
THE GALLERY.

[We had many things to say in this Number concerning art and its works and its workmen, but an unlooked for amount of matter of foreign contribution has constrained us, were it only through courtesy, to exclude the home-made. But we will draw one paper out of our folio, at the risk of depriving it of some of its grace by detachment from its chapter, that our Journal may not go quite without homage to the laws of Fine Art; for "Art," as Dr. Waagen writes, "is an expression of the mind, whose peculiar character cannot be supplied by anything else."]

Ho, Amico! Stop a moment, and let me have a word or two with you. I was in Concord yesterday; and talking about pictures. W— said we must have some account of the Gallery, and asked me to write it for him. But I knew myself too well to write with anything but the brush, and so they carried it by acclaim that you must do it for them.

Amico. Proh Jupiter! I do it for them! Why, my dear Pictor, I have been running away from pictures I know not how long, and they seem destined to be my bane. For my sins once upon a time I set up for a critic. I had done a great deal better to have written a book. *Then* I did not care whose glass was broken, and I went about decrying daubers, and preaching up art. Many were the aggrieved, many the ladies offended that their *soft pictures* were pronounced emphatically *rather too soft*;—and as to the artists, it is only with the new generation that I begin to be upon speaking terms. And besides, what good did I ever do by it?

Pictor. Yes, but then you were in your youthful extravagance. "Aut hoc aut nihil" was your watchword;—you have now more patience with mediocrity?

Amico. My young friend, you call yourself a painter. Nay

more, you delight to be called Artist. Now lay this close to your heart; if you accept mediocrity, you shall have mediocrity, and nought else.

Pictor. Here we are at the door of the Gallery; shall we go in?

Amico. As you will.

Pictor. Now look around you, Amico. Here are a hundred or two of pictures;—not one of them that was painted without some thought. Each was a striving towards expression; each an attempt to embody the ideal. Now is it philosophical to throw them aside *en masse*? Nay, if you are a true critic, does not each demand of you, that you shall divine its law, and judge it thereby?

Amico. I must confess, not being an artist myself, I am not sure how far each picture is an attempt, or striving of the kind you name. But let me ask a few questions of you as to this process of creation. Here are two pictures of your own now, the "Neapolitan Girl" and the "Old Oak Tree." Which of these two is your favorite?

Pictor. The Girl is the last, and the last conquest is always the dearest;—but before I had painted that, I loved the Old Oak better than any of my pictures. But then there is a reason for that. Two years ago, before I had fully determined to be a *bonâ fide* painter, I went into Berkshire with E——, who is now in Europe, to spend the College Vacation. Now besides being a poet, E—— has of all persons I ever saw the most farsighted eye into nature, and I may truly say he opened my eyes. This huge pasture was our favorite resort. As you see in the picture, there is no fence in sight, so that it is as good as if there were none in the world. You see these bare hills covered with warm brown grass, and here and there with stunted bushes, on which the shadows skip so beautifully, — that bold ridge covered with pine trees, that stands out far beyond the rest of the range into the valley, and round whose base the river winds, — and that fortunate old mill, whose position makes it as invaluable as a castle in the landscape. Well, I know not how it happened, but those were most happy days for us;—each morning we would start with our sketch-books and our dinner, and make our way to this old, scathed, and leafless oak; and whatever point in the horizon attracted us, thither we went; and sometimes were gone for days, as occurred when we went to that blue mountain in the distance. I know not if it were the clear mountain air we breathed, or the sympathy and affection that bound us together, but I have never before or since experienced the serene happiness of those days. I have been ever since struggling with the world and life, and poor E——, the gentle, the ten-

der-hearted, has been cheated of the future upon which, like a spendthrift, he lived so prodigally. I suppose something of my sad feeling has crept into the picture.

Amico. Well;—and now about the other picture? I shall be surprised if it has as long a story.

Pictor. I confess it has not. It was a head sketch from a sitter, because I thought it graceful,—and finished because I thought the sketch good. But don't you like it? Do you not think it a great improvement in my coloring?

Amico. Friend, I care not for your coloring, at least not now. When you painted the old oak, you were a man. The world opened before you in those days, as it should every day. Feeling as you did then, you could not but paint.

Pictor. But my good Amico! Would you have me walk upon stilts all the time? Or should I paint any better, because I live *tête exaltée*?

Amico. Were you upon stilts then?

Pictor. I should be an apostate to all my better feelings to say I was. But such states are involuntary. They are the gift of the gods.

Amico. Now, O my friend! you have touched the root of the matter. You want *faith*, without which was no great character ever built up, no great work achieved. And, Pictor, you may paint till you reach threescore and ten, and you may please yourself with the idea that you are forming a style, or adding to your knowledge of color, but unless you have faith, you shall not be saved. And now you may understand why I demur, as to our being called on to criticise every painting according to its law.

Pictor. But surely you do not contend that the painters, as a class, have been of that high and severe character you demand of us.

Amico. "The painters as a class" I do not speak of, but the artists,—the men who created art. Most painters think they have done enough when they have acquired all the age can teach them. To the Artist this is but the Alphabet wherewith he shall teach the age.

Pictor. But you demand that we should all do that which Nature permits only to her favorites.

Amico. Tell me now; did you ever notice how rich certain past eras have been in these "favorites," as you call them?

Pictor. Certainly; and the race, I often think, has degenerated.

Amico. Do you suppose this degeneracy is in the child, or the men?

Pictor. Doubtless, if the child be the same that he was in the

days of Raphael, his chance of being a painter is infinitely less from the prosaic tendency of everything around us. Why, Raphael created painters not less than pictures!

Amico. Did he create them by exciting their enthusiasm, or by giving them some part of himself?

Pictor. Of course, by calling out what was in them.

Amico. Then it was *in* them. That is all I want. Now if many men have the power, what we want is to call it out. Which, think you, is the nobler way, and most likely to lead to great results,—to wait if perchance some one may come along sufficient to excite your enthusiasm, or to take the matter in your own hands and wait for no man? Nay, is not the history of the great a sufficient answer? *They all went alone.*

Pictor. This is fine theory, Amico; but you demand the impossible. Your great men made painting, and that is their title to glory. But for us the field is filled. There remain no such conquests in art for us, as Raphael and Giotto made.

Amico. O man of little faith! Is there nothing for Columbus to do now, because America has been discovered? We stand all upon a Western shore, with a whole unknown world awaiting our discovery. To believe it is there, is faith. To know it, is given to no man. Where would have been the merit of the great Cristoval, if some messenger had revealed all to him?

Be a new Ulysses. Do you remember the old Florentine's verses? Tennyson has hammered them out very skilfully, but here is the gold itself.

“Nè dolcezza del figlio, nè la pieta
Del vecchio padre, nè 'l debito amore
Lo qual dovea Penelope far lieta,
Vincer potero dentro a me l' ardore
Ch' io ebbi a divenir nel mondo esperto,
E degli vizi umani e del valore;
Ma misi me per l' alto mare aperto
Sol con un legno, e con quella compagna
Picciola dalla qual non fui deserto.

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O frati, dissi, che per cento milia
Perigli siete giunti all' occidente,
A questa tanto picciola vigilia
De' vostri sensi, ch' è di rimanente,
Non vogliate negar l' esperienza,
Direto al sol, del mondo senza gente.
Considerate la vostra semenza:
Fatti non foste, a viver come bruti,
Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza.”

Inferno, Canto XXVI.