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# Six Lectures on Painting

G. Clausen

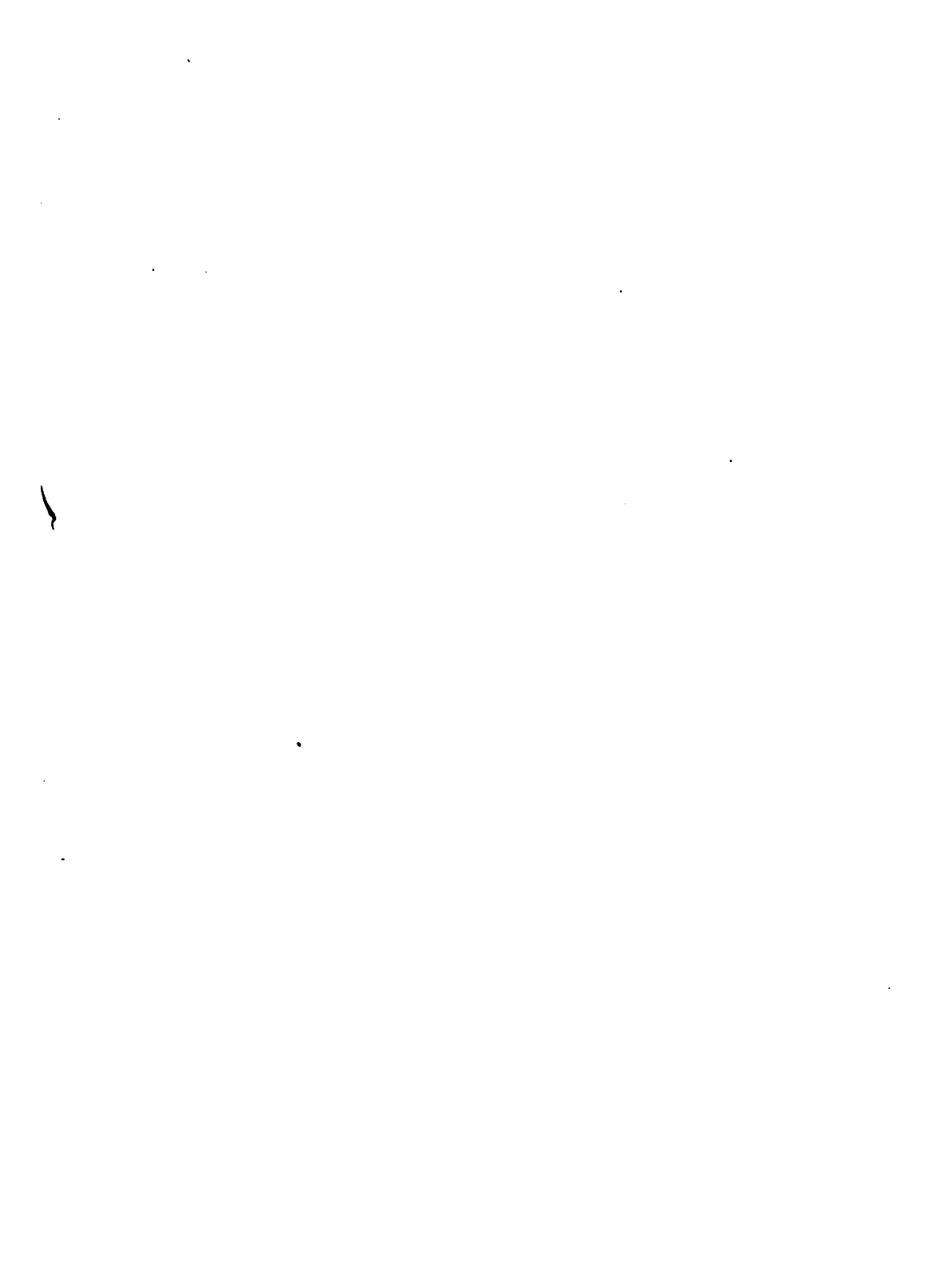
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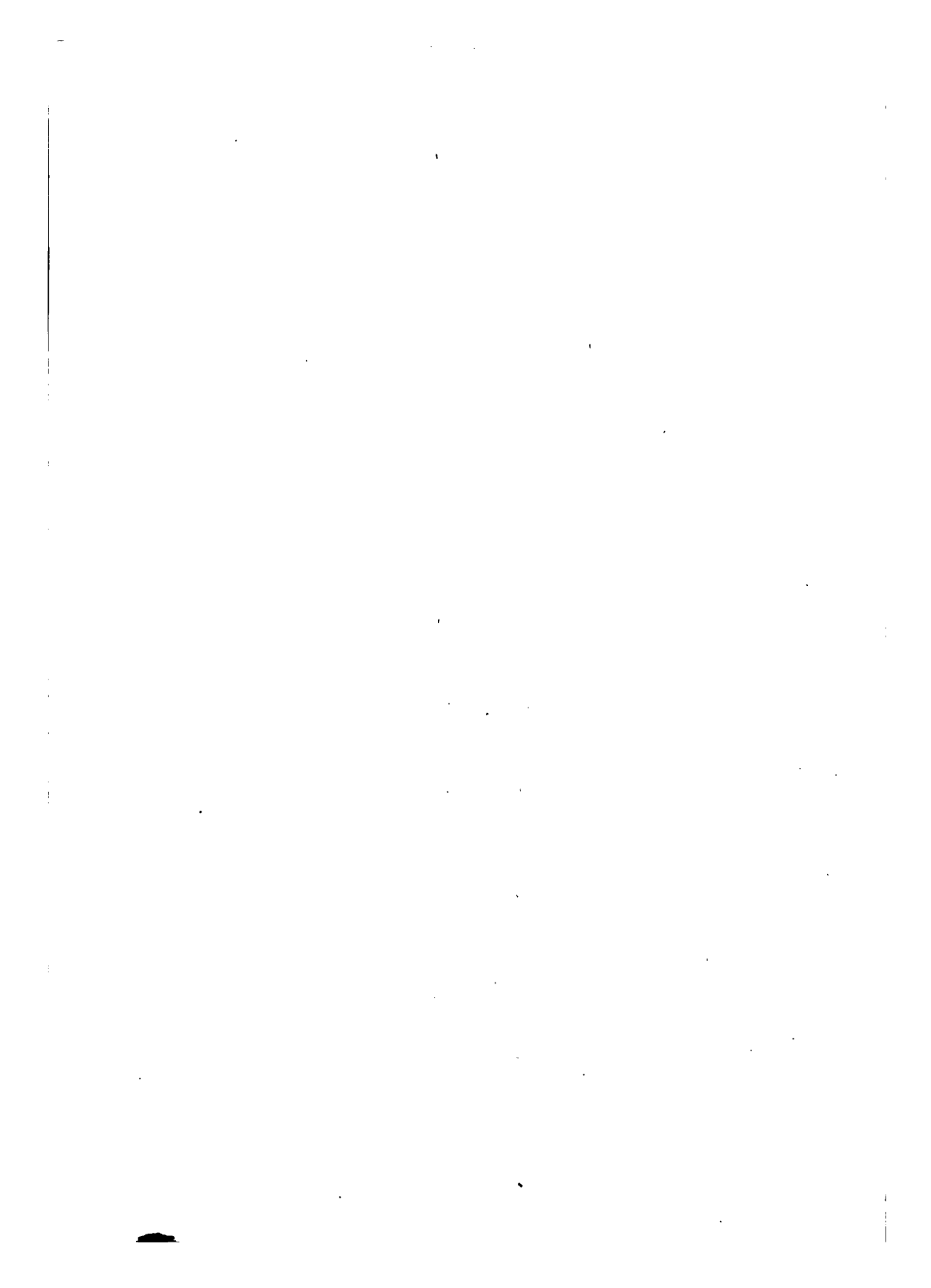
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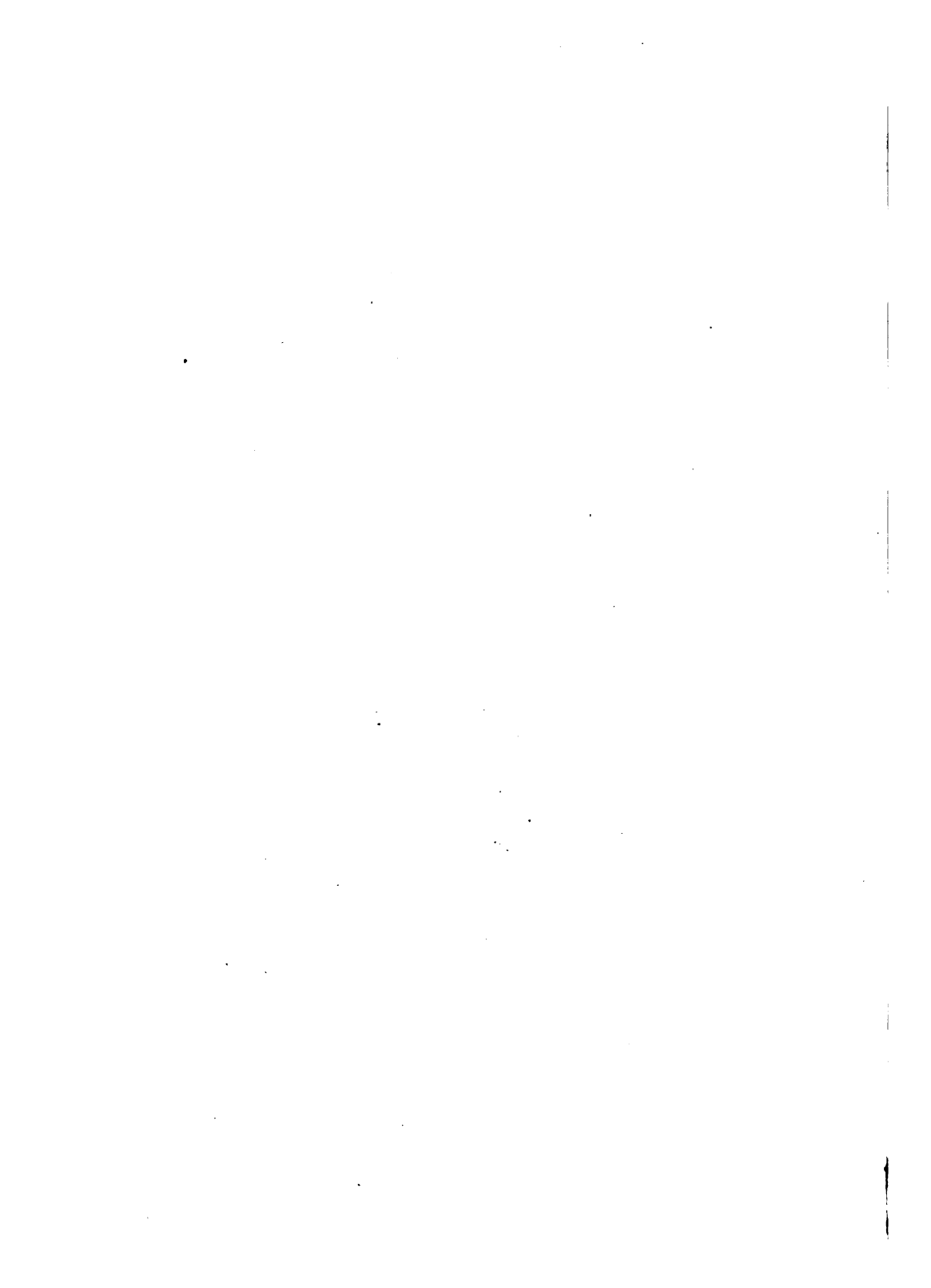


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**SIX LECTURES ON PAINTING**



**SIX LECTURES ON PAINTING**







*Leonardo da Vinci*

THE VIRGIN OF THE ROCKS

*National Gallery*

# SIX LECTURES ON PAINTING

DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS OF  
THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS  
IN LONDON, JANUARY 1904

BY

GEORGE CLAUSEN  
A.R.A., R.W.S.

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WITH NINETEEN ILLUSTRATIONS



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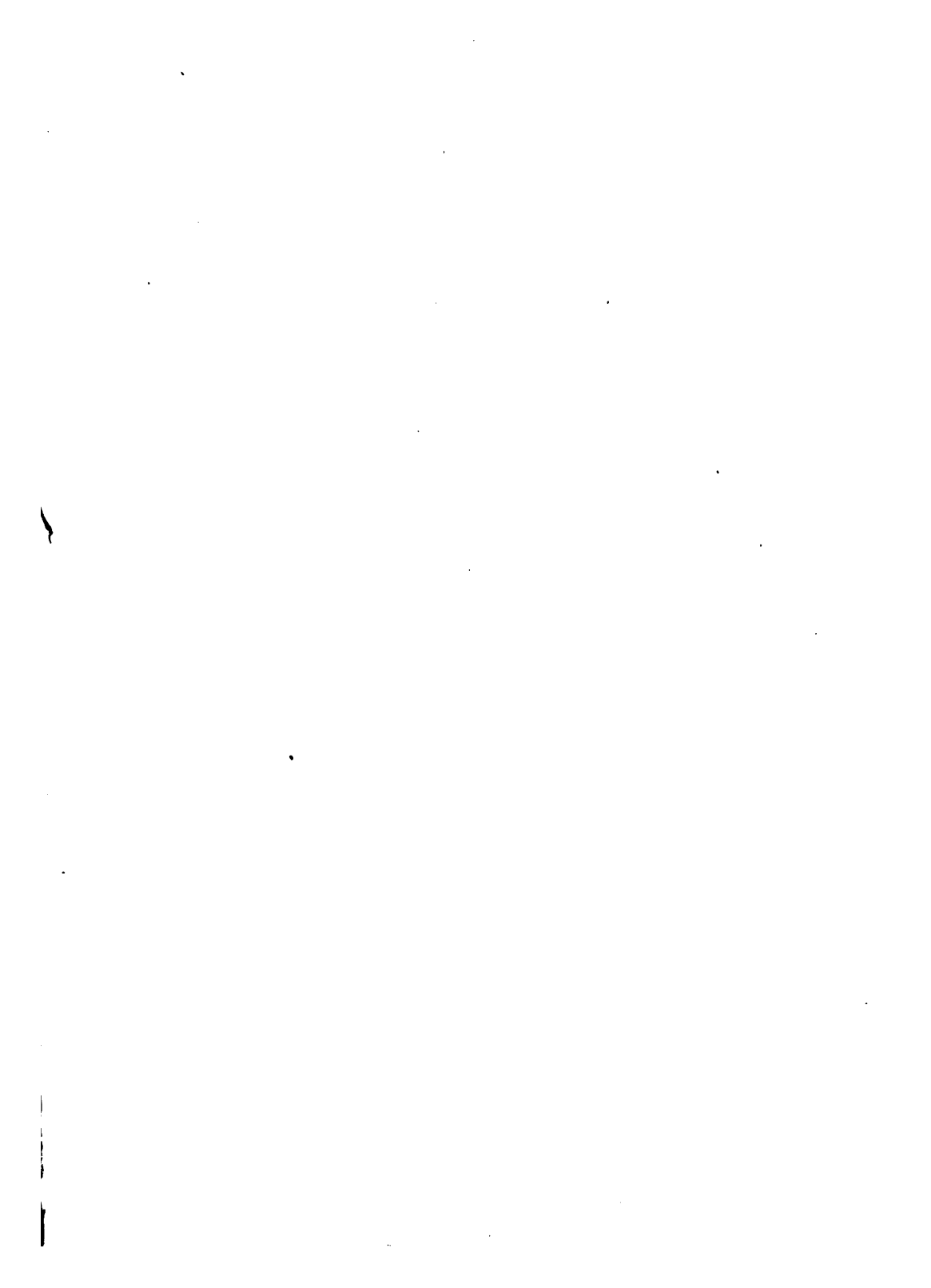
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**SIX LECTURES ON PAINTING**





I think we may consider that extraordinary genius, William Blake, who was once a student of these schools, to be the real forerunner of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Writing in 1809, he draws attention to the clearness and beauty of the early Italian pictures, praising their precision and hardness, which he contrasts with the art of Rubens, Titian, and Rembrandt, whom he calls smudgers, blunderers, and daubers.

At about the same time, too, as the Pre-Raphaelite movement came the invention of photography, which has, I think, exercised a disturbing influence on our art ; and a little later the art of the Japanese became known among us. So many theories are in the air to-day, so many courses are open to us, that it is more than ever difficult for the student to find his way ; and though, knowing my own shortcomings, I feel strongly my inadequacy, I will do my best to give you such help as, were I a student in your place, I should wish to receive.

I imagine the intention of the Royal Academy in establishing this Chair was to supplement the teaching of the schools—the life class, which is a

## Introductory—Some Early Painters 5

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training of the hand and eye, the tools of the artist, so to speak—with some direction of the mind also, so that the student should be not only equipped with sound technical skill, but be put on the track of some direction, or at least given indications, which would help him to decide how he should apply his skill when he goes out into the world. For the artist's education does not finish in the life class; it begins there.

In the old days, when there was the constant relation of pupil to master, theory and practice went hand in hand. The training was thorough, the best obtainable, but limited. An artist knew at most what a few others were doing round about him, and was, as a rule, content to develop himself on the lines of the traditions and with the instruction he had received. And so arose the "schools" of one place and another.

But to-day we are at once worse off and better. We have lost all tradition—almost the tradition of fine workmanship. With the exception of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, no moderns have attained the wonderful, almost miraculous, per-

fection and delicacy of execution which we find in the best old paintings—not achieved once or twice only, but steadily and consistently for a long period. But we are better off in that we have before us, brought into the open light of discussion and criticism, the whole practice of painting, for our admiration and guidance—and confusion ; for our wider knowledge has brought uncertainty, and every man is a law unto himself. We are also under the disadvantage—if it is a disadvantage—of there being practically no direct commands for pictures, such as the Church or the great patron furnished in former days, which allowed the artist full liberty of expression under the restraint of a given idea.

We have long been without this ; in fact, the varied developments of painting in the last century are owing to the freedom which artists enjoy, or I might say to the necessity which every artist feels himself under, to express his own feeling ; and this accounts for the somewhat chaotic and confused impression which our big exhibitions produce, as a whole, in spite of so much excellent work.

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Portraiture, which is vigorous and flourishing, and wall decoration, in which, thanks to the initiative of the late Lord Leighton, some essays are being made, are the only branches of our art that rest on the simple basis of direct demands. It is to be hoped that those who have the power will do all that is possible in the direction of encouraging fine decorative painting; for the conditions of decorative work are such as necessarily to develop the best faculties of the artist and the finest qualities of painting.

But I don't want to paint my picture too black, or to imply that our painting is in decadence, for I think it is advancing; and although we live in times when everything is in the melting-pot, including the Fine Arts, we know that the instinct for beauty, and for its expression in the Fine Arts, is as natural and as necessary to our being as any other of our instincts, and that the cry of decadence is as old as the world itself. There is a comforting little story told by Lanzi in his book on Italian painting, of Orcagna the Florentine artist, who was living somewhere about 1320, at the very beginning of Florentine art. He gives

it on the authority of a contemporary writer, Sacchetti, that one day Orcagna proposed as a question, Who was the greatest master, setting Giotto out of the question? Some answered Cimabue, some Stephano, some Bernardo, and some Buffalmacco. Taddeo Gaddi, who was in the company, said: "Truly these were very able painters, but the art is decaying every day." And I think that Michelangelo said that in his time the arts were not much considered. So we may conclude that the relation of the artist to the world in general was always much the same as it is now. As in other departments of human activity, painters have done well or ill, as it has been given them to do; succeeding generations of artists have cherished their memories, or have forgotten them, according to the estimation in which they held their work.

And so, when we find ourselves in the presence of great works of the past—in the presence, one might say, of the thought of great men made visible to us, it is well that we should put aside, as far as we can, our own preoccupations and theories, and try and read their thought, and see how far

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we can gain from them confirmation, strength, and support for ourselves.

For one result of the wider appreciation of the older men is that our own work is brought sharply up against them ; and when we find that a work of our own time may lose its freshness and interest in a few years, while the older works still hold us with an increasing charm, must we not see that we may have something to unlearn as well as to learn ? There is no doubt that greater knowledge only serves to confirm and to extend our admiration for the work of the past, and this must lead every thoughtful student to question much that is practised to-day. We should try to reach some firm ground, some fixed principles that we can hold in common with the old painters.

I wish to direct your attention to-day to some of the Early Italian painters, but I do not propose to take you systematically through the history of any of the different schools. Some knowledge of the kind is very necessary, and no doubt in early days it was the duty of the painting professor to give this instruction. But we must remember that in those days communication between

nations was difficult. There were no national collections, and there was little or no literature on artistic subjects generally available ; while to-day we have readily accessible to us, not only—thanks to the Royal Academy—our Old Masters Exhibitions, but an enormous and admirable body of literature, covering the whole field of painting, which, as I have reminded you, is now very fully explored. Indeed, I almost think that too much attention is given nowadays to the minutiae of criticism ; but still, we should be very grateful to those writers whose learning and patient enthusiasm are devoted to the service of our art, who have done so well a necessary work, which practising painters could never be expected to do. It is a hopeful sign of the interest taken in the Fine Arts to-day that it is not only possible, but profitable, to produce such works, and I earnestly recommend you to make as much use of them as you can.

But I should advise you not to go to work systematically, and to take it as a task ; not to grind through the different schools, and then thank goodness you've done with it ; not to puzzle your-

selves too much in trying to reconcile contradictory excellences, for things will make themselves clear to you as you go on. I should recommend you to go through a picture-gallery as one seeking the face of a friend in a crowd, and to let yourselves be led on by your sympathies. If you admire the work of a man, find out all you can about him ; see his work as much as you can, especially his beginnings,—always look out for beginnings,—and try to get at his drawings and studies, which you can readily see either in photographs in your library, or in the Print Room at the British Museum, where there is a magnificent collection of original drawings. So I must leave the detailed study of the Old Masters to your own goodwill.

But there are problems in painting—the main points of pictures—which appeal only or mainly to artists, and on this ground I hope that my remarks may be of some service to you.

Painting, as we know it, may be said to begin with the Early Italians, for but little remains of the painting of the ancients, and we have no example of their finest work, though we may

infer, from the merit of such works as the Græco-Egyptian mummy-portraits of the second century A.D.—ordinary journeyman painters' work, no doubt, and of no pretension—that the ancients were as great in their painting as in their sculpture. There are several of these portraits in the National Gallery. But, for us, the Italian Primitives are the starting-point. We do not perhaps realise how great were the earliest men of all—Giotto and the other inventors, the men who took the first steps forward, who discovered perspective and foreshortening, realising not only length and breadth, but depth in their pictures, and giving nature in its three dimensions—the men who first expressed form by the use of shadow. Although these things are commonplaces to us, we can still learn much from the study of the early men ; but I do not propose now to do more than touch on the work of two early painters—not of the earliest time, but still of the beginning—Fra Angelico and Masaccio, an idealist and a realist. They both lived in Florence (Angelico from 1387 to 1455, Masaccio from 1401 to 1446), and rank among the great artists of the world.

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Angelico painted in Florence, in Orvieto, and in Rome. There are a number of his frescoes in the monastery of St. Mark, in Florence, little pictures on the walls of the cells and passages. They are remarkable, apart from the directness and simplicity of their execution, for their deep religious feeling. It seems as if Angelico must have had a distinct vision of the scene he was painting in his mind, for his paintings convey to us the feeling or sentiment of his subject more strongly than anything else. We are not concerned with the people of his pictures as individuals, nor with their dresses, or the general setting of the scene, except so far as it serves to express the subject. And it is, I think, because of his preoccupation with the subject that his execution is so straightforward and expressive. There is no cleverness, but he does just what he wishes to do, with beautiful and expressive drawing and very simple, clear colour. The sentiment of his landscape is, like that of all the early painters, very serene; like the clear light before sunrise in summer.

There is no trace of posing in his figures; they

have an unstudied grace, and there is even in their movements something of the little awkwardnesses that we notice in the movements of children. And, though they are very human and touching, there is something about them different from ordinary people—something remote and apart from the world. They seem to exist for the picture only, and to have had no past history, no experience of life.

His pictures affect one as do things seen in a dream, and we accept his visions without questioning details which, if they were not somehow wrapped in his sentiment, would make us smile at their childishness. The little arcade under which the Virgin sits, in the picture of the Annunciation (one of the most beautiful of his works), is so low that she could hardly stand upright in it ; but it does not matter, nor do the little toy trees and towns and towers that we find in his pictures. They are symbols only, and we do not question their details ; nor are we conscious, in Angelico's work, of the model as an individual.

But in the work of Masaccio we are conscious of the individual models throughout, and of the



*Fra Angelico*

THE ANNUNCIATION

*Monastery of St. Mark, Florence*



*Masaccio* *Church of the Carmine, Florence*  
THE EXPULSION FROM PARADISE

interest of portraiture. He was one of the first, if not the first, to get beyond the early conventions of drawing and of light and shade, and to understand drawing in the sense in which it is understood to-day. We can see this in his frescoes in the Church of the Carmine, in Florence. The figures of Adam and Eve, for example, are drawn with an accuracy and truth to nature—to the nature of his models—which is convincing. And there is a portrait of an old man by him, in the Uffizi, drawn with the most absolute assurance and accomplishment. The modelling is so close and true that a sculptor could model a bust from it. This portrait is, like the paintings in the chapel, executed in fresco ; and, as we know, this means that the work must be done rapidly, and with certainty, as no alterations are possible. It seems to me that these works of Masaccio are as well done as they could possibly be.

These frescoes of his in the church were felt to be so far in advance of anything till then done, that they became the school and pattern for all the young Florentine artists, and Masaccio's chapel is one of the starting-points of the Renais-

sance. Raphael and Michelangelo both studied there, and one may trace there the origin of the composition of some of Raphael's cartoons, and even some of his figures, as the St. Paul, are taken bodily from these frescoes. Masaccio's work shows interest in expression of form and character rather than in sentiment. One can imagine that one kind of subject would come as readily to him as another, but one cannot imagine Angelico painting anything but his own visions.

What is the charm of the early artist's work—a charm which fuller knowledge only strengthens—in those who have once felt it? It is, I think, partly owing to the impression which these pictures give us of a simpler state of life. We see good, honest, simple souls taking part, without excitement or surprise, in miraculous events. We feel with perhaps a little touch of envy that man was a little nearer to the angels than he is to-day; it is very doubtful if he actually was, but that is the impression. Then there is their great charm *as paintings*: their wonderful simplicity, and untroubled ease of execution. We never can admire too much the delicate, clear

lighting, and it is doubtful if in any later work, with all our added knowledge, the sense of tranquil daylight—not the illusion of daylight—is given as well as in these early works. There are no cast shadows—when painters began to see shadows their troubles began—to take our attention from the sensitive, firm, and expressive lines of their drawing. How beautiful is their broad, simple modelling, and their masses of fine colour and beautiful plain spaces, enhancing little passages of extreme richness! One can go again and again to them with increasing wonder and delight. And when we come to the later generation—to the painters who were living just before the year 1500—we reach a period that to me is the most interesting and beautiful of Italian painting, although its highest development was yet to come. But think of the men then working! Da Vinci, Botticelli, Pollajuolo, Piero di Cosimo, Pinturicchio, Signorelli, Mantegna, Bellini, Crivelli, and a host of others.

The technical perfection of the early work is one of its great beauties. Much of it was in fresco, which from its conditions requires—to

take one quality alone—very fine draughtsmanship. And in tempera painting, which was employed for panels and small work, the same preliminary planning as in fresco had to be gone through, although it was, I believe, possible—I have had no practical experience of tempera painting—to work more than once over the same surface. But, as a rule, and as we can see by studying these works, the colour was put on sweetly and quickly, and the draperies were painted, often with one plain tint of colour over a preparatory monochrome, and this accounts for the beautiful quality of the paint ; for we know that when the colour is put down clearly and untouched, it is fresh and untroubled.

Until the time of Masaccio, no attempt was made to gain richness or relief by the opposition of light to dark. All was in an even light, and richness was obtained by the local colours of draperies, ground, sky, etc. It is a style of painting admirably suited to the decoration of buildings, because of its clearness and formality.

But I think that the older painters' ideal was always the representation of nature—even, if



*Masaccio*

PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN

*Uffizi Gallery*



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possible, to the point of imitation or illusion ; and we know that the invention of oil-painting was welcomed as giving, in this direction, a greater range to the artist. And yet one may feel that the unconscious and naïve representation of nature by the older men was better—in that it was truer to the spirit of nature—than the self-conscious imitative work of later times.

I should like to touch on the question of the picture as a decoration ; in our times a distinction is made between painting which is decorative and painting which is pictorial, which is, I think, an unfortunate distinction, and one which should not exist : for all pictures should decorate the walls or places on which they are placed. That this distinction should exist is perhaps our own fault, in forgetting, as we do sometimes, that a picture should be agreeable to the eye in its colours and masses ; the good old painters never forgot that. And a picture that has only cleverness of execution, or interest of anecdote, will soon cease to charm ; while a picture may be feeble, and even childish, in its execution, yet

if its masses and colours are well arranged, it will always give pleasure to the eye.

But I do not think it is possible to draw the line, and say at what point of imitation or of realism a picture ceases to be decorative and becomes pictorial ; for when a picture was painted on a wall, it was intended to bring the scene into the presence, if possible, of the spectators in the room.

In the House of Livia, among the ruins on the Palatine Hill, are some rooms with the painted decorations still on the walls. One room is painted with architectural openings in the walls, through which we see landscapes and figures, the intention being to give the idea of space outside.

And there are many other instances to be seen, especially in Italian churches, where we find paintings in which the real architectural features of the building are imitated in paint, and continued into the picture, to make a scene for it, as in the small refectory of the monastery of St. Mark in Florence. This is a vaulted room. At one end is a painting of the Last Supper,

by Ghirlandajo. A bay of the vaulting is continued in perspective into the painting, and the colour of the vaulting is matched, so as to suggest that the scene passes in our presence. The same device is employed by Leonardo in his Last Supper. And the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is planned in this way. Michelangelo has joined painted mouldings to real ones,—one cannot tell where,—and has built up in paint from them a great structural framework into the ceiling, and on this he has placed his figures.

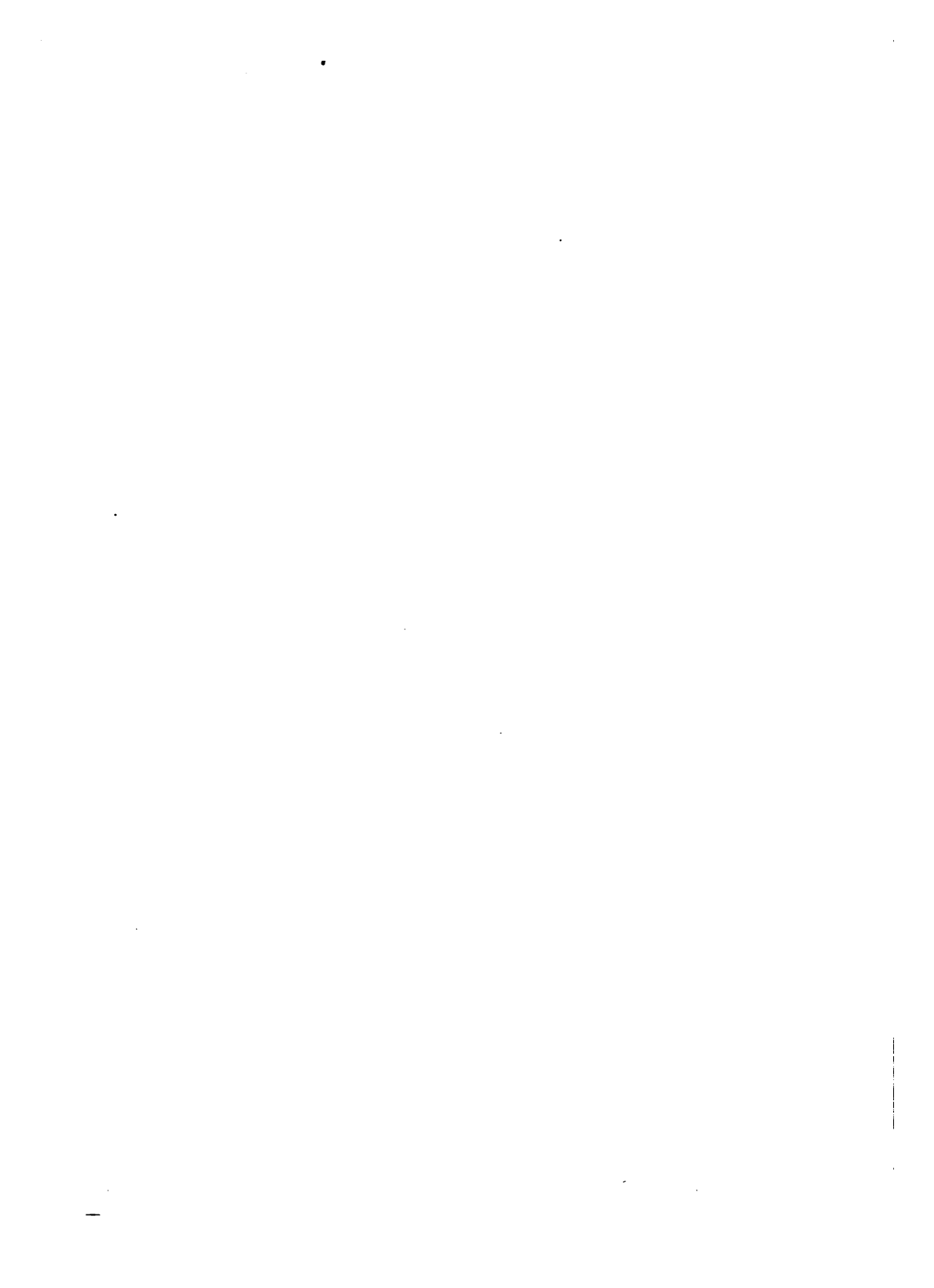
And we see the same plan carried on until, in later times, it falls into the worst possible taste, as in those decorations where a ceiling will be covered with painted flying figures, with the leg of the nearest one actually modelled in relief, and projecting over the enclosing moulding! And the lamentable part of it is that it is very skilfully done.

We can, I think, draw a little generalisation from this. It seems as if in the artist's mind the desire to express his subject and the desire to display his skill are conflicting tendencies. When these are in perfect balance we get the

finest work. When the desire for expression is the stronger, we get sincere and beautiful, but imperfect and immature work, as in the case of the early Primitives. But when the desire for the display of skill is the stronger, we get cleverness, affectation, and decadence.

## II

### ON LIGHTING AND ARRANGEMENT



## II

### ON LIGHTING AND ARRANGEMENT

THE difficulties encountered in painting a picture lie, not so much in the actual painting of each portion of the work (though this is full of difficulties) as in the control of the whole canvas, in determining what part of the picture is to be given prominence, and in what way this is to be attained.

To draw a figure, to paint a head, a piece of drapery, a sky, a tree—this we can all do to some extent if we have the actual object before us; but as it is not in the nature of things that a group or a scene—even if we are so fortunate as to see it once so arranged as to make us wish to paint it—can be reconstituted every time we get to work on our picture, we must learn to retain its main points, or get some general design—some image in our minds of

what we want to accomplish, before we begin our work.

The wonderful range which is possible, and which has been attained in painting, has been attained by the study and analysis, not only of nature, but of the way in which things are shown to us in nature by light and shade, by warm and cold colour. These are the simple elements of every picture (drawing, of course, included). It is the appearance of nature that has to be observed and analysed, the object being to present or suggest an illusion. The painter studies, not facts, but appearances, being helped in the direction of his vision by the works of those who have gone before him.

As I have already pointed out, the aim of the early artists was to imitate nature; and although they had not then learned to give by light and shade the illusion of nature, their fine taste led them to produce great work by other means. They were—the best of them—very true to nature in drawing, in strong characterisation, and very expressive in sentiment. Their decorative sense and imagination were not held in re-

straint by the necessity of being literally true throughout, and their works, though in them the actual force of lighting in nature was not attained, often not even attempted, yet have, in other ways, a beauty and charm as great as any later works possess.

We will follow a little the development of painting towards realism. This is, of course, only a partial view, but there is some interest in following it. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), in his treatise on painting, says that "the first object of a painter is to make a simple, flat surface appear like a relievo, and some of its parts detached from the ground. He who excels all others in that part of the art deserves the greatest praise. This perfection of the art depends on the correct distribution of lights and shades. If the painter, then, avoids shadows, he may be said to avoid the glory of the art, and to render his work despicable to real connoisseurs, for the sake of acquiring the esteem of vulgar and ignorant admirers of fine colours, who never have any knowledge of relievo." I think Leonardo was a little too hard on the Primitives; he does not seem to appreciate their

beauty. He was the first to record, if not the first to practise, the study of light and shadow as we understand it now. For we see also in the work of a contemporary, Melozzo da Forli (1438-1494) the study of light and shade in nature ; there are two of his pictures in the National Gallery—“ Music ” and “ Rhetoric.” Those of you who do not know Leonardo’s treatise on painting would do well to read it. It is full of wisdom and fresh observation. His clear intelligence raises problems, many of which painters still discuss. I will read a few extracts. He says on “ gradation ”: “ What is fine is not always beautiful or good. I address this to such painters as are so attached to the beauty of colours that they regret being obliged to give them almost imperceptible shadows, not considering the beautiful relief which figures acquire by a proper gradation and strength of shadow.” Again : “ Do not make the boundaries of your figures of any other colour than that of the background on which they are placed ; that is, avoid making dark outlines. The boundaries which separate one body from another are of the nature of mathematical lines,

not of real lines. The end of any colour is only the beginning of another ; and it ought not to be called a line, for nothing interposes between them except the termination of the one against the other, which, being nothing in itself, cannot be perceivable." Again : " Those shadows which in nature are undetermined, and the extremities of which are hardly to be perceived, are to be copied in your painting in the same manner, never to be precisely finished, but left confused or blended. This apparent neglect will show great judgment, and will be the ingenious result of your observation of nature." Again he says : " It is a great error in some painters who draw a figure at home by any particular light, and afterwards make use of that drawing in a picture representing an open country, which receives the general light of the sky, where the surrounding air gives light on all sides. This painter would put dark shadows where nature would put none at all, or, if any, so faint as to be almost imperceptible ; or he would throw reflected lights where it is impossible there should be any."

He recommends the painter to compare his

own work with nature in a small mirror, "which," says he, "*being your master*, will show you the lights and shadows of any object whatever." And, indeed, all through the book we get constant reference to nature. "If you do not rest on the good foundation of nature, you will labour with little honour and less profit." "Whoever flatters himself that his memory can retain all the effects of nature is deceived, for our memory is not so capricious. Therefore, consult nature for everything."

These words were written four hundred years ago; they might have been written to-day. One feels how very modern he was in spirit. It is, of course, a question what he means by "nature"—whether that ideal which Sir Joshua Reynolds called the general idea of nature, or nature in its variety and imperfection as we see it. I think Leonardo meant the latter, in the sense that the persons in a picture should look what they profess to be—not, of course, in the sense that he would take the first woman he met as model for a Madonna. There, where he had to represent the highest type of woman, he chose the most beauti-

ful person he could, as we see in "The Virgin of the Rocks" in the National Gallery.

There is a passage of his on lighting that seems to bear on this picture: "The light admitted in front of heads situated opposite side-walls which are dark will cause them to have great relief, particularly if the light be placed high. And the reason is that the most prominent parts of these faces are illumined by the general light striking them in front, which light produces very faint shadows on the part where it strikes; but as it turns toward the sides it begins to participate of the dark shadows of the room, which grow darker in proportion as it sinks with them.

"Besides, when the light comes from on high, it does not strike on every part of the face alike, but one part produces great shadows on another, as the eyebrows, which deprive the whole sockets of the eyes of light. The nose keeps it off from a great part of the mouth, and the chin from the neck, and such other parts. This, by concentrating the light upon the most projecting parts, produces a very great relief."

I have given these passages from Leonardo to

show that we are justified by tradition and good precedent in examining nature as closely as we can.

The effect of light colours in a picture is the same as that of actual light in nature—to attract the eye. Therefore painters have naturally always striven to give that object to which they wish first to direct attention the greatest light. There is an old precept that there should never be two principal lights in a picture. It means that the spectator's attention should not be distracted.

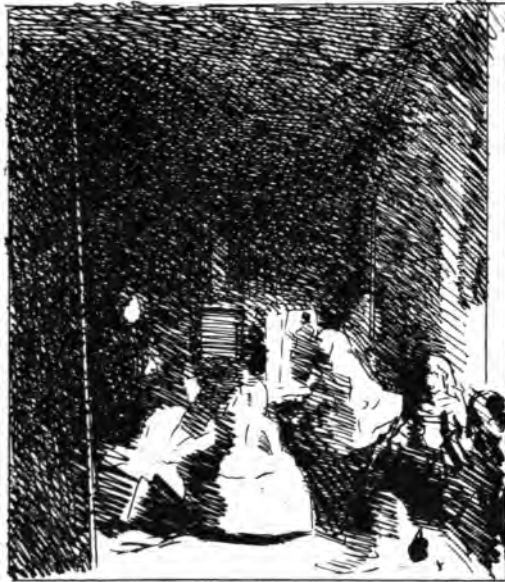
Now, if a scene is represented as taking place in a room, it is possible, by arrangement of objects, to bring the principal things into prominence naturally and with most beautiful effect, as in the "Maids of Honour," by Velasquez. I am sorry to say I have not had the privilege of seeing this picture, but only the sketch, which was in the Old Masters Exhibition a year or two ago ; but the picture is, I should think, the greatest achievement in painting of true ordinary lighting in the world. There is no doubt that the effect in this picture is exactly as in the room ; everything is





COROT  
(DIAGRAM FOR LECTURE II)





VELASQUEZ  
(DIAGRAM FOR LECTURE II)

accounted for naturally. It is worth remarking how the picture is arranged—divided diagonally into light and dark, with a strong dark on the light side, and a little light taken into the dark. This is a very effective arrangement, and a very natural one. Pictures arrange themselves that way unconsciously, or perhaps the eye finds something agreeable in this arrangement—in its interchange. It is common in landscape, as in the picture by Corot in the Louvre ; and Whistler's portraits of his mother, and of Carlyle, are arranged in the same kind of pattern.

In connection with the arrangement of a picture, it is worth while inquiring why it is that principal masses or objects, although they should be placed near the centre of the picture, should not be placed exactly in the centre, or why any absolutely symmetrical arrangements are unpleasant to the eye, and should be avoided. I think it may be a purely physical reason, connected with the fatigue experienced by the eye in looking at regular forms and spaces, and that this may also account for the fact that such things as the true surfaces of machinery, and the straight lines or

monotonous regularity of buildings, fail to charm the eye ; while unexpected variety of form does, as we see in old buildings, ruins, mountains, and generally in all that is called picturesque.

If a scene is represented as being in the open air, the difficulty arises that the light of the sky, being so great, will dominate everything, and, instead of the figure being the principal, the landscape interest will predominate, and the figure take the second place. It is not, however, always so. There are effects of light, such as when one is looking with the light at figures facing the sun—especially in evening light, or when there is a cloud behind them—when the figure receives most light, and tells beautifully. I think Titian studied and used this effect a great deal, and his picture “The Entombment,” in the Louvre, gives very finely the impression of that effect.

“The Surrender of Breda,” by Velasquez, is also arranged looking with the sunlight, and the group is built up and united by shadows from the figures, and from clouds on the figures in middle distance. The shadows tie the picture together.

It is possible to avoid the difficulty of the sky

by leaving it out, or by using a high horizon and showing very little ; and when this is done, figures can be painted up to the strength and the lightness of nature, as in Bastien Lepage's picture of " Les Foins " in the Luxembourg. But if much sky were added to this, the brightest light we could use would only look like paper, because the relative intensity of the light on figures and on sky would not be correct. It could be " managed "—if the middle and distance were painted dark, as in shadow—to have a larger sky ; and the sky is so beautiful, and can be made to convey so much, that a picture gains if it can be used. And this compromise was used largely by the great Venetian painters, simply, I feel sure, through knowing well what effects are possible in nature.

For you will find, if you are in the habit of constantly observing nature, and on looking on all things as if they were or might be pictures, that such arrangements and variety of lighting of figures as one sees in Velasquez, in Rembrandt, in Titian, Veronese, Tintoret,—figures in shade against figures in full light, and all in the open air,—that these arrangements are strictly founded

on nature, and result from observation. On a windy day in summer, when clouds are passing, one constantly sees, but for a moment only, such effects—of figures in sunlight relieved against a deep background of shadow, or of near figures dark in the shadow of houses or trees, with others in the light beyond; one sees no end of beautiful things, but only for a moment. There is no time to do more than make a mental note, but they give one a clue which one may follow, and perhaps be so fortunate as to learn to develop—a clue to the fine scheme of lighting which these great artists have mastered and used.

We, in our work, lay too much stress on the superficial qualities, the imitative ones, and are unable to grasp these great generalisations. They won't pose for us, but they wouldn't pose for Velasquez or Titian either. Then we may feel when we look at great pictures such as I have mentioned, and such, for instance, as "The Marriage of Cana," by Veronese, in the Louvre, how very great and thorough was the knowledge of the possibilities of light in nature which enabled them to plan and execute their great works. It

is told of Veronese that when someone objected to his putting some figures in shadow, and asked him why he did it, "A cloud is passing," said he.

But it may often be against the intention of the painter to draw attention to the sky, and we find that some—especially portrait painters—have adopted the artifice of frankly painting the sky background darker than it would naturally be, as in the portrait of Lord Heathfield, by Reynolds, where he stands against an intense black background, which in a little while we realise is intended for the smoke of the cannon down on the left.

This is a frank convention. Now, don't let us despise conventions, but try and understand them. All conventions rest on some truth. The convention may have grown so as to obscure the fundamental truth. Our conception of truth widens with our experience. The student's is, as a rule, narrowed down to the particular one he happens to be struggling with. He is so much engrossed with the difficulty of imitation that he is apt to think this the main truth. But he should not confine his observation to the life

class, or to the time when he is actually painting. Let him try and notice, as one can, at all times, how things look at unpremeditated moments, and he will find as he becomes familiar with the great men's work that they did so too. He will come upon their tracks.

It is well, then, when in a good picture we see some passage we think false or conventional, to try and understand the intention of the painter in using it. Almost always it will be found to have been adopted for the purpose of concentrating attention on the principal things. The painter, by his artifice, seeks to attract our attention, and so produce the same effect as, were we ourselves in presence of the scene, our consciousness would produce in us.

We may copy a scene as truly as we can with regard to values, and all the rest of it, and find, after all, that it does not give us the effect of the actual scene. The reason is that we copy with an eye looking equally and dispassionately on everything, as would the lens of a camera, forgetting the main thing—the human element of attention, or attraction to some particular part. A convention by which we would sacrifice sub-





*Rembrandt*

*Hague Museum*

THE REPOSE IN EGYPT

ordinate parts for the sake of accenting the essential is truer to the effect of nature. For all painting is a partial statement—a reading or rendering of nature—rather than an inventory. And the different temperaments of artists show in the particular qualities which each one feels most impelled to select; but the desire for literal truth is always in conflict with this, and every artist must make a compromise for himself.

There are two extremes in the way artists see light in nature. One is to half close the eyes. This takes away a certain quantity of light, joining all the darks together, and leaving the high lights as spots. This seems to have been the way of Rembrandt. He makes the whole picture lead up to his point of light. There is a little picture of his—a “Repose in Egypt”—in one of the German galleries, which shows very clearly his love of the beauty of light. The arrangement is typical of many pictures: a central mass of light, surrounded and led up to by dark. It is the common arrangement of portraits and still-life pictures; also of many of the old landscapes.

Turner, in his long career, began by seeing

nature in the same way as Rembrandt,—by concentrating on the light,—but he studied and assimilated Claude, and ended by surpassing him. In his picture of “The Shipwreck,” you will see the same arrangement of a central light surrounded by dark.

The other way of looking at nature is with the eyes wide open, as we see in Claude’s pictures, such as the “Queen of Sheba” in the National Gallery. In this picture the difference in value between the sun and adjoining sky is very slight ; but if in nature we look at the sun only in such a position, we realise that it is impossible to get the difference in brightness between it and the sky. If we half close our eyes so that we can look at the sun, we find that we cannot see anything else. But if now we look with open eyes on the whole scene, we realise that not only the whole sky, but everything else, except the actual shadows, is governed by, and is part of the sun’s light. The shadows tell out as spots of colour. This is, it seems to me, the truer way of looking at nature, and I think Claude was the first to realise it.

Turner, in his later manner, painted in the same way, as we see in his "Approach to Venice," where he has completely left his old manner of vision, and has realised the infinite gradations in light.

But this difference between the earlier and the later manner of Turner is one which is noticeable in every artist's work. The tendency, with increased knowledge, is to broaden and to lighten. Rembrandt himself shows a difference between his earlier and later work. It is the growing perception of the beauty of light.

In connection with lighting, there is a point of comparison between the Flemish and the Italian work generally which is, I think, worth noticing—that is, that the Northern painters, as a rule, seem to have been more attracted to the surfaces and textures of things, and to have studied their models at a closer range than did the Italians. In some of Dürer's portraits, for example, one can discern that the high light of the eye shows the panes of his studio window. And in the portraits of Holbein, too, we see that everything must have been studied at extremely close range.

That wonderful work, "The Ambassadors," in the National Gallery, is all painted in a clear, even light with the utmost precision and minuteness, over every square inch of the panel, apparently without effort. It is beautiful in colour and harmonious, and at its distance everything seems in its place. Yet the figures do not quite hold the spectator, perhaps because they are placed so far away from the centre ; partly, too, owing to the lack of atmosphere, which is almost inseparable from the close point of view necessitated by minute realisation. If we go from this picture to Velasquez's "Admiral," in the next room, we see the difference, for in this picture atmosphere is realised and detail suggested. It seems impossible to combine these different qualities—at anyrate, on a large scale, though it can be done on a small scale, as we see in the work of Van Eyck and some of the later Dutchmen.

Holbein's "Duchess of Milan" is finer as a portrait than "The Ambassadors," for there is nothing to distract the attention from the face. But one finds this difference in the way of seeing, all through the work of the Flemish and Italian

schools. It may be due, I think, partly to the tradition of the antique, which had never been entirely lost in Italy. And it may be due also partly to the difference of climate and light in the two countries. The clear air of Italy would enable things to be seen plainly at a greater distance than we can see them here. But I think the main reason is that the Italian artists were accustomed to design and paint large spaces, and that they studied their figures and groups at a distance sufficient for the eye to take in the whole group. At this distance, surfaces and smaller details of modelling would be lost, and only the broad structural features and masses of colour remain.

I have mentioned the disturbing influence of photography on painting. It is hardly necessary to recall that, until the invention of photography, there was only one way of seeing things—through the human eye. And all the fine things have been accomplished by men whose minds were trained to perception of beauty in nature through the eye. Now, as Leonardo pointed out, nature does not define everything,

and the triumph of painting has been that it has realised this, and presented things in degrees of emphasis corresponding to that in which they are presented to us in nature. But the minutely searching lens of the camera presents everything with indisputable accuracy, only not as we see it. How cruel and searching are the majority of portrait photographs! Yet the painter, for a time, tried to rival the camera in minuteness and detachment, forgetting that it is just this human quality of attention and selection that makes a painting a work of art. Photography itself now seems to admit the pictorial falseness of its own ideal, and we find photographers occupied to-day in arranging the tones and concentrating the lights of their pictures—in fact, using clumsily all the conventions discovered by the masters. But photographs, especially snapshots of nature, are most interesting and suggestive to look at. I do not think, though, that photography can in any other way be an aid to a painter. You cannot make that yours which the camera chooses to give you. You must make your own selection from nature.

**III**  
**ON COLOUR**



### III

#### ON COLOUR

ONE may say broadly that if drawing is the intellectual side of art—it is understood that I refer to the art of painting—colour is the emotional side. This is not a hard and fast distinction. It is impossible to make one where the two qualities are so intimately connected ; but colour has an effect in echoing or waking our feelings that drawing alone has not. This is perhaps because colours themselves, even if placed in simple tints without definite form, suggest to us correspondences with the colours and effects of things in nature. Thus blue suggests the sky ; white and yellow, light ; red, fire or blood ; green suggests the fields and trees ; and dark colours the night. One feels this emotional correspondence with some aspect of nature, or something recognisable in nature, in every tint of the palette.

The rules of drawing are fairly definite, and we may claim to know what constitutes good and accurate drawing ; but it is not at all easy to define in what good colouring consists. One cannot go further than say that it must be harmonious, and that it must convey the impression of truth to nature. One can tell bad colouring at once—that the colours are untrue or discordant ; but the limits within which good colour is possible are as wide as the range of emotion or temperament in man. Any artist will paint things as he sees or feels them. If he has succeeded in expressing some truth or beauty, it will be recognised and felt by some among the many who will in time see his work.

Nothing in nature is actually the colour that we see it. It only appears to us at a given moment as a particular colour in relation to other apparent colours which surround it. Thus we may walk out on a rainy evening when the sky and everything is grey, and come indoors and light the lamp, and immediately the sky which we see through the window appears as a beautiful and tender blue, though there was no

trace of blue in the sky a minute before, when we were outside. The change is produced in our senses by the colour of the sky taking its place in relation to a range of warm colours in the lighted room. In the same way the presence of a man with a lantern, or a light in a window, will apparently change the colour of things in its neighbourhood, and a mass of any strong colour, such as red, blue, or orange, will suggest its complementary colour in surrounding objects. (There is a curious exception to this in the case of lilac or bright violet, which, instead of suggesting its complementary colour in surrounding things, appears to diffuse its own colour over them, so that we seem to see a suspicion of violet in all other neighbouring colours.)

We must realise, then, that each combination of colours we see presents and forms a problem of its own. I think this was a difficulty not present to the older painters, who—perhaps wisely—seem to have ruled out, or not troubled about, many subtleties that worry us.

The range of colour that we possess—from white to black—has been proved sufficient to

express the utmost range of colour or light in nature, from the sun itself in the sky to the deepest gloom. Yet our range of pigments is nothing like as wide as the range in nature from light to shadow. It is wide enough to enable us to paint, to the point of absolute illusion, an object receiving light in a room ; but not with actual light added. For example, one might paint the portrait of a man, with a white shirt-front in full light, which would be white, or nearly so. But if he wore a diamond stud, the light from this—a reflection of the sky—would be much too bright for our colours. In such a case it would become necessary to sacrifice the stud, or to paint the man and the shirt down to it. It would become a question for the painter which thing he considered the most important, and in this way either a light or a dark version of the man might be true, and both might be equally beautiful, but on different grounds. One may imagine this difference of point of view between Millais and Whistler in their portraits. The same kind of question arises if we paint a landscape—whether to sacrifice the ground for

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the sky, or the sky for the ground, or both for figures, if we introduce them ; and the solution is the same—that the colour of the particular part one wishes to be the principal must determine the colour of the secondary things.

We can consider the tints of our palette to be like the notes on a keyboard, and, in looking at nature, try and resolve its appearances into a series of tints in some correspondence with what we know from experience our colours will produce. Thus, in looking at a scene, one would say : “ The general tone of the whole is so-and-so—warm, or cold, or whatever it may be ; the highest light is so-and-so, and the darkest dark is so-and-so,” and having made up our mind on the general aspect and limits of our problem, get to work on it in detail.

This is the ordinary way one would begin in studying from nature in colour. Now we go on. The scale of colour may be divided into warm and cold colours, and all colours we see in nature incline either to warm or cold—I am presuming we are making a study from nature—not only in themselves, but according to the degree

in which they are influenced by light. We shall, I think, never find light and shadow on an object equally warm or equally cool. This would be a monochrome, like an etching or an engraving, which suggests colour, but does not give it ; and those engravings best suggest colour which are printed in black or neutral tints, and not in a positive colour, for our imagination supplies the colour if the gradations are right. But in ordinary daylight in a room the lights are cool, and the shadows are warm in colour. So, out of doors in warm sunshine, we get the lights warm and the shadows cool, even to the point of absolute blue or violet. This brings me to one of the difficulties of outdoor painting—the tendency, especially if sunlight be attempted, to paint in too cold a key, so that a study which, at the time we were engaged on it seemed absolutely true, should afterwards, when brought into the even light of a room, fail to give the impression of warmth that the original scene gave. We often see pictures of sunshine painted which give us no impression whatever of warmth.

I think the reason of this is that we do not

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realise how warm the colour of the light is, being enveloped in it, perhaps even having it on our work—at anyrate, having our eyes filled with it. We are struck by the sharp contrast of the cool shadow, and paint that, it being obviously cool. But if we concede that the light is warm, we can get the opposition of the cool shadow, and get it to look blue, or almost so, even though as pigment it may be umber and white, or grey. A difficulty of the same kind is felt with regard to the blue of the sky, which, under some effects, appears as blue as one can possibly make it—bluer, even—and at the same time warm. We may pile on our brightest blue as much as we like, we cannot get it blue enough, and we cannot at the same time get it warm. Now, we know that the bright blues of our palette, when we look at them in a room, are bright enough to give the sense of any conceivable blue; so we may conclude that the fault does not lie in our paints, but in ourselves, as not knowing how to manage them, and that we must try and make the blue look more blue by accenting the complementary colours and painting the ground and surround-

ings warmer—*i.e.* by painting the whole picture in a warmer key.

There is the danger, of course, of going over to the other extreme, but of the two it is better to err on the side of warmth than of coldness ; and I think that probably one reason of the fineness of colour of the Venetians is that they had the possible blue of the sky in their minds, if not in their pictures, as a key and point of contrast with their other colours. But doubtless the main reason was the situation and importance of Venice, and its relations with the East ; which gave its artists the finest possible opportunities of studying colour. People of all races were there, dressed in fine and varied colours, and moving among beautiful buildings, with the sea and sky for background ; and the Venetian artists had this fine show daily before their eyes, under all conditions of lighting. All the possibilities of colour would become familiar to them, and we can understand how the influence of their surroundings led them to their great results.

If we aim at getting the utmost fulness of colour in the lights, as the Venetians did, the limited

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range of our colours makes this impossible in the darks. It becomes necessary, then, to keep all the darks together, treating them very broadly. You will find the old painters were never afraid of strong darks or dark shadows. Sir Joshua Reynolds advises that in a picture the shadows should be all of one colour ; or, at least, he says, they should *appear* to be of one colour, meaning that the eye should not rest on nor question them. And though the old pictures impress one as being darker than nature,—and so, in the sense of the general colour of nature, untrue,—yet in themselves and within their conditions they give a true impression of nature.

We have not the opportunity of studying fine colours that the old painters had ; our life goes on in more sombre dress. Still, there is fine colour to be seen wherever the sun shines, here as elsewhere, and of late years the search for the fulness of colour, with light, has led artists to the furthest limits of the palette, and the most violent means, in endeavouring to get the range and force of colour in the shadows as well as in the lights, so that we find pictures painted in spots of pure

pigment placed side by side, the intention being that they should fuse together in the eye of the spectator. But the result is not successful ; it is distressing to the eye, and, I think, shows that something must be sacrificed at one end of the scale or the other. And yet, if we paint in a very high key, in simple tints, I question if we are not in some danger of starving our colour for the sake of keeping our pictures light. White paint will not of itself express light, but only by contrast with dark.

To get colour and light is the great thing. The difficulty is to get them both. Turner, in his Italian landscapes, enhanced the colour of his sky by a dark pine-tree in the foreground, sacrificing the colour of the tree for the sake of accenting its value and warmth ; and the old landscape painter's device of a brown tree is used for the same end—to make the blue of the sky and distance more luminous and beautiful. This is also the reason for the dark-brown foreground usual in old landscapes ; and our eye is not arrested by the tree or the dark foreground, but goes past it to the point of the picture.

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Rembrandt, in his colouring, seems to have avoided blue altogether, gaining the sense of it by the opposition of golden-brown to grey. The secret of his wonderful colour is difficult to read. A passing impression of one of his pictures is of a work all in golden-brown, with fine reds and strong blacks. But when one has looked long enough at it to get into the picture, as it were, this sense of a particular colour disappears, and we feel ourselves in presence of the actual scene, with its air, colour, and light.

I do not think we should try and imitate the colour of the old painters, though we can, by study, see in nature the indications of, and perhaps the reasons for, their method of work. It would be hopeless, for instance, for anyone to try and imitate Rembrandt's colouring; and probably Rembrandt himself would be unable to explain his method, but would simply say, "I saw it so," or "I wished to express a particular sentiment."

There is the question of quality of colour—another difficult thing to define, though we recognise it readily. It does not seem to depend on

truth of relations, or even on truth of colour, for a picture may be true in colour and yet the paint itself may be bad in quality—opaque, heavy, or showing much labour. But there is fine quality of colour in works differing as much from each other in method as Rembrandt and the Primitives, as Raphael and Franz Hals, as Velasquez and Titian. It means that the work impresses one as having clearness, freshness, and that, in short, the impression is produced of nature, and not of paint.

There are two methods of painting, and good quality of colour can be achieved by either. One method is that of simple and direct painting—that we put down the right colour at once with fresh, untroubled paint, as in a sketch, and we know how often there is greater charm in a sketch than in a finished work. This is the method of Hals, of Velasquez, of Moroni, and of most moderns. The other method is the elaborate one of preparing an underpainting, more or less of the nature of monochrome, with reference only to the drawing and massing of light and shade, and then painting by thin glazes, or by working over

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thin glazes with the right colours, the under colours showing through, and giving a richness and transparency. I think we see this in the work of Rubens and of Titian, though, of course, we nearly always see both direct and glazed colour in the same work, as in that most marvellous head by Rembrandt, of himself as an old man, in the National Gallery. The object of underpainting and glazing is, of course, to retain the freshness which is so easily lost in oil painting, if the same colour is painted over and over ; especially as when half-dry, or if much medium is used, it becomes muddy : stiff colour stands fairly well.

Another object of underpainting is the determining of the design in light and dark. All paint changes a little, lowers a little, with time ; and if a picture has no strong arrangement of light and dark, but depends for its beauty on subtle delicacies and differences of value, these are often lost in a few years through the flattening down of the paint ; while if there is a strong backbone, as it were, of light and shade beneath the colour, the picture will always be effective, and the main features remain, in spite of any little changes.

The painter has to make the quality of his paint in oil-colour. If you compare oil- with water-colour you will see what I mean ; for if you put a simple wash of colour on paper it is always beautiful, because of its transparency, and it is difficult to lose this quality in water-colour ; but it is difficult to get it in oil, and still more difficult to retain it throughout a work.

Good quality is a measure of the painter's perception. Two men will paint a plain blue sky, using, perhaps, the same pigment. One man will give you the actual sense of the sky and the air, and the other nothing but blue paint. The difference between them is that one man had perception of the quality of the sky, and the other had not. So, when we see a good quality in paint, we know that it means not only niceness of hand and perception, but great knowledge and judgment in the artist. It all comes back to the same old story—that we must work, and cultivate our perceptions.

I have spoken of the emotional power of colour—*i.e.* the power which colours in themselves have in inducing a mood—as an important element in painting. The sad, golden tone of Rembrandt

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seems to strike the keynote of his sentiment, and to bring us into his frame of mind before we realise his subject. In the same way, the rich reds and warm colours of Titian, Rubens, and Reynolds produce in our minds the sense of activity, richness, and splendour, quite irrespective of the drawing or modelling of their figures, or their meaning.

If they had painted their figures as they would look in the cold light of a studio, this effect would not have been produced.

The picture of Admiral Keppel by Reynolds, in the present Old Masters Exhibition, is painted in a clear grey key of daylight—a realistic effect, as anyone might see it; and one may infer from this that in those instances where Reynolds darkened down his pictures with rich warm glazes, it was done designedly, in order to produce an effect by the means of colour.

I think, then, that we may conclude in these cases—I may mention as an example an “Adoration of the Magi,” by Filippino Lippi, in the National Gallery, where red and gold and other rich colours are pushed to their extreme power—

that painters deliberately employed the emotional power of colour, *as colour*, quite apart from any immediate resemblance to nature, in order to produce an effect on the mood of the spectator. And it must be the most difficult thing of all in painting, to do this so as to include general truth of resemblance.

But these paths are outside the track of most artists to-day. Our efforts are not so much directed to imaginative subjects, as to actualities, and our endeavour is to find and express the beauty which exists among us. We are more literal, less imaginative ; and this enhancing of nature by the power of colour is beyond us. We feel that it may be possible to paint with our first and main reference to nature as we see it around us, and, while trying to understand what has been done, to claim still that beauty of colour may be found also in the plain aspect of visible things even to-day.

It is for this reason, I think, that the art of Velasquez specially appeals to us. In it the ordinary aspects of nature are found to be not inconsistent with the finest art. There is nothing conventional in his colour. It is simply like that

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of nature, and I think that none but artists, or those who have studied the appearance of nature, can quite understand the intense admiration his work excites. It is not, as in the case of Titian and the colourists, an emotion produced by colour, as colour, taking us beyond our ordinary sensations ; but it gives us something of the pleasure of a surprise, in finding and recognising that such beautiful modulations of colour are apparent under ordinary conditions. Velasquez is sometimes, perhaps rightly, called unemotional, because his colour is not prearranged to influence us, but is, as it were, an impartial statement, as contrasted with the work of those painters who pushed the emotional power of colour to its extreme limit.

As I hope to consider the work of Velasquez later, I will not touch further on it now, but may mention one or two men of kindred spirit. Chardin, the French painter, gives us very beautiful colour in his still-life paintings in the Louvre, and there is one in the National Gallery. We are shown, not what beautiful things are painted, but how beautiful they appear under the influence of

light. The effect of one colour on another, the harmony of the different tints produced by light on a few simple things—these things may be seen in his work ; as also in the work of Edouard Manet, who had much the same feeling as Velasquez for the beauty of colour in simple, cool lighting, and expressed it with a directness of vision and execution (being able by a true eye to strike the tint at once) that gives his colour a very great charm.

The splendid work of Sir John Millais—the “North-West Passage” and the “Yeomen of the Guard,” for example—appeal to us in the same way, as fine painting and fine colour, apart from the interest of the subject. And that great artist who died recently—Mr. Whistler—has not only given us the example of a fine and simple method in painting, but has shown us more fully than any other artist the modulations of colour by light. In his portraits, with their fine realisation of the effects of atmosphere on colour, and in his pictures of twilight and of night, he has recorded effects which no artist before him had attempted. We can all see these things now, and how beautiful they are, but Mr. Whistler was the one who showed

us. He was, I think, the one artist since Turner who has extended the range of the artist's vision in the direction of revealing to us the beauty of colour as it appears in nature.

I have already spoken of the painter's main difficulty—in determining the proper relation of parts to the whole—in the matter of lighting and arrangement of his picture. This is also the main difficulty in colouring, and the only solution I can give you is that you should, at least once, endeavour to have the scene you are painting—if it is of such a nature that you can do this—actually before you, and to consider it as a whole, taking in the whole scene as comprehensively as possible; and so you can judge the effect of one colour against another, and see which colour strikes you most unmistakably, and so gives the keynote to the rest. We should study in the same way anything we happen to see that strikes us as having the material for a picture.

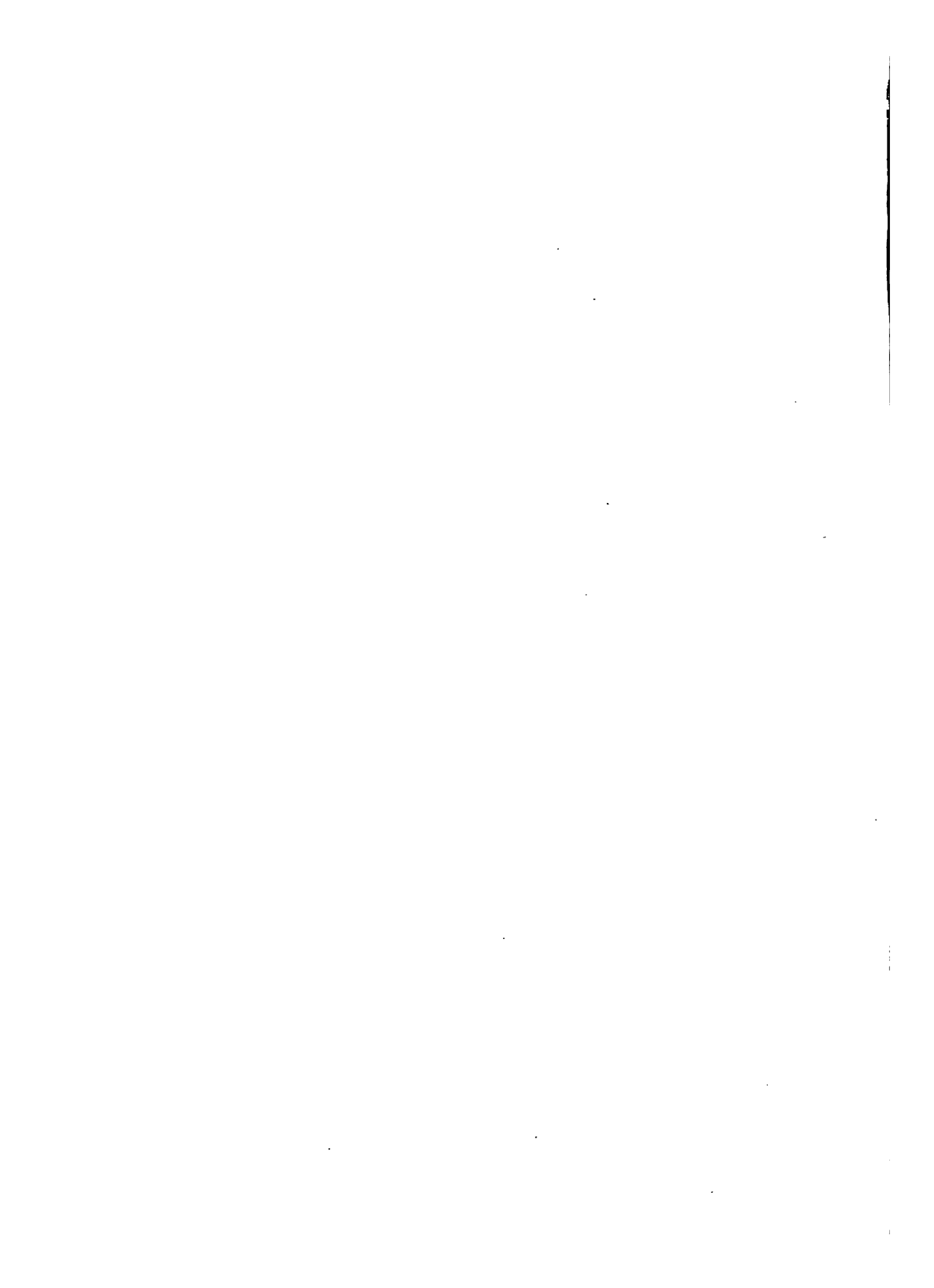
Truth or beauty of colour is the main thing in a picture. It is, in fact, the only thing that gives a picture a high place among the master-pieces. A picture that is well drawn and modelled

only will interest, but will be passed by in favour of colour. For colour touches us more deeply ; its sense is more instinctive. A child will be excited by colours, but indifferent to form. We all, artists or not, have some latent memory or mental image, which is called forth in us when we look at a picture, and recognise, or fail to recognise, nature in it ; not, I think, so much by our memories of form, as by our memories of the colour and general appearance of nature.

We can only see what we have learned to look for. An uneducated person will consider a face in a picture beautiful if it has bright eyes, pink cheeks, and red lips ; or a landscape beautiful if it also presents him with the obvious facts. It will be enough for him ; it is as much as he sees in nature. But Nature does not reveal her beauties unsought, and the study of paintings by those who are not artists is not only an education, but an added pleasure to their lives, enlarging and directing their minds, so that they learn to detect and appreciate beauties in nature to which they would otherwise have been blind.

IV

TITIAN, VELASQUEZ, AND REMBRANDT



#### IV

##### TITIAN, VELASQUEZ, AND REMBRANDT

**I**N speaking of these great artists, the greatest masters of painting that the world has seen, I do not propose to do more than make a rough comparison of their main qualities, with the idea of indicating the points of agreement and of difference between them. It seems almost an impertinence to speak at all of men who are above discussion or praise, whose names alone suggest the finest painting, and each of whom in his own way has reached the limits of achievement. One might discuss all the problems of painting by reference only to what each has done. I am not qualified to do this, but can only give my own, perhaps superficial, impressions of their work.

It seems to me that the differences which divide Italian painting into schools are of much less

account than are the great qualities these schools had in common—a noble simplicity of form, broad lighting, and rich, full colouring. Indeed, to my mind there are only two schools of Italian painting—Michelangelo is the one, and the rest of the Italian painters all come together in the other. The great ceiling of the Sistine Chapel stands apart from, and beyond, all other work ; but of all the other Italians, Titian most fully represents the finest painting. By his great genius he brought together the theories of his predecessors, and carried on their practice to a degree of completeness which cannot be surpassed. Velasquez said, “ It is Titian who bears the banner ” ; whether in subject pictures or portraits, his work is perfect in all the qualities of painting, and it may almost be said that he has done with colour all that can be done.

He is the meeting-point of the old and the new. His work combines minuteness and freedom. His early training must have given him the power he possessed of treating detail with the most dainty fineness, yet keeping it always in its place, never letting it appear laboured or

obtrusive. There is a "Madonna" of his in the Vienna Gallery—an early work—that has the clearness and simplicity of the Primitives, with a greater fulness. It is carried to the finest point of realisation, with seemingly the greatest ease. It is one of the most beautiful things in the Gallery.

Titian chose, as a rule, a simple mode of lighting—a warm daylight, or evening light, upon his figures; not concentrating the interest on one main point of his picture by suppression of minor things, but controlling it from one end to the other, and including everything in his attention. His effect was produced by devices of composition which he invented, or developed, from his own observation of nature. I have already indicated how, by relieving figures in light by figures and objects in shade, or by uniting figures and groups by shadows—on the ground, on or from trees and buildings—he constructed his pictures, using these momentary effects of contrast which we may notice for ourselves in nature. These devices, besides enabling him to make his picture by placing his principal

objects in prominence, give us the sense of living and moving nature ; of man not merely posed against a background of landscape or building, but in the scene, and part of its setting, so that one influence is felt throughout. And in this use of landscape, as well as in his treatment of landscape as a mood of nature, and not a transcript of nature, Titian was the first and one of the greatest of landscape painters.

His method was usually to keep the principal parts of his picture warm and light, and this warmth was enhanced by the blue of the sky, which he frequently used in his background ; and the colours of his principal figures were made to tell out strongly, as well as separated from the background, by masses or spaces of shadow in the middle distance ; as we see in the picture of the " Entombment " in the Louvre. We may notice, too, in this picture how the central light is packed round with various colours—rich reds and dark greens—in the dresses of the supporting figures.

When we endeavour, in cold blood, as it were, to gauge the actual colour of his work by comparing it with white, its richness and depth are



*Louvre*

THE ENTOMBMENT

*Titian*



amazing. It seems, indeed, to go beyond the power of the palette as we know it, but, of course, it cannot be so ; and it is recorded that Titian used few and very simple colours to produce his fine harmonies. I doubt if his work owes much to the mellowing of age. It must always have been fine and rich, and I think, as I have said, that the Italian painters were led in the direction of warm and glowing colour through feeling strongly the beauty of blue ; for, as we know, it is only by keeping the whole tone of a picture warm that the beauty of blue can be expressed. How this richness was produced, this depth without darkness, has been again and again discussed. It is called the " Venetian secret," and certainly no other painting is so full of colour ; and is considered—I think rightly—to have been produced by first painting a solid monochrome in tempera, on which the picture was finished, in its colours, in oil. But we need not trouble much about the method, for whatever it was, great knowledge, and that only, was the secret of Titian, as of all the other masters. This is brought home to us when we see a number of fine pictures

of different schools hanging side by side, as in the Salon Carré of the Louvre, where there are on the same wall, works by painters as different in their methods as Rembrandt and Giorgione, Da Vinci and Velasquez, Raphael and Holbein, all agreeing together like good brothers. Their methods are as various as may be, but great knowledge was the basis of them all.

When in presence of one of Titian's pictures we are conscious of their being true to a noble vision of nature,—*i.e.* that particular elements have been chosen and put before us,—and we feel, although we are not always conscious of it, except by comparison with other men's work, a sentiment, which by means of colour alone he has conveyed to us. I think the sentiment of his pictures is communicated but little by form or expression, and almost entirely by the emotional power of their colour. His figures have the natural grace and gravity of their race, with an air of nobility, and, as Reynolds says, of senatorial dignity, of his own ; but to me they seem to go through their actions as in a formal pageant, without interest, with something even of an air of

indifference. There is in them nothing of the familiar, passionate human interest—of insight, almost, one feels, into the very souls of his subjects, that we find in Rembrandt ; which moves us so deeply, and makes us—at anyrate, I find it so—to hold Rembrandt nearer to our hearts than any other artist. Titian's power is in the beauty of his colour, and this is the special power of the painter. By his command of colour he imposes his mood upon us without our knowledge, making us look at nature through his eyes.

Titian was greatest as a portrait painter, as Reynolds has said. In arrangement, and in painting, and in character also, although he does not give so searching a reading as Rembrandt, they are as fine as can be. We have none in our National Gallery, but there is a very fine portrait in the Louvre, the "Man with the Glove." This work is beautifully drawn and modelled, the head very simply and broadly, so that everything seems left out, but everything essential is there. The head is not forced out into the highest light, as is the usual practice now, but is kept lower in tone than the linen,

which is the brightest light, and each colour tells in its natural degree. I should imagine that his painting-room was not lighted in our ordinary way, from the north, but probably from the south, with a veiled light, and that he painted or studied sometimes out of doors ; for the lighting of his pictures could, I think, only have been arrived at by studying in sunlight, or perhaps by artificial light. His portraits seem to me to have very much the effect, both in colour and modelling, of people as seen by the light of a candle, where the light is reflected from the bright colours only, and is absorbed by the dark ones.

The influence of Titian can be traced in the work of all succeeding painters. Both Velasquez and Rembrandt owe something to him ; Velasquez more than Rembrandt, as he was better acquainted with his work. But the influence of Titian, of Rubens, and of Tintoret on Velasquez only supplemented, and did not lead him away from, his own frank and straightforward view of nature.

We know, now that we have his whole life's

work before us, that Velasquez had the surest eye and the truest hand of any artist who has ever lived, or at least that he was the equal in this respect of any other artist; but if we look at his early work in the National Gallery, we find that it is not "clever" in any sense. It is most uncompromising, somewhat heavy-handed, one may almost say common, in its execution; suggesting not brilliant ability, but clear insight and determination. We may notice in this picture—the small still-life group with figures, called "Christ in the House of Martha"—how everything is set down relentlessly and thoroughly; and in another early work, the "Dead Warrior," we see the same thing—everything is painted deliberately and apparently without alterations. It is only those who try to paint who know how much knowledge, how much determination, this implies.

But so much is said of the freedom of Velasquez's painting, and so often is his name used to justify careless and sloppy work, that one may be allowed to draw attention again to the old truth—that this freedom was only gained at the

price of labour, greater than most of his worshippers seem willing or able to undertake ; and that the charm of his painting is that, with all its freedom, it is so careful and so beautifully drawn. He having, by great labour, learnt what to do, practice gave him a ready means to his end. It is surely, then, a mistaken idea for an artist to think that he can begin in Velasquez's later manner, where he left off. If he will follow this great master, let him begin as the master began, and tramp the whole road.

The work of Velasquez seems to reveal the temperament of a dispassionate observer, with an eye so keen and so thoroughly trained that nothing escapes him ; but he does not show us his own feeling towards his sitter. In other painters' work, we get at least some hint of the artist's feeling towards the persons he brings before us, but we do not get this in Velasquez. He is a perfect mirror. His attitude is that of one apart, or aloof, from his fellows, understanding, but without appearing to show sympathy or enthusiasm. These feelings seem to be reserved for the painting itself, though in some





*Velasquez*

THE SURRENDER OF BREDA

*Prado*

of his pictures, such as the "Surrender of Breda," where, I fancy, the Italian influence can be seen, and in some of his dwarfs, there is, I think,—I have not seen the pictures themselves, and only know them from photographs and copies,—a little nearer approach to his persons, a little less detachment than usual.

In examining his work we can follow with delight the interest he must have felt in recording the things before him, and yet the final impression remains that the picture was not painted for the sake of fine painting, and that his manner was but his ready way of expressing his subject. When we look at that fine portrait of the Admiral in the National Gallery, we think only of the man who stands before us, as he stood before the painter; and it is only when we come near and realise the extreme simplicity of the means by which the illusion of his presence is produced that we are amazed at the painter's skill. These odd, apparently unrelated, touches of colour, which we see at close quarters, explain themselves and take their place when the picture is seen at its proper distance. The fine portrait

of Pope Innocent x. in Rome impresses in the same way.

The later work of Velasquez is the finest of all. One cannot imagine direct painting finer than the head of Philip iv. in the National Gallery, and it has every appearance of being done with ease and certainty. There is no display, no trace of effort, no "execution." And in what must be his finest work, "Las Meniñas," of which I have only seen a study, a problem of the utmost complexity in gradation is solved with apparently the greatest ease. The arrangement is so easy and natural that one does not realise its consummate art. How beautifully the figures are proportioned to the room, and how finely the large dark empty space above contrasts with the light and sparkle of the figures! His paint charms by its clear silvery colour and by what looks like unconscious certainty in his handling, and this must have come to him naturally, unsought. But the great interest of his work lies in the fact that it is so "modern," that he paints things as we see them; and this has been well pointed out by the late R. A. M. Stevenson in his



*Velasquez*

LAS MENIÑAS

*Prado*



excellent appreciation of Velasquez, which I should advise you to read.

Rembrandt in some of his works, as in the "Syndics," at Amsterdam, is as fine and rich in colour as Titian ; but in the range and variety of his lighting, and in the interest he shows in life and character, he goes beyond either Titian or Velasquez. Every portrait, every picture indeed that he painted, seems to have been undertaken as a problem of lighting, as well as of character ; but there is nearly always, I think, some reflection of himself in his portraits, and if detachment is the ideal, he was inferior to Titian or Velasquez in this respect. But he was greater, perhaps, than any other painter in human feeling and sympathy, in dramatic sense and invention ; and his imagination seems inexhaustible.

His qualities, however, do not strike us at once. If we come from looking at Titian, or any of the fine Italians, to Rembrandt, our first impression is of plebeian coarseness, of uncouthness, and even of vulgarity, and all these qualities are there. But if we can put aside our pre-

judices, and try to understand his meaning, we find, after a time—it takes a little time—that beauty may wear the most unlikely dress. We discover beauties of design, of delicate drawing, and of sentiment, and a depth and intensity of feeling so convincing, that the ugliness of his types becomes of small account. Compare, for example, Rembrandt's etching of the "Descent from the Cross," either the large or the small platé (the small one is the better, for probably the design only of the large plate is Rembrandt's) with the "Entombment" by Titian. The tragic side of the scene is finely given by Rembrandt, and Titian's picture is formal in comparison with it, although this is one of his most expressive works.

Rembrandt's eye seems to have been always attracted to the point of light, or the source of light, when the actual colours of objects were rather suggested than seen, or if the light shone on objects it was always focussed on the principal parts by shadows; and we find his work characterised by the most searching study of shadows and their infinite gradations, as well as of the diffusion of light. This study of light





*Rembrandt*

*National Gallery*

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

and shade in his pictures is so thorough as to seem an end and object in itself, but it was only with him the means of expressing or enhancing his idea. The idea and its presentation are inseparable, and his pictures seem to be imagined rather than constructed. He seems to take a suggestion from some very ordinary scene, and to carry it on in his mind and make it significant; as in the "Adoration of the Shepherds" in the National Gallery, the light and shade motive of which was probably inspired by something he happened to see in a stable.

This is, to my mind, one of his most beautiful works. If we look at it long enough to get beyond the paint, we find ourselves in the stable, taking part in the scene, with the shepherds; we seem even to know them well. The lighting, expression, gesture, and sentiment in this work are all natural and true; and the picture in the Wallace Collection, the "Unmerciful Servant," with the figures starting out of the deep background, is also an instance of his lighting, or conceiving a picture so as—unconsciously, it seems—to emphasise the dramatic element in the story.

There is something greater and deeper in this than the mere artifice of lighting. The "Supper at Emmaus," and the "Good Samaritan," both in the Louvre, are instances of this marvellous power of conceiving his subject which can be seen in all his works, even in the slightest sketch.

Two drawings are reproduced here from the British Museum Collection. These drawings of his, made on the impulse of the moment, with expression as the one aim, show the richness of his imagination and his mastery more clearly than do his paintings, where other aims and problems enter, and sometimes confuse or obscure the thought. They are most wonderful in directness and expressiveness ; in a happy instinctive rightness of arrangement, which seems inevitable. Every essential thing is given with the slightest of means—with the greatest economy of line ; yet they are not slight sketches, but full and complete expressions.

We should study his drawings and the magnificent series of his etchings, as well as his paintings, for not only do we see in these the great range of his invention and expression, but his fine draughts-



*Rembrandt*

JOSEPH CONSOLING THE PRISONERS  
(PEN DRAWING)

*British Museum*



manship. It is, too, in his drawings, but most of all in his etchings, that we see Rembrandt's greatness in landscape. As an etcher, he is beyond question the greatest master, and the completeness and delicacy of his plates has never been surpassed. His etchings alone number about three hundred, and there are about four hundred and fifty of his paintings, and some hundreds of drawings, so that his life must have been one of unflagging industry, of constant progress towards perfection ; everything that he touched is fine in some way. And if we think of this enormous number of works from his hand, and their great perfection ; and realise how readily his work must have been done, and how few mistakes were made, we can understand what is meant by mastery.

Our knowledge of art is wider than that of our predecessors. Not that we have greater abilities, but we have greater opportunities of judging and making comparisons between schools. And time has helped us in coming to some conclusion on the vital question : On what does the reputation of an artist rest ? His work should express some

kind of beauty; it should be true to some aspect of nature; but, above all, it seems to me that an artist should be true to himself. In the work of all great artists we feel that we make the acquaintance of a person, and share a personal view—as in Titian, the interest is in the rich and beautiful aspect of nature; in Velasquez, in an absolute truth of presentation, with no preference; while Rembrandt saw with the eye of a poet, looking for the soul of things through their outward appearances.

Rembrandt in his later years, when he was producing his finest work, was, as we know, poor, and in such obscurity that his death was unnoticed by his contemporaries; and Michel, in his interesting book on Rembrandt, enforces this by quoting Gerard de Lairese, who wrote of Rembrandt some thirty years after his death, that “in his efforts to attain mellow colour he merely achieved the effect of rottenness. The vulgar and prosaic aspects of a subject were the only ones he was capable of noting, and his colours lie like liquid mud on the canvas,” etc. He goes on to say that in early life he was much



*Rembrandt*

ZACHARIAS AND THE ANGEL.  
(PEN DRAWING)

*British Museum*



attracted by Rembrandt's manner, and thought of following it, but better counsels prevailed! Gerard was an artist of some standing, and a follower of the Classic tradition, as the Dutchmen understood it; but the world has very willingly let his work die, while Rembrandt has come to his own.

The history of art shows that an artist's work lives by its own vitality rather than by following blindly a tradition, however noble. And the innovator is usually, in his lifetime, decried; it must be so. But sometimes it is recognised afterwards that the innovator was the loyal follower of good tradition, and that his opponents merely imagined they were. The work of the great minds, the great masters, remains unapproachable, and is, if possible, more highly esteemed now than ever; but where are the Caracci, Carlo, Maratta, Pompeo Battoni, and the rest who were so highly esteemed in their day? They are—perhaps a little undeservedly—forgotten, for they were able painters; but their glory is absorbed again into that of their masters. For, as Jean François Millet said:

“Decadence set in when people began to believe that art was the supreme end ; when such and such an artist was taken as model and aim, without remembering that he had his eyes fixed on infinity.”

V

ON LANDSCAPE AND OPEN-AIR PAINTING



## V

### ON LANDSCAPE AND OPEN-AIR PAINTING

THE main development of painting in the last century has been in the direction of landscape painting, and, as allied to it, of figures under the conditions of outdoor lighting—in the open air. We may go back to the Italian Primitives for the first landscape painters, although landscape was then only an accessory, and did not, as a rule, consist of more than a sky and a view of distant country, used as a background for figures. But these little glimpses of landscape, especially the skies, are most interesting and beautiful. I do not, indeed, think that skies have at any time been painted which give the feeling of light so beautifully, or a finer, purer sentiment in the landscape itself. There is a very fine instance in the large fresco by Perugino in the National Gallery—a picture repre-

we come down to Rembrandt, whose influence is still the leading one in the Dutch school. There is a little-known Dutch artist, Hercules Seghers, a landscape painter, who lived a little before Rembrandt, and is believed to have greatly influenced him in his feeling for landscape. I think only one of his paintings is definitely known ; but there are a number of very beautiful etchings in the British Museum, some printed in different colours, a method which he is believed to have invented. These are very remarkable works, and should be studied. From Rembrandt, through Ruisdael, Hobbema, Vermeer of Delft, down to our Norwich school, to Gainsborough and Constable, and to Turner, the connection is all clearly traceable and well known. The great French school of the forties—the Romanticists, as they are called—Rousseau, Corot, Daubigny, and their allies, received their impulse through Constable. Delacroix was influenced by him also ; and the later impressionistic developments of landscape painting in France may be traced to the inspiration of Turner.

Any view of outdoor nature may be said to be

a landscape ; it may be the barest record of facts, or it may give something like a vision, with hardly any support at all from facts : the range is very wide. But in what does the charm of a landscape consist ? It must be a record of a scene ; that is, it must be true to the appearance, and must show the facts of nature under the influence of some definite effect of light. But there must be something more. An accurate record of a scene, although it may be true to the facts, will not charm, will not move us so much as a picture where the effect, or sentiment, of atmosphere or light is the dominating motive.

Constable pointed out that painters should not think that the sky terminated at the horizon, but should realise that it comes all through the picture, and close up to us. That there is a particular tree, river, or hill in a certain place is of no great interest. The interest for us lies in seeing or recognising the great elemental forces of nature, living and acting in and through the little things upon the earth. A landscape should not be so much an inventory as a transcript or translation of a mood of nature. Its appeal is to the primi-

tive instincts—not to primitive people, not so much to people who pass their lives in the open air ; for they take nature and its changes as a matter of course, and look on the weather as a capricious master whose whims have to be met, and a tree only as so much timber, or flocks and herds as so much stock. This is really quite a natural and proper view, but the artist's view is outside this ; and a picture of landscape appeals mainly to the primitive instincts of cultivated people, of people who live in cities, who look from the standpoint of civilisation with a sentimental longing towards a more simple state. The French gallants and ladies of the eighteenth century liked to imagine themselves shepherds and shepherdesses ; and we, with our increased development of commerce and industry, have an increased appreciation of landscape, as if, since we cannot live with Nature, we would still be reminded of and be brought, even at second hand, into association with her.

The wide range of vision or treatment in landscape, as compared with that of figure painting, makes it difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at

any rules which can be generally applied ; for selection of subject seems more determined by emotion or impulse, and less by reason, than in figure work. The landscape painter is more instinctive than the figure painter, and, as a rule, is less definite in his study of form, or seems so ; but has a finer sense of gradation of colour. But the building up of a landscape seems governed by pretty much the same unformulated rules as of a figure picture, and to depend on the same elements—the balancing of light by dark, and the contrast of warm and cool colour, so that the masses of the picture shall be agreeable to the eye ; and the study of pictures, carried on concurrently with the study of nature, is the only way by which a student can learn how he can bring his vision of nature within the limits of a picture. I mean, by the study of pictures, that the student should follow the plan indicated by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and, if a picture pleases him, take the trouble to note and, if necessary, make a memorandum of the general masses of light and dark, where they come, and in what degree, so as to learn the general disposition of the main things.

All the great landscape painters have presented Nature in the way I have indicated, as records of her moods. Claude, in his picture of the "Queen of Sheba," did not, we may be sure, care about the Queen of Sheba at all. She was only a point for his picture ; nor was he much interested in the towers, columns, and palaces which frame his picture. What he wanted to paint, what he wanted to impress upon us, was the beauty of the evening sun shining in the clear sky over the sea ; and so well did he do it that the sun still shines in his picture, after over two hundred years. No one but Turner has ever equalled him in the knowledge of subtle gradations of light. An infinite space in air is suggested without forcing the range of colour ; for the lightest part of the picture is far from white, and the darkest part by no means black.

In another picture of his, "The Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca," also in the National Gallery, the subject is not the marriage, which is a mere incident, to give excuse for some figures as spots of colour, but the beautiful peep of sunlit country seen through the trees. In this picture we may



*Claude*

THE EMBARKATION OF THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

*National Gallery*







*Turner*

APPROACH TO VENICE

*National Gallery*

remark how the dark trees accent the sky and the river, and how dark they have to be painted to express the lightness of the sky. Their colour is sacrificed to their tone. Claude did not wish us to look really at anything but the stretch of open country. We notice the trees, but our eye goes through to the distance.

Wilson and Turner followed in the same path. Wilson's work is most beautiful in its direct, full painting, but he is limited in his range; while Turner's seems to know no limit, for he touched the extremes of light and dark, of sunshine and of gloom. Such pictures as the "Shipwreck," the "Sun rising in a Mist," and the "Calais Pier" show the power which he possessed—in which he is quite unapproachable—of giving the greatest minuteness of detail without losing the breadth of the general impression. In his later work, as in the "Approach to Venice," detail was suggested rather than expressed, but it was fully suggested. How delicate, in these pictures of his later time, are the gradations, and how slight the intervals between the tints!

Turner's enormous range, his comprehensive-

ness, and the beauty of his vision should be studied in his drawings as much as in his paintings. I do not, indeed, know if the drawings do not to the artist express his qualities best.

The work of Constable touches on smaller things and the more homely aspects of nature. He sees things at close quarters ; his range is not so great. He felt the beauties of everyday nature, of trees and fields under the sky, and painted them with a clearness and a freedom from convention which were then new in art. As you know, when his pictures were shown in Paris in 1824, they were welcomed as a return from conventionality to nature, and made the point of departure for what is now known as the Romantic school, the finest group of painters that France has produced. " The Valley Farm " in the National Gallery is, I think, one of his finest works. How beautifully his trees are drawn ! I think one of the most difficult things in painting is to paint a tree. The most difficult of all, perhaps, is to paint a sky which shall really be a sky ; but as this means that all the other elements in the picture shall be in accord with it, to paint a good sky is to paint a

good picture. It is not so very difficult to copy a tree, but to paint it so as to make it live, to give us the impression of life that a tree gives us when we look at it in passing, or without sitting down to paint it, is a thing that few can do well. How often, when we set about painting a tree—or anything else, for that matter—we lose, even in looking at it, the charm that attracted us! We get confused, I suppose, with the infinity of detail, and by our intentness on each particular part, or by analysing each part separately, our minds are taken away from the general idea of the whole which made us wish to paint it; and we end by getting a painting of the branches and leaves, but not the living tree. We miss it, somehow. One often sees trees painted that look all cut out at the edges, like trees on the stage, and when we look at the edges of a tree against the sky, we see that they look cut out, too; but if we look at the tree as a whole—as a great green dome, spreading up and rounding into the sky, with the light shining on it and through it—if we can realise this, we can get a little nearer to our tree. Sir Joshua Reynolds touches on this in his discourses, and

advises students to study the general masses and disposition of their trees, and not to devote themselves to painting each particular part.

Constable saw his trees as a whole, and so did Rousseau, Cecil Lawson, and Corot. Theodore Rousseau was the greatest French landscape painter of our time. There are two fine pictures of his in the Louvre—one, a marsh in the evening, and another of an opening through trees at sunset (I think there is a version of this in the Wallace Collection)—which are most perfect and beautiful things ; his work is fine in colour, severe in drawing, and has a wide range of effect. And Cecil Lawson, one of our best landscape painters, was very like Rousseau in his austerity and fine sentiment, and in his large view of nature.

One of the most delightful of landscape painters is Corot, whose work has a lightness of touch, and a kind of happiness in its delicate sentiment, which are altogether his own. He is another painter who arrived at ease of execution through beginning carefully and hardly. There are some of his early pictures of Rome in the Louvre, very beautiful, and, at the same time, very hard and



*Comot*

SOUVENIR DE MORTE-FONTAINE

*Louvre*



precise ; and I have seen drawings—life studies—of his, all elaborately worked with the hard pencil-point. He was able to paint, or to suggest a tree, in the most delicate way. Constable, Rousseau, and Lawson preferred the sterner and stronger trees—the elm or the oak—but Corot loved the delicate trees, especially the willow, and effects of twilight or dawn ; and he rendered the mystery produced by tiny interlacing leaves, which look sometimes like a mist against the sky, in a very beautiful way, which was, I think, his own. But this is only an incidental beauty of his work, which is remarkable in its expression of the clearness and fresh beauty of nature ; although, as compared with Turner, his range is very limited, and we feel his mannerisms when comparing him with Rousseau.

Claude, Poussin, Wilson, Turner, and Corot all lived and worked in Rome, and I think this influence shows in their work, in the sense of what is called style. There is in Italy something nobler in the natural forms than in our Northern lands, and the air is more serene ; Italy has a

beauty which has made and still keeps it above all others as the artist's country.

Rousseau, the landscape painter, was associated with several other kindred spirits; and the greatest of these was his friend and neighbour, Jean François Millet, certainly one of the greatest artists of the last century. Everything about him and his comrades is so well known, and so easily accessible, that I need do no more than touch on his work. He was, I think, the first, perhaps the only modern, to approach nature with the simplicity of the early painters. I mean simplicity of mind rather than of method; as compared, for instance, with our Pre-Raphaelites, who varied from their contemporaries not so much in the nature of their subjects, which were much the same as those in vogue at the time, as in their method of painting them. But Millet was not the first painter of peasants. This was, I think, an artist of whom I have already spoken, the elder Breughel, quite one of the early men. There are a number of his pictures in the gallery at Vienna, of rustic scenes, harvesting, etc., very fine in drawing and colour,

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and painted for the sake of their subjects, and not as accessories, as are the charming groups of woodmen in the background of Bellini's "Peter the Martyr" in the National Gallery. Breughel's work is very little known in this country.

The work of Millet was a new note in modern art. No other has seen so clearly and shown so well the beauty and significance of ordinary occupations, the union of man with nature, and the dependence of man on nature. The peasant had been painted by the Dutchmen, but generally from the point of view of ridicule, and by Morland; but he was usually represented as drinking,—or resting in some way,—and was not painted, as Millet painted him, from cradle to grave, as one may say, in the midst of his daily work. One remembers, too, an ideal sort of peasant, painted by men who did not realise that his labour is hard, constant, and exacting, and who did not see the beauty of the simple movements necessitated by it. But Millet was painting things which he understood and felt thoroughly; yet his work, which we recognise now as being both true and beautiful, appeared

to his contemporaries as a rather repellent rendering, and it was some years before he was properly appreciated. He was a great inventor—greater even as an inventor than as a painter; for he was not a facile painter, and painting with him was not an end in itself, but only a means of expression. His design was always most beautiful, and there is, I suppose, no incident of the peasant's life that he has not made the subject either of paintings or drawings; and always the chief interest lay in the expression of the action or sentiment, and the type. Although his colour was harmonious, and sometimes very beautiful, these qualities of painting were of lesser importance to him than those of design. When the point of expression he sought was reached, he left off, whether his paint was smooth or rough; but he always gave as much detail as he wanted, and in some cases, as in his picture of a "Village Church" in the Louvre, it is carried to very great completeness, with beautiful colour all through. This is one of his finest works.

If we compare his work with that of Bastien Lepage, the greatest of those who have been



*Engraved by A. Lavieille*

NOON

*Drawn on wood by J. F. Millet*



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inspired by him, we find Millet still the master, though Bastien, as a painter, was incomparably more able and skilful. Bastien painted the same kind of subjects, sometimes absolutely the same subject, as must sometimes happen. Not, like Millet, letting everything go for the sake of the expression, but painting for the sake of giving the true effect of people in the open air, with the light and actual colour of nature ; at anyrate, this became the dominant motive, and he has done this more beautifully than any other. In some ways his work recalls that of the early Italian masters, such as Filippino Lippi, in its clear lighting and definite drawing, and intensity of expression. Yet its interest loses when compared with the work of Millet ; or rather, a different point of view, one not so vital, is presented to us. The approach is so near, the study so close, that the portrait interest dominates and displaces the interest of the type, which Millet always preserved. And the necessity of painting from his model posing leads to Bastien's avoiding sunlight and effect, and confining himself to an even light ; and leads also to the

qualities of action, and interest of subject, being sacrificed to truth of resemblance, so that we have two qualities to set against each other : in the work of Millet, the presentation of the type and the action ; in the work of Bastien, the presentation of the individual and the surroundings. The sentiment was the same, but in this Millet was stronger. His qualities lead up to it, and enforce it, while Bastien's tend to divert our attention from it.

There is a design of Millet's, one of a series he drew on the wood for engraving—a mid-day rest—which we may compare with the " Foins " by Bastien Lepage. No doubt Bastien was inspired by Millet, and I think we must agree that the impression of the subject is stronger in Millet ; of the individual in Bastien Lepage.

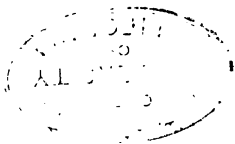
There is never, in the work of Millet, any consciousness of the spectator. His people are always intent on their occupation, not posing to the painter, not regarding anything outside their work. In the drawing of " Night," how well the intentness of the figures is expressed ! And nothing is forced ; it is all quite natural.

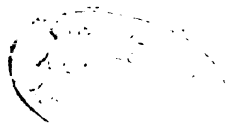


*Drapers on rood by J. R. Miller*

NIGHT

*Engraved by A. Leventine*







*J. Bastien-Lepage*

**LES FOINS**

*Luxembourg*





*Engraved by A. Lavieille*

NIGHT

*Drawn on wood by J. F. Millet*

I think the points of difference between these two painters, in spite of a common aim, are most interesting. They are both great artists ; but the question is raised whether it is not better to give, though imperfectly, the leading elements of a picture, than to allow a lesser interest to arise and supplant it. It is a question for the artist which he considers the greater interest in his work ; that he will necessarily express.

But Bastien Lepage, although he does not, I think, rank with the pioneer Millet, yet has a high place among modern artists, not only as one of the first who realised figures in simple outdoor lighting, but for the unaffected sincerity of his work ; and we must remember that Millet completed his career, while Bastien's was cut short by death.

Everything in nature is moving—not necessarily quickly, but nothing stands still for us ; this sense of life and movement must be given in a picture with the measure of detail which may be necessary, and the result reveals the artist's mind, showing on which qualities, and in what degree, his attention was fixed.

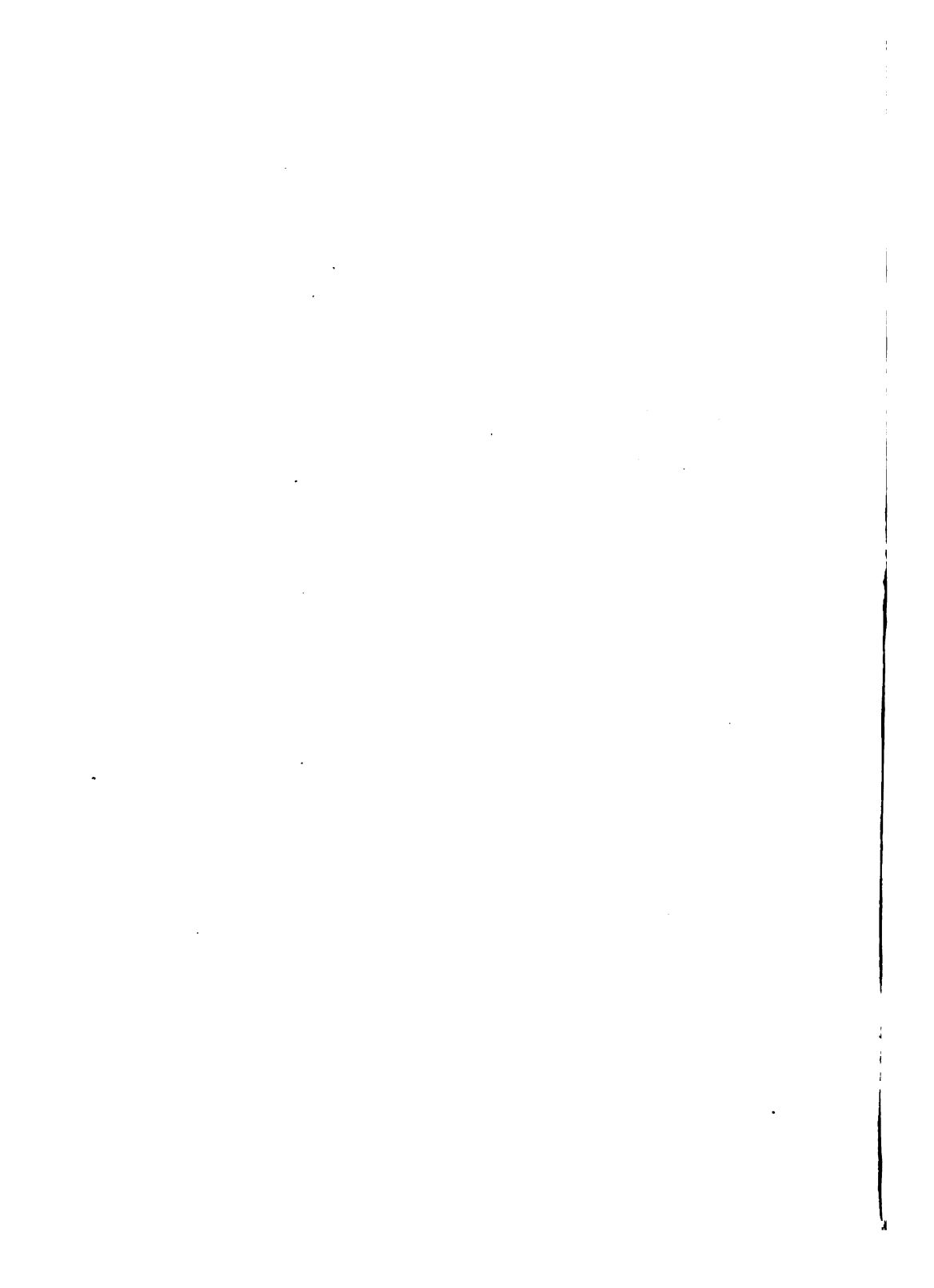
Corot, I think, in one of his letters, says that when he was a young man, painting from nature, he used often to wish that the clouds would stand still, so that he could draw their forms ; but that he had learnt later that it was a very good thing they did not, for the thing to express in clouds was their sense of movement. It must be a matter for the personal feeling of the artist how he expresses the movement of nature. No rule can be given, but we recognise it, or its absence, in a picture. We have a different feeling in looking at a sunrise from what we have in looking at a sunset, although at any one moment, if we saw it only for that moment, we could not tell whether we were looking at a sunrise or a sunset ; and the reason is, I think, that our sensations are, in one case, of a progression from darkness to light, and in the other from light deepening into dark ; and some expression of this feeling, although he may be quite unconscious of the means he uses for the purpose, will be given by the painter. In the same way, too, if we are painting figures engaged in any action, it will not bring to our minds a clear image of the action, if we only give one

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momentary phase of it such as a snapshot would give ; for we have in our minds an impression produced by successive phases of the action, and a rendering will suggest itself which, though probably not true, as a snapshot would be, to the action at any particular instant, will give the general sense of it more truly. If more than one figure is engaged in the same movement, the whole can be expressed by representing each figure at a different stage of it. A good example of this may often be seen when men are breaking up the streets, where four men will drive a steel wedge into the hard road with sledge-hammers, striking in turn on the wedge ; or in a row of men mowing, or of horses walking. One can, in such cases, by referring from one figure to the other, give the complete movement.

But whatever we are able to get direct from nature, in studying movement, should be revised afterwards, and considered in reference to the impression of the movement which we have in our minds, for what remains in our minds is the essential thing.



VI  
ON REALISM, AND IMPRESSIONISM



## VI

### ON REALISM AND IMPRESSIONISM

THE greatest work in painting that has been produced is unquestionably the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo. This work shows, in perfect balance, all the qualities of the finest art : invention, impressive sentiment, grandeur of design, with a presentation of form which is not only in itself beautiful and noble, but unapproachable in its expressiveness and appropriateness of action and gesture ; and in colour it is rich, grave, and harmonious. In this great work each quality stands in such perfect balance one with the other that no one asserts its pre-eminence ; and each quality is carried to its farthest possible point of expression. It is impossible to say whether this work is greater in knowledge of form or in the sentiment which it inspires—or which inspires it—

in its design or in its colour, in its fulness or its austerity. The general impression which it produces is of perfect harmony, and of a mind infinitely greater in its range than our own. Michelangelo is beyond, and apart from, other men. His work has not the sentiment of Pagan art ; it has not the sentiment of Christian art ; but is simply human. Millet said of him that he seemed able, in a single figure, to personify the good or ill of all humanity.

Never in art has there been shown such a perfect balance of intellect and emotion, each carried to its highest point, as we find in Michelangelo ; he is the one ideal artist. All is under the control of his mind. All is kept within the possibilities of nature, yet taken beyond nature as it is seen by us.

. It is hardly necessary to dwell on this, for it is the accepted commonplace of criticism, but I would like to touch on it, and on the question of idealism in art, so far as it seems to affect our work.

As you know, Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his Discourses, continually dwells on the excellences of Michelangelo, and exhorts his students to take

him as their model. And there is no book that an artist can read that is so illuminating and so helpful as the Discourses, though I think it cannot be so well understood by young painters as by those who have had some experience, who know their own mistakes and weaknesses, and through them can begin to estimate the greatness of the masters. These admirable Discourses give, with the utmost candour and clearness, with entire freedom from the sentimentality and gush which mars so much that is written on artistic subjects, the ripe conclusions of a great artist. We see the perfect workman—the master-craftsman, if I may say so—putting his methods before us and laying bare his mind to us. Now, if there is one thing in the Discourses more commented on than another, it is that Reynolds, while continually exhorting his pupils to follow the grand style, was himself a follower of the Venetians and of Vandyke—of the schools which he classes as merely ornamental, and lower than the grand style of Michelangelo. And this is pointed out as an inconsistency. I do not think that this charge is just or fair. No one can

read the Discourses without feeling convinced of Reynolds' admirable candour and consistency. No one can read his last discourse, especially the concluding passage, where he says, " I feel a self-congratulation in knowing myself capable of such sensations as Michelangelo intended to excite," without feeling his absolute sincerity ; and it is evident that Reynolds, knowing well how great he was, and how great was the work of the Venetian who inspired him, simply and candidly stated what he felt, in placing his own work, and that of so many other great artists, below that which he knew in his heart to be the greatest work of all.

I instance this as touching on idealism in art. It is evident that Reynolds recognised that more than the will was necessary to follow in the steps of Michelangelo—that to take up the work of Michelangelo one must have the mind of Michelangelo—and we can all recall instances in which his followers have achieved, not sublimity, but only bombastic pretentiousness—not realising that every peculiarity of his was part of his means of expression ; and they gave his body, and not always a good version of his body at that, without

his spirit. The only artist, so far as I know, who has been able to enter into and carry on his tradition worthily is Alfred Stevens, whose Wellington Memorial and other works stand alone, as continuing the spirit of the Renaissance.

The tendency to estimate the manner as of greater account than the mind is the cause, I think, of so many failures in the direction of idealism in art. It must be governed by the idea. If the idea is not worthy, or the artist is not capable of giving it expression, there cannot be a fine result. Ideal art requires a man to be both a great artist, as executant, and a great thinker; and such men are rare. The majority of us have to walk, as well as we are able, in much humbler paths, and to keep within the limits of man's experience, of things we can actually see; within the indefinite bounds of what is known as "realism."

Realism may be of different kinds. One may have the realism of external things, where a painter may so copy a face or person that though everything is represented in a way one cannot find fault with, it is all lifeless. This would happen if the painter were only occupied with the

visible surfaces of the person he was painting, and not thinking of expressing his individual character. Or one may have the opposite of this ; a realism of expression or character, in which the character of the person or thing may be conveyed to the spectator, although in its appearance—in colour or surface—we fail to recognise the painter's work as corresponding exactly with what he depicts. We feel that the painter has taken liberties with his facts. Or one may try and maintain a balance between these two extremes, giving each quality its due place.

The realism of surfaces only is a false realism. It seems to me to be a kind of evasion of the difficulty of true representation, and to ask that we should assume that the care with which the trivial things are rendered, implies that the greater ones are equally well rendered also. For though we may have all the buttons right, the ring on the finger, the curl in the hair, and so on, we do not produce truth of resemblance by the sum of little things without first securing the great ones. It is a common error that much detail necessarily means completeness, or conscientiousness.

The realism of expression or character, on the other hand, may reach the level of very fine art—perhaps the finest. It depends on the degree in which expression or character is realised. It does not depend on the accuracy with which facts or details are copied, nor does it depend upon colour, but upon a grasp of the broad structural features and movements which give expression. It is an analysis and abstraction of the simple forms.

The realism of externals is a fault too common in our work to-day. We see too many pictures—in all branches of painting—where the interest does not lie where it professes to be, or where it should naturally be looked for, but is frittered away over the surfaces of things, on rich stuffs, or flowers, or weeds, or other minor points and accessories; while the central intention, or what should be the central intention, is but little regarded. I do not wish to discourage attention to detail,—detail must and should be attended to,—but it should come after the qualities of structure and expression, not before. It is possible, with detail carried to the extremest point, still to be

broad, still to keep to the structure, still to maintain the expression, as we may see in the works of Van Eyck—especially, as masterpieces of modeling and character, the two small heads in the National Gallery—or in the work of Holbein, such as the “Duchess of Milan”; or, among modern work, the “Last of England,” by Madox Brown, and the “Ophelia” by Sir John Millais. But what we should guard against is letting ourselves be led away, by the comparative ease with which we can paint the little things, from the difficulties of painting the greater ones.

The realism of expression or character is to be found in the work of the past rather than in that of to-day. We find it in the work of Titian, of Tintoret, of Rembrandt, as in the “Jew Merchant” in the National Gallery, and of Sir Joshua Reynolds. It is not an imitation of nature, but an abstraction of an imaginative artist, and is found, as a rule, in his later works. We find examples of the middle course between these extremes in the work of Velasquez, of Moroni—such as the “Tailor” and the “Lawyer”—and of Lorenzo Lotto, in his fine portrait of an ecclesi-

astic in the National Gallery, and in the work of Veronese and Franz Hals. This is the direction, I think, in which realism in portraiture should go.

The degree of realism, or definite realisation in a picture, should be kept in accord with the actuality of its subject. For while it is quite proper, and may be very necessary, to realise materials and textures in a picture of actual life, it is manifestly no help, but is a hindrance to the expression of the subject, when the same degree of realism is given in an abstract subject or a mythological story. In such a subject, where the appeal is to the imagination through figures or persons whom we know to be unreal, it jars terribly to find figures, draperies, and accessories painted with the realism of still life, so that we recognise the model, or question the material of the dresses, and wonder where they were bought. Some convention, some treatment, especially of the colour, in accord with the sentiment, should, I think, be adopted in work of this kind.

The hardness and archaism of the early painters is acceptable to us in these subjects, as we see in the "Primavera," or the "Venus

rising from the Sea," by Botticelli, because it does not lead us to think of our treatment of nature. We are too far removed from the early men, and their style of painting also becomes legendary, like the story of their pictures. There is a consequent harmony between subject and treatment. We may see this in the work of Burne-Jones. Titian's convention seems to be too near to nature, Tintoret's is less literal, but Michelangelo's is the ideal one.

Whatever be the intention in a picture, the treatment should be in accord with it. This seems self-evident; but often we see pictures where a greater sense of reality, of unity, would be gained were a less realistic treatment adopted, and the picture would be more real if it were not so realistic. In painting real things, let us be as real, as true to what we see in nature, as we can. And the field is wide enough. But when we attempt subjects outside ordinary experience, we are under the disadvantage, as compared with the early painters, of not having the same naïve simplicity of mind which carried them safely through very difficult themes. We are too self-

conscious, too critical, and cannot walk securely outside the bounds of our ordinary experience ; and we seldom see a Scriptural theme, or an allegory, treated now in a way that we do not, in our minds, challenge—however much we may admire its skill—on the ground of its leaning towards a kind of realism that is inappropriate and distracting, in the sense that the real interest of the picture is not where it professes to be. As, in a picture of history, the historical interest may be neglected, or overpowered, and altogether secondary to the interest of the costumier ; although it may be said that from the painter's point of view it does not matter, and that good painting, as good painting alone, will always hold its own.

This is true ; yet I cannot help feeling that painting of objects, as an end in itself, is not fully satisfactory, and that true realism consists in the impression of general truth produced by rendering, not only the externals, but, by means of the externals, something of the significance of the thing painted. We find this in all the greatest art, and this should be the painter's

aim. He should give his reading of the subject. He should, at the same time, by study and by reference to what great artists have done, educate himself, so that his reading of nature may not be an ignoble one.

It is impossible to draw the line and say where realism ends and impressionism begins—that is, if we are not to confine the term “impressionism” to a particular school of explorers in colour. I do not think we should do so, as all art is so largely a matter of personal impression; and one quality runs into another, from the old conventions at one end of the scale to the extreme impressionist at the other, whose impression is so personal that he alone can understand it. But if we use the term in its accepted sense, as denoting the work of a number of artists whose interest is in recording effects of light, seeking to express nature truly and disregarding old conventions, we have a very interesting development of painting to consider.

There has always been impressionism in painting, but it was in the recording of form and movement, and not of colour. The colour of the older

painters was more or less arbitrary, except in the case of a few men. They did not study or seek to record the momentary effects and changes of colour with the keenness they showed in studying form, or light and shade. We know how they took trouble to give draperies the effect of movement, or figures the sense of action. And it was not until landscape painting had developed—until the time of Turner, and since then—that some artists saw in the study of colour as effected by light a new field, a little corner of nature which had not been explored, where some fresh beauty might be found.

The old painters gained colour at the expense of light, suggested sunlight by means of dark shadow, and the general effect of truth to nature by a proportionate lowering of the scale of colour in nature. Turner was the first to discard these methods, and to try and attain in a higher scale of colour one more resembling nature, the fulness and gradation of Nature herself ; to get colour in the shadows as well as in the lights. And in his finest works he did, I think, succeed in giving this, not only as it had never been given before,

but with a delicacy which has not been equalled since ; he was the first and the greatest impressionist painter. He left no successor in England, and it was not until some years after his death that Claude Monet, and some other French artists who had been inspired by his work, endeavoured to develop his principles, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that they were influenced to study nature in the direction indicated by Turner—the realisation of actual sunlight ; and their painting became brighter and brighter in the effort to express its full brilliancy, or to suggest its effect, until it has now reached the limits of what is possible in paint.

The impressionists have rendered sunlight with a truth of colour and freshness new in art—if anything can really be said to be new ; for their method of painting in pure colours is but a kind of magnified stippling, and one remembers the pictures of Eastern sunlight by J. F. Lewis, in which a wonderful brilliancy is produced by small touches of pure colour. One cannot help feeling that some impressionist work in its extreme developments—where, in

order to get the full force of colour, the paint is laid on pure, unmixed, and in separate spots—is, in spite of its beauty, disquieting and violent ; and that it is questionable if, after all, this method is as true to nature as the older conventions of painting, where the effect is more restful if less brilliant.

It is a fresh convention, that is all. One cannot say that it is truer than others, for truth is infinite, and cannot be expressed in any formula ; it may be truer in a particular respect, but this applies to the older conventions too. The impressionist methods make evident to us, by the force of contrast, the beauty of the older conventions, and many painters are returning to them as being more true to the general look of nature, so far as it can be expressed by paint ; this may be taken as a reaction from impressionism, it being felt to have reached its limit of expression. But we cannot contentedly go back again to the old brown shadows and degraded tones ; something has been gained, and we may try to follow the effective planning, the breadth and simplicity of the older painters, and still to have our colours

clear and true. It seems to me that the work of Manet was in this direction.

I should like to touch briefly on the art of Japan, which has influenced Western art in the last fifty years. It is a true style, perfect and complete in itself; and there is no art more beautiful, in the sense of simply giving pleasure by its decorative qualities. It is frankly impressionist in its disregard of all but the things chosen, is less diffuse and self-conscious than our art; more concentrated, more vital. Its point of view is altogether different from that of Western art. This difference is so great that Japanese and modern European pictures cannot hang together on the same wall harmoniously; the European work suffers. The two schools do not agree, and one would say that it is impossible to combine their points of view, were it not for the work of Whistler and Degas. Whistler, in the portraits of his mother, of Miss Alexander, and in his nocturnes, has entered into the spirit of Japanese art so thoroughly as to gain from it something of his own, and to develop his own art from its suggestions; and the work of Degas shows

the same influence in the unexpectedness of its arrangement and its decorative balance and spacing.

There is something disquieting in the fact that Japanese art is so beautiful, and at the same time so altogether different from ours, so much so as to cause a momentary thought whether it is not finer. But whether or no, we must keep on our own road, for our traditions and practice do not lead us to render nature like the Japanese. Still, we may study their work with great advantage; especially their fine colour, and the way they make their pictures by simple masses of colour or by silhouette, so that the effect is produced by the play of colour against colour, or by harmony of colour, and not by light and shade.

Our art appeals through representation or imitation, creating an illusion of nature in its three dimensions; while the Japanese representation of nature is not imitative, but selective, certain things being chosen and the rest ignored. And their art seems, in this respect, to have developed to its final perfection on the lines of the earliest forms of art, without changing its direction. If we go back to beginnings; to the

Egyptian wall-paintings, to the Greek vase-paintings, or to the earliest Italians, or even if we look at the drawings of children, we find they are alike in this, that they draw the thing they want to express, and leave out the rest. The Japanese make their selection in the same way ; their art has developed, but has not changed.

But in our art this simple method of selection is no longer possible ; figures must have their backgrounds and surroundings, and the appearance of nature must be studied in order to give, by light, shade, or colour, the necessary emphasis to the principal parts.

We are agreed that this is the proper way to represent nature, but the art of the Japanese brings home to us the fact that it is not the only way ; and we see from early pictures, such as the " Battle of St. Egidio," by Paolo Ucello, in the National Gallery, which is extremely like a Japanese picture, that the Early Italian point of view was very similar to that of the Japanese. Then I think we can realise how much the appreciation of a work of art depends upon the accepted convention of the moment ; and this

may help us to understand the unaccountable neglect which has from time to time overtaken great artists.

Our conventions serve the same end as the simple selection of the Japanese, to give prominence to the thing desired ; but it is not easy to decide how far we should be absolutely frank before nature, as we know we ought to be, and how much to depend on conventions. All that we can do is to try and understand the reasons for conventions, we may then be able to use them ; and the underlying thing, I think, is that imitation as an end is not enough—there ~~must~~ be some motive or point in the picture to which it is necessary to give prominence ; for all art is based on selection.

The student's greatest difficulty is to find himself ; what it is that he really wants to express ; and he is naturally more influenced by the present than by the past. His inclination is to think only of the mode of to-day, of the work which surrounds him, rather than to search for general principles. But he should try and arrive at principles, and to that end study also the work

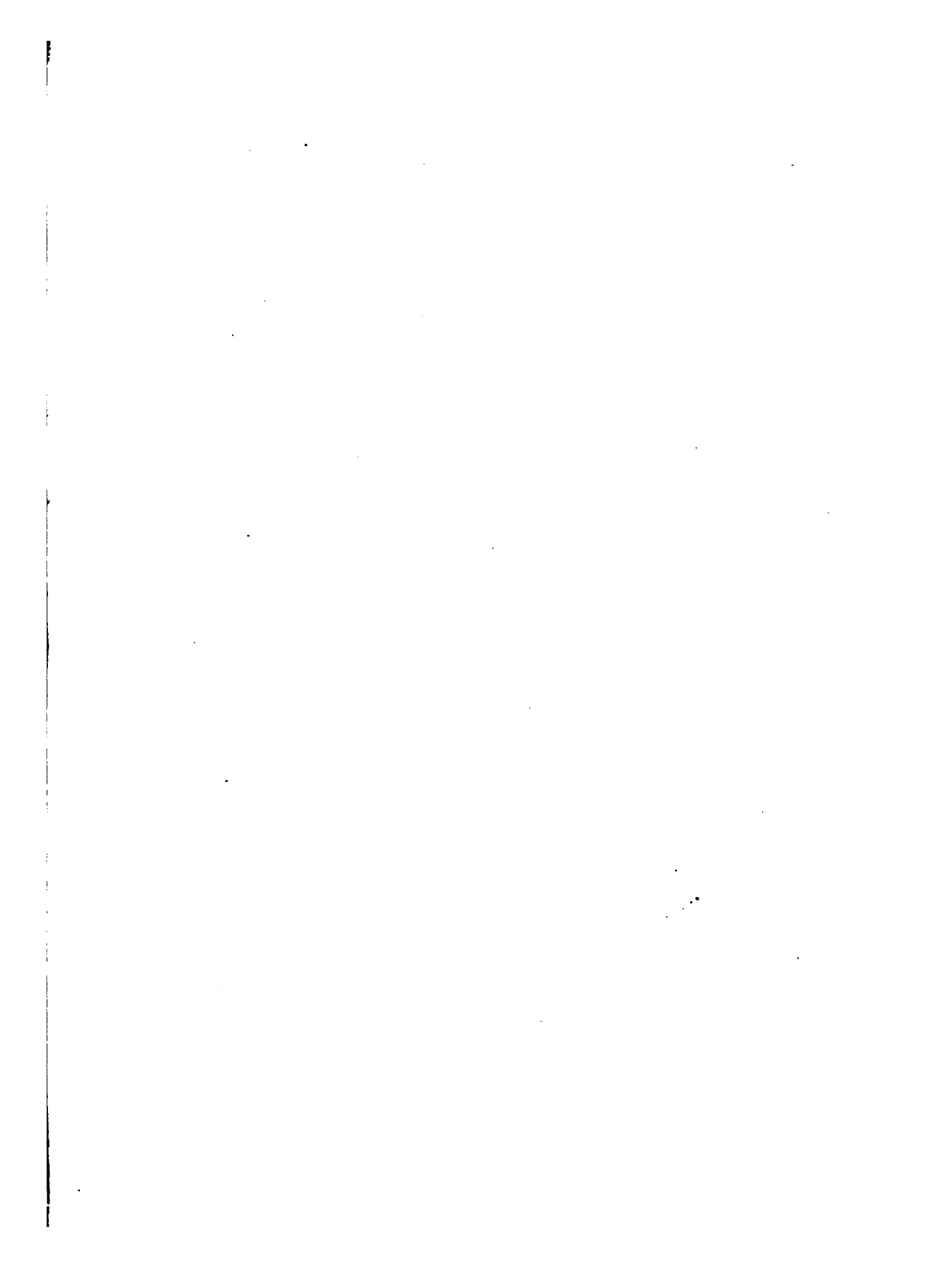
of the old artists, who have travelled the whole road ; depending on nature for his inspiration, while referring to them for guidance. For we train ourselves to see and understand, by studying the work of the masters, which help us to form our judgment before nature.

I have tried to put before you as fairly and with as little bias as I can, some of the problems we have to consider ; but it seems to me, now that I am come to the end, that I am something like the innkeeper who had but one wine in his cellar, which he made do duty for all vintages, only changing the label on the bottle. Like the innkeeper, I have given you the only wine I have, and, after all, the label does not matter ; nor does it matter, I think, what kind of label is affixed to our work—whether it is realist, idealist, impressionist, or what not. The important thing is that we do it as well as we can.

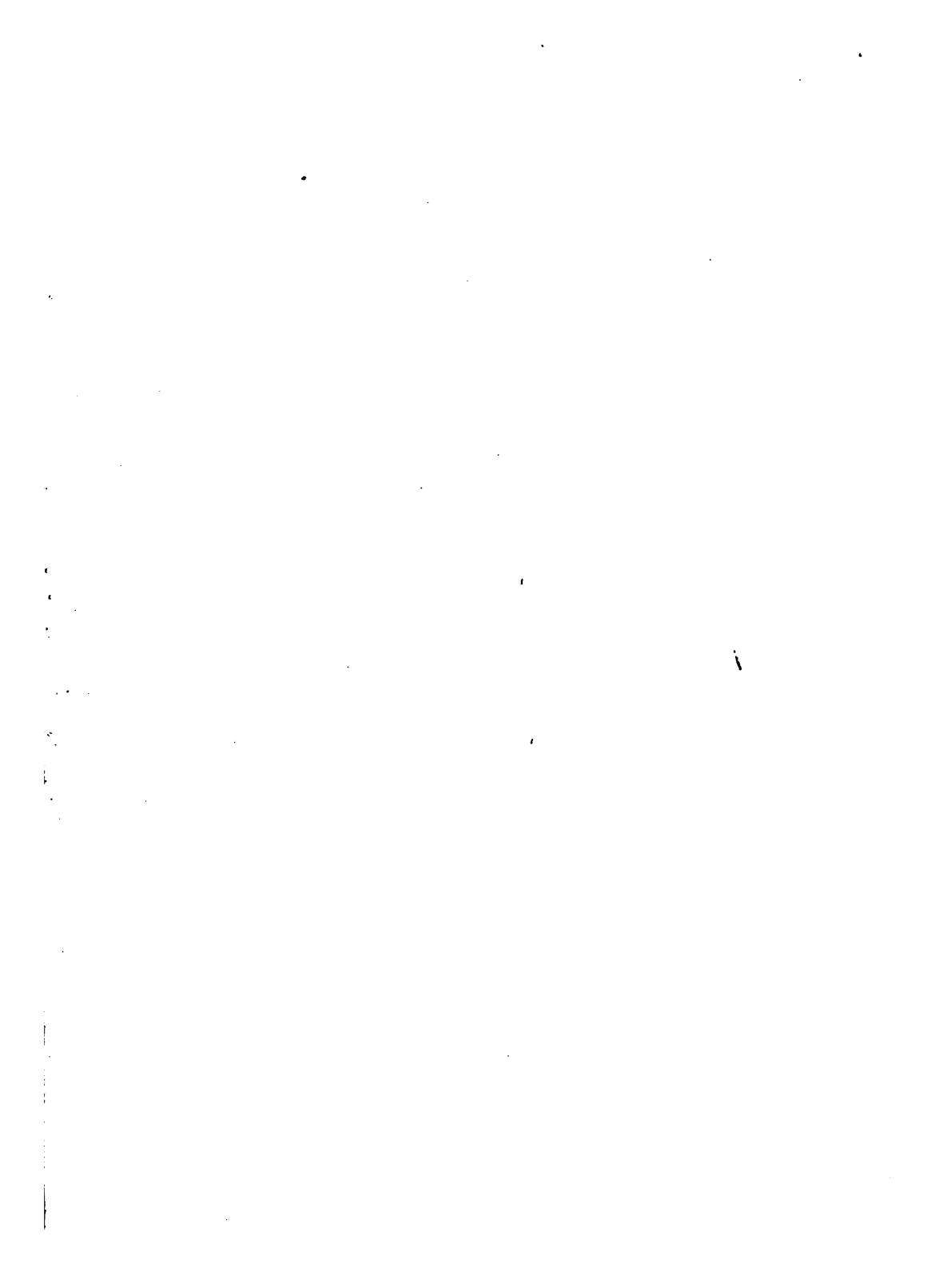


THE END

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