stuart, when he said "De Young man had a cold leg." James Frothingham however ventured to carry another head from Charlestown through Boston on to the neck, where Stuart then resided, when the great artist perused it, and then perused the young aspirant, and then said to him "Young man, you yourself do not know how well you have done this!" Mr Stuart expressed a wish to see more of his productions, and they were occasionally shewn to him, when he one day observed to his son Charles, — This young man's colouring

colouring reminds me of Jenkins." In 1810, ~~and~~^{but not on the 1st} our crack painter carried a fresh painted head from Charlestown to Boston-neck to his polar star in the art, when Stuart said to him - "Mr Frothingham, there is no painter in Boston but myself who can paint so good a head as this;" and he gave him from time to time such information and remarks as he thought would benefit so promising an artist, and the effect of it has been that there is no painter in the United States whose portraits approach so near to those of Gilbert Stuart, as those from the pencil of James Frothingham, and yet this Boston painter has not been remarkably fortunate in the reception of his portraits in our Athenaeum gallery, chiefly owing we believe to his own diffidence. We know of but three portraits in this neighborhood from the pencil of the New-England Rembrandt*. It is in painting as in the theatre, to act very well requires the stimulus of applause. It is the sunshine of the artist. The Philadelphians deem it the highest sign of approbation to look and listen to an actor in respectful silence. They have been led into this mistake by the manners, principles, and habits of their forefathers, who worshipped in silent meetings, and had no idea of that grateful cordial, thundering applause, the meat and drink and vital air - yea, sunshine of ambition, without which the delicate plant of genius, wilts, withers, fades and dies.

I have adduced this instance of a Charlestown-neighbor to shew that we Americans need not quit home to learn how to paint our fellow-creatures. But some may say, we in this new, raw region never saw a Jupiter, Jeno, or Apollo very true, and nobody else; and as to the European King and Queen of Heaven, and their handsome God of day, and the most beautiful Goddess of love, we can pick out as good samples in our cities, and in our deep, and boundless forests as are to be found among the stones and incrustations of the old world, and should we fail in these searchs, we can imagine them to our taste. The demi-God Hercules is not to our taste. He comes not up to the New-England idea of heroic labor. We prefer the Horse to the Rhinoceros or Elephant. It is time we ^{were} weaned ourselves from our idolatry of the old world.

There is a pretty close analogy between the study of Medicine and of Painting. Both are encumbered by a multiplicity of verbal rules. Medical anatomy is overloaded with terms, and so is the nosological part of the same art and science; and painting can hardly move along under the heavy load of verbal directions. Sir Joshua Reynolds himself appears in his annual Academic Discourses hardly able to get along with them. His twelfth discourse is a striking example of it, which, though very ably written, contains no absolute rules of instruction, or method of study, which seems to amount to vain attempt to teach the art of feeling after the manner of Rhetoricians, who presume to teach the art of the passions. That a young man struck by a passion for painting should at the great expense of time and money, quit his natale solum, and sail over 4000 miles of ocean to learn how to represent on canvas his fellow men, or animals, and trees, fields mountains, rivers, and the distant sky, can be likened only to him who shall make the same sacrifices, and endure the same degree of labor to learn how to manage and cure the diseases of people, born and dwelling in his own neighborhood. Some of the best physician, the world was ever blessed with remained always at home; and some of the very best painters, and sculptors never strayed from it. Rembrandt was born in a mill, close beside the walls of the city of Leyden. There he learnt the science of colors, and how to spread his palette, and his hard faced mother was his primary model, and she gave the predominant cast to his wonderful specimens of the art. In taking likenesses, he was so very exact in distinguishing the predominant feature and character of every face, and copied his models in so plain and faithful a manner, that his portraits appear alive and starting from the canvas. Had he visited Italy, it is not probable he would have risen to the rank he maintained in the world of painters. His historical paintings of Ahasuerus, Esther and Haman are splendid examples of his powers of painting. His invention was fertile, his imagination lively, and his execution, at length, very rapid. His etchings wonderfully fine, and bearing the highest price.

Corregio made his exquisite paintings before he stirred from home, & was at a small village in the Duchy of Modena. Towards the close of his life, when he saw for the first time the works of the most famous of the Italian artist; after contemplating them awhile, in silence, he exclaimed - "I am, also, a painter!" From the history of all the great Painters, Italian as well as Flemish or Dutch, two names for the same people, it appears that an eager desire to excel, will more than supply the place of method.