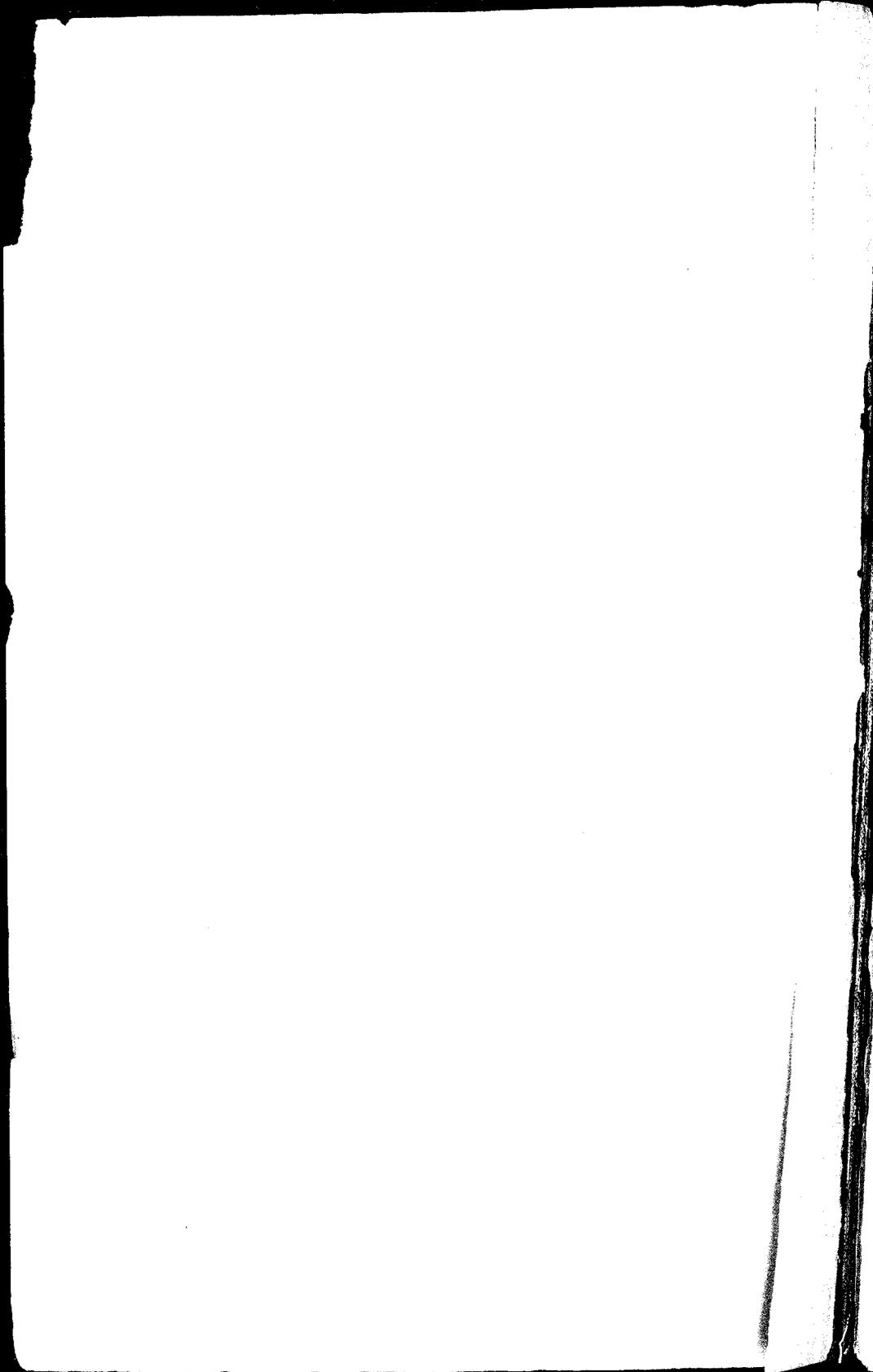

J. R. TYSON'S ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

WASHINGTON ART ASSOCIATION.

C. SHERMAN & SON,

PRINTERS.



ADDRESS

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Washington Art Association.

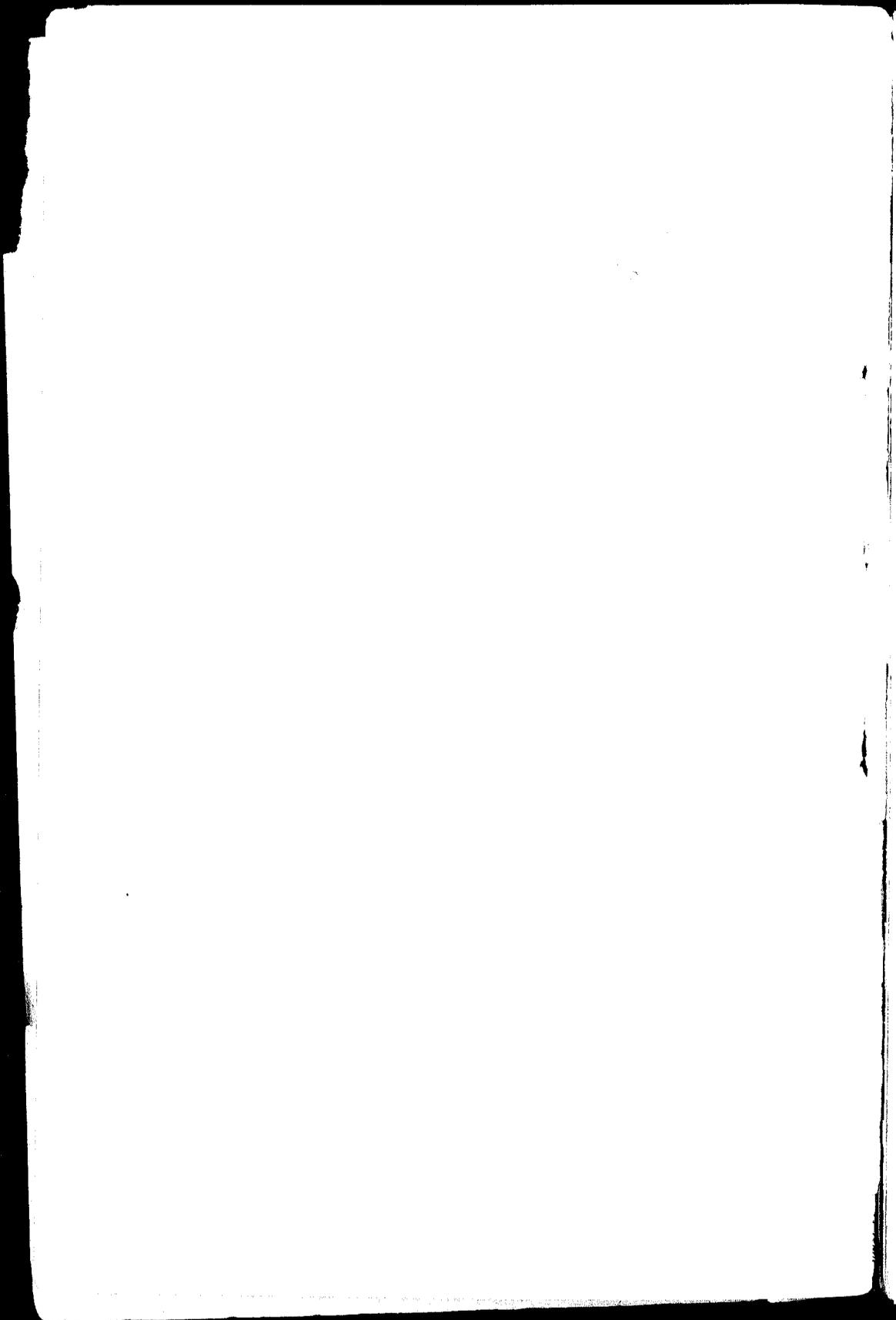
BY

J. R. TYSON, LL.D.,
OF PHILADELPHIA.

PHILADELPHIA:

C. SHERMAN & SON, PRINTERS.

1858.



CORRESPONDENCE.

At a Meeting of the Board of Management of THE WASHINGTON ART ASSOCIATION, held on the evening of January 6, 1858, the following Resolution, moved by Major S. Eastman, and seconded by Mr. Titian R. Peale, was unanimously passed.

Resolved, That the thanks of the Association be tendered to the Hon. Job R. Tyson, LL.D., for the able and interesting Introductory Address delivered by him on the occasion of the opening of its Second Annual Exhibition, and that he be requested to furnish a copy of the same for publication.

H. STONE,
President.

R. S. CHILTON,
Corresponding Secretary.

WASHINGTON, January 7, 1858.

To the Hon. J. R. Tyson, Philadelphia:

SIR:—In communicating to you the above copy of a Resolution passed at a late meeting of the Washington Art Association, I beg leave to express the hope that you will not hesitate to comply with the request conveyed in the Resolution, in regard to the publication of your very eloquent Address.

The dissemination of just and liberal views in reference to the all-important, but hitherto too much neglected subject of Art in the United States, is a chief object of our Association; and when such views are enforced with the ability so conspicuous in your Address, we feel a more than ordinary desire that the profit and gratification which we derived from listening to it may be shared by those who were not so fortunate as to be present at its delivery.

Very respectfully and truly yours,

R. S. CHILTON.

ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE
WASHINGTON ART ASSOCIATION.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: We meet together this evening to advance the plans of our infant society, under circumstances of peculiar discouragement.

It requires a fortitude which deserves success, something indeed of the ardor which *commands* it, to press forward in the prosecution of such a design, amid a thick financial gloom as universal as it is pervading. In times of prosperity and repose, the minds of men are attuned to objects of beauty and taste, and require their allurements to sweeten and refine existence. But the blossoms of elegance and art are chilled by the frosts of adversity. Their fragrance exhales and expires, when exposed to the stern and imperious struggles of life.—The effort which is now made to impress the aims of this Institution upon the age and the country, at a time so inauspicious, is worthy of the heroic spirit of those masters of the pencil and the chisel, as well as of song, who lived and died for the glory of their professions. Artists and poets, whose names are embalmed and immortalized in their works, were willing to

endure the ills of unrequited toil; and at last, to die, in miserable want, and unpitied obscurity, if future ages would but recognize and reward their labors. Without making such sacrifices, or claiming the recompense of such meeds, the projectors of this design are ready to incur the hazards and cares inseparable from the undertaking; and if, perchance, the seeds they scatter may find a prepared and genial soil, they confidently look forward to a beautiful harvest of taste and of skill, and a greater love and pride of country, as a part of its legitimate fruits.

The idea of making a repository of art for domestic genius, in this metropolis, among or surrounded by those memorials of national greatness which meet the patriotic eye, wherever it turns in Washington, is a conception honorable to its founders. It is to this place, that the home-student of whatever department, and the foreign tourist repair, for glimpses of the national intellect and evidence of the national manners. Here may be found no faint expression of the spiritual lineaments of our varied country, whether in opinion or doctrine, in science or letters, in personal habits or social peculiarities. Here may be expected a fair exhibition of American art, diversified by those varieties of climate, and those different conditions of society which distinguish its wide-spread and distant regions. In a land stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, and extending from the long winters of the frozen North, to the almost perpetual summers of the fervid and sunny South, the proclivities of the people are not less multiform and opposing than their several latitudes. The human mind, ever moulded by climate and local circum-

stances, and wherever placed in our free country, disporting itself without the restraints of conventional and transmitted usage, reflects these influences in an endless diversity of taste, genius, and pursuit. From these contrarities is formed the interesting aggregate of national character. We, therefore, add to the attraction of the National Capital, in giving to it all the artistic grace which American talent can bestow. The errors of local taste, and the mistakes of real genius, may here be exposed to the criticisms of an impartial and cultivated judgment; and the distinctive merits of every spot in the republic, recognized and rewarded.

To the Federal Legislature, the artists of the country naturally and justly look for employment, in directing the architecture of the public buildings, the embellishment of their interior, and the decoration of the grounds and walks of the metropolis. Every citizen takes a pride in seeing the great Capital of his noble country supplied with all the conveniences and elegancies of a high civilization; and he will feel that pride enhanced by the consideration that the grace and beauty which surround him, are the work of his own gifted countrymen. Private collections may properly contain works of foreign art, but the public edifices and their adornment, should be the productions of home-skill alone. The career of our country, the great and illustrious men whom her brief but eventful history has produced, and the spirit of our political government, will be best recorded and elucidated by the creative and emulous designs of the domestic pencil and chisel.

But, gentlemen, I do not regard the invitation which has

been lately given to a French historical painter, of the highest celebrity in Europe, to represent on canvas one of the great battles of the American Revolution, as a departure from the principle I would enforce. In the thickest of these conflicts, and fighting in the front ranks of the army, were to be seen some of the brave and chivalric subjects of France. As honorable allies in the posts of danger, they are entitled to fill appropriate niches in the temple of our national renown. The Library Committee of the last Congress, therefore, in offering to Vernet the commission to execute such a picture, might justly consider the act as one of national importance, no less than of special artistic propriety. Among the leading portraits of the vast group which will crowd his canvas, will be some of his own countrymen, whom France has long since placed among the greatest and most distinguished of her sons. Let France, then, through her most eminent limner, tell the incidents of one of those deeds of valor which stayed the empire of foreign dominion in these States, and blazon her own imperishable annals with a nobler page of illuminated splendor.

In all ages and nations, the artist has ever been regarded by the government with a benevolent and paternal eye. Without the liberality of sovereigns, princes, and nobles, or the kindly encouragement of private munificence, the fine arts have always languished or declined. Our laws have not created imperial or patrician rank, and the fostering aid of the legislature must necessarily be limited in the circle of its range and objects. From the nature of our popular institutions, private wealth can seldom be as

ample as the protected landed estates of aristocratic Europe, where patrimonies, if not increased, are not divided. But other elements exist, which supply, to some extent, the want of royal patronage, and the affluence of privileged primogeniture. With a schooled and reading people like our own, even among those whose training in early life has been confined to the most uncongenial pursuits, there are sometimes to be found a cultivation of tastes and habits of thinking, to which, perhaps, the common mind of no other nation can furnish a parallel. In this class, as well as among the most refined and highly educated of our people, no one can fail to perceive that an appreciative spirit of art is widely diffused.

But with this advantage, we have countervailing inconveniences. Our country demands, not merely for its political well-being, but for the physical development of its vast and unexplored resources, many more millions of wealth than the capital which its bountiful territory and rich and growing commerce supply. No one needs be told of the contributions which have been made in this republic to the sum of pure as well as experimental science. The vast attention bestowed by the best intellects of the land to practical knowledge, to the adjustment of the colossal machinery of government, and to the industrial pursuits of the country, absorbs much of that devotion which is challenged for the beauties of art. The truth, however, may not be concealed, that, under these disadvantages, much time and expense have been laid out in efforts of taste and decoration, in architecture, and in landscape gardening, as well as in statuary and painting. Schools of Design have

been formed in some of our chief cities, and tasteful and original patterns have improved and beautified our manufactured fabrics. It is thus that the *fine* embellish the *useful arts*, and minister to the utilitarian purposes of life, while they give to us new capacities of enjoyment, by quickening the sense of beauty, and refining and deepening our sensibilities.

Poetry and sentiment may exist in a region where artificial convenience and mental culture are limited. But it requires the co-operation with these of leisure, luxury, and wealth, to produce that condition of feeling and manners, which is favorable to a general appreciation of artistic genius, in its highest manifestations.

Greece in its earlier historic stages, and Rome in the time of the Kings and the Republic, were undistinguished by refinement and elegance. The ages of Lycurgus and Solon were eras of comparative barbarism, very different from those subsequent periods of Grecian glory, which are marked by the tasteful munificence of Pericles and the luxurious splendors of Alexander the Great. When Apelles flourished, the arts of necessity and convenience had long before attained their acme, not merely in Macedonia, but in the other States of Greece. While Rome was contending for the supremacy of the world, the hardier qualities of heroism and valor were cherished at the expense of the gentler virtues. But when she had grown rich by successive conquests and extended commerce, the city became, not merely the centre of dominion and wealth, and the great point of elaborate beauty and tasteful art, but the focus of the vice and the wickedness of the universe.

Many cherished and splendid works in architecture, sculpture, and painting, were transmitted from classical to papal Rome; but it is, nevertheless, to the latter, in modern times, that we chiefly look for the noblest specimens of pictorial genius in Southern Europe. The successors of ancient Rome found themselves surrounded by all the means of artificial existence. Such were the completeness, durability, and finish of the monuments of ancient Rome, in all that could minister to necessity, convenience, and luxury, that physical objects solicited from the modern Italians, but the slight attention made necessary by change in manners and the inroads of time. The tendencies of a luxurious climate, co-operated with the supposed interests of the new religion, to call into intense activity, the resources and powers of the popular taste, in the various departments of the fine arts. The noblest examples of human workmanship,—paintings and statuary of unsurpassed excellence and sublimity,—have thus been produced from the easels and shops of modern Italy.

England has not exhibited a sustained and superior genius for the fine arts. In that splendid period of Elizabeth, which has been justly denominated the Augustan age of the Empire, few works of artistic merit challenge our admiring approval. That age of romance and of enterprise, of noble poetry and subtle philosophy, of intrepid daring and high statesmanship, is undistinguished by the spirit which covered Italy at that time with pre-eminent glory. Even in the era of Charles I, the great patron of art, no native painter of celebrity appeared. In vain did the gifted and polished Addison endeavor, in the reign of

Anne, to kindle among his countrymen, by his Travels in Italy, a glow for ancient art. He called into requisition the resources of a mind elegant and suggestive in itself, and teeming with the finest passages of the Latin poets, to aid him in describing Rome and Florence, in their classic excellence. But his appeal was answered by no sympathetic response. Drawing and design were still at a low ebb or totally neglected in the kingdom; and no English painter appeared, whose performances could command the favor of his travelled countrymen. From the reign of Anne to that of Victoria, if we except the painting of portraits, and the bold and graphic—the inelegant perhaps—but still the spirited and original delineations of Hogarth, we look in vain for much to give a place of high dignity to the British school. Those eminent sculptors, Flaxman and Chantry, of recent times, and Mengs, and Reynolds, and Barry, indeed were Britons born. But Rubens, and Vandyke, and West, and Copley, whose paintings, executed in London, adorn the palaces or enrich the private and public halls of England, were of foreign birth and study.

A land whose history is that of high achievement and practical wisdom, whose genius has illuminated universal science, and shed a new effulgence on every department of literature, can well afford on one subject to be behind. In all else which tends to exalt and dignify humanity, she excels some of the nations of continental Europe, who distance her in this. To us, her offspring in America, she taught better lessons and bequeathed better qualities, than could have been imbibed from the example and precepts of Italy. The principles of Christianity, the representative system of

government, unfettered freedom in speech and the press, and those sterling bulwarks of social liberty in which the sea-girt isle is so far beyond all Europe;—these, with science and letters, constitute a portion of that inheritance which made our fathers great, and which have rendered their posterity a cultivated, a self-relying, and a happy people.

As this country owes little in art to her political mother, it may be well to glance at our real condition with respect to it, and at the career and prospects of its domestic professors. The trials of an artist in a society like ours, are indeed severe. True, the discernments of the native taste are quickened, to a limited extent, by the general cultivation and generous impulses of an ardent people. True, private wealth, though seldom overgrown, has been liberal to art. But true also it is, that the number of persons of elegant taste and leisure is small in our busy country; few models of artistic excellence are to be found; and no standard of taste exists by general acknowledgment. Caprice or whim, partiality or ill-nature, may most erroneously determine the merits of a candidate, whose works are submitted to the public favor. Not unlike the people of Rhodes, who had so little confidence in their own judgment, or so mistrusted its decisions, that they remained insensible to the eminent merits of their own Protogenes, until Apelles of Cos was sent to purchase one of his pictures for Alexander the Great.

Without the sustaining arm of opulent patronage, the artist in this country encounters all the evils incident to early and unaided struggles, with a mind ill fortified by discipline to endure them. The homely virtues of pru-

dence, patience, and fortitude, are not among the lessons taught or learned in the studio. The *genus irritabile* includes the artistic, as well as the poetical race. The mind dwelling upon beauty in its varied forms, contracts a disgust for everyday existence, and imbibes a taste for factitious elegance, wholly irreconcilable with toiling for bread. It is rare, indeed, and melancholy to reflect, that artists anywhere, and certainly not in this country, acquire distinction or renown, during the ardor of youth or the vigor of middle age; and seldom have their labors been repaid or reputations established, until the lengthened shadows of life announce to them the approach of its decline.

It is a mistake to suppose that the artist who labors in this country, lies under the disadvantage of having so few subjects of study. Some excellent copies, and a few originals from the best masters, may be consulted here, and though not so numerous as to enslave the spirit by imitation, we have enough to restrain the license and rectify the errors of genius, without repressing its originality. While so much artistic talent in the old world has been lavished upon superstitious legend, madonnas and saints, the American artist may appropriate many noble passages of sacred as well as profane history, which are yet untouched; and especially the events of our own country, which lie as an unbroken field before him. The majestic scenery of our new, broad, and Eden-like land, will demand the masterly efforts of the pencil, not merely to sketch the variegated beauty or unequalled sublimity of particular scenes, but to class and describe extensive tracts of country, in their separate and aggregate characteristics. He

may not have around him all the opulence of art in the works of the old masters, but he has faultless models in the wild Apollos of the woods. Magnificent nature is spread out before him in the cultivated plains, and in the grander regions through which, as undisputed master, the savage roams, or which, yet in pristine freshness, he has lately abandoned. Inanimate and animated nature, therefore, offers him new subjects in both. The very forms of society and the genius of our popular institutions, out of which the former have grown, challenge the exercise of vigorous and original conceptions to portray them. A new field of art may thus be opened and cultivated. With themes so novel and suggestive, the arts of painting and sculpture may, in this country, form a school of their own, as free from subjection to foreign ideas, as their subjects are dissimilar and independent. Such a school may have its own intrinsic defects, but it will be emancipated from others of foreign origin, worse even, perhaps, than those which it would perpetuate. The principles and canons of painting and sculpture, as taught by the best masters in Europe, are everywhere accessible. Steam and enterprise are quickening the spirit of commerce, and blending into a vast commonwealth, the universe of civilization, whether in practical knowledge and useful discovery, or in luxury, elegance, and art. It is this spirit

“Which gives the North the products of the Sun,
And melts the ungenial climates into one,”

upon which the American artist may depend for those aids, which, however desirable to the finish of genius when once

directed, may cramp and enslave it, if sought too exclusively or studied too early.

As evidence of the bold spirit of the American mind, it may be remembered that our countryman, Benjamin West, produced a revolution in British art, while yet unknown, by the costume he adopted in his portraiture of the Death of Wolfe. Reynolds, the Archbishop of York, the King himself, and the amateurs of the Royal Academy, were in favor of the classical *toga*, as opposed to the military dress of the hero, for which West contended. So convincing were his reasons for abandoning the ancient drapery in a modern historical painting, and so spirited and just was his execution, that Sir Joshua magnanimously withdrew his objections. The truth and integrity of West's views were signally vindicated by the ultimate acquiescence of his opponents, by the immediate success, and by the permanent popularity of the picture.

In Europe, the orders of social rank place the undistinguished disciple of the studio and the worshipper of the Muses, aloof from the crowd of the gay and honored. "Pass on, my lord," said a French nobleman, with reference to Piron, "pass, *he is only a poet.*" But it is related of Francis I—the magnificent cotemporary of Henry VIII of England—that he rose superior to this conventional restraint. Preferring the society of the untitled Da Vinci to that of the nobility of his court, he silenced their complaints by declaring that Da Vinci was raised by his genius above them all. "I," said he, "indeed can transform a peasant into a count, but it is God alone who can make a Da Vinci." The same magnanimity of act and sentiment

is attributed to Maximilian of Germany, in behalf of Albert Durer. While Durer was sketching on a wall, the Emperor bade one of the lords of his court, who was near, to hold the sliding ladder on which he was standing. The nobleman remonstrated, that such a service degraded the dignity of his rank, and ordered a servant to perform the office. But his clear-sighted sovereign indignantly reproved him, by saying, "The excellence of Albert in his art places him in the front rank of nobility. I can, with a word, make a thousand nobles, but I cannot transmute a nobleman into an artist." This deference to merit, original and acquired, this honor to those high gifts and sedulous cultivation which go to form superior genius, was not, and is not, universal in Europe. Historians admit that George II of England revealed his true character, when he said, "I hate boets and bainters." It is to this want of taste and sensibility on the part of the monarch, and to such a eulogist as he found in Colley Cibber, that Dr. Johnson satirically alludes, in that famous couplet in his London :

"Great George's praise let tuneful Cibber sing,
For nature formed the poet for the king."

But whatever obstacles, whether patrician rank, or rival pretensions bolstered up by rank, may obstruct the pathway of success in Europe, no such hindrances impede the artist in this country. Merit here will always command the avenues to distinction, wealth, and fame. If nature has first done her part, diligence and honor will do the rest. Let us see what a young American artist may effect for

himself in this country, without spending money in Italy to learn the arts, and with them their concomitants, the frivolities and vices of that artificial land. The dullards of the profession, those who have mistaken their vocation, and are fit rather for chopping wood than "chipping marble," will not enter into this question. Such tourists are well depicted by an English satirist,

"They dive in wells, o'ertop St. Peter's dome,
Doze through the Alps, and shoot all day at Rome."

History and experience may *calculate* for the fathers of these charming youths, who were born to consume or waste the fruits of the earth,

"How much a fool who has been sent to Rome,
Exceeds a fool who has been kept at home."

But endowments, how high soever, are not enough. The trite maxim, *poeta nascitur, orator fit*, if, indeed, measurably true in its application to poetry and eloquence, is not applicable to the highest aims of art. Diligent perseverance must combine with benignant nature, to produce the great artist. The well-known aphorism of Apelles, *no day without a line*, and his own undeviating observance of it, in giving himself up to daily toil, led to that renown which secured to him the friendship of Alexander, and the transmitted fame of succeeding ages. The artist, then, must be born as well as made—he must join to the ethereal inspiration of gifted genius that strength of character which shuns idle dissipation, and passes a laborious life, in the daily practice and systematic study of his art.

It is only such artists as combined genius with labor, that deceived animals and delighted men. The Bucephalus of Apelles, though it failed to please his master, was so perfect as to be mistaken by the original for a veritable horse; and the grapes of Zeuxis imitated nature so closely as to deceive the birds, which came to peck at them. Parrhasius was asked to draw the curtain which was supposed to conceal his picture, but the curtain proved to be the picture itself. But though practice and skill can perform wonders, yet it is true in painting, as in poetry,

"Some beauties yet no precepts can declare,
For there's a happiness as well as care."

This felicity of touch is the gift of genius. It was this which enabled West, when a boy, before he had been taught to draw, to catch and transfer to paper the likeness of his sleeping sister, an infant in the cradle, even with its smile, kindled by a dream.

The bull of Paul Potter, to be seen at the Hague, is so admired for justness and spirit, as to be placed by common consent among the great enumerated pictures of Europe. To copy nature with fidelity, so as to transfuse to the picture not merely the lineaments, but the expressive life and soul of the original, is no mean achievement. But the powers which are equal to these fall far below those which, by invention, suggest to the mind new thoughts and images. The pencil may not merely represent separate forms in nature, but it may combine them into action, and so dispose the parts as to evolve, as by a stroke, all the complications of an intricate narrative. It may create

scenes and unite them, with a concentrated effect, far beyond the reach of oral or written language. The poet may vividly express in words scenes as distinctly perceived as in actual life, or on the canvas. But Homer, who, according to Phidias, is the greatest painter that ever wrote, requires volumes to evolve his story. Is not the painter, who first conceives his images with the distinctness of the writer who describes them, and then portrays his thoughts on a single sheet in the magical language of expression, attitude, and color, a poet? Nothing, perhaps, can be imagined or expressed which may not be imparted to the mind through the medium of sculpture and painting. The most pungent satire, the most delicate irony, the severest libel, and the highest praise—vice in its most seductive forms, and morality with its most impressive lessons, can be spread upon canvas, as well as written in a book. How can the noblest events of history and greatness be so well presented to the common eye, or be so durably and nobly illustrated as by painting and statuary? But it is within the compass of artistic genius to present the grandest conceptions of the human mind in corresponding proportions of beauty and majesty, and to unfold them in the most fearful aspects of terror and sublimity. As an evidence of this truth, I shall invite your attention, in a few moments, to a production of native genius, which combines, in an eminent degree, the constituents of the terrible and sublime.

The flatteries of self-love are so delusive, as sometimes to mistake the cajoleries of conceit for the whisperings of genius. Ovid tells us that Pygmalion, a statuary of

Cyprus, fell passionately in love with a beautiful female form of his own carving. But for the marvellous transformation of the statue, we might fancy that the poet intended a sly innuendo at the self-devotion of a sculptor who could become enamored of an image, because it was his own handy creation. However this be, let the artist avoid that infatuated self-love which is blindly inflamed with his own performances, for however lovely and bewitching to himself, they may fail to win the affections of others; but intent only upon excellence, let him, with passionate diligence, seek higher objects at each successive endeavor, until he rises to a lofty and impartial conception of the perfect and the faultless.

With that steady but not overweening self-reliance which belongs to the character of our countrymen, the American artist should make himself acquainted with the alphabet of his art, with drawing, colors, and the principles of taste. Supposing him to possess these, a persistence in sedulous study and practice, purity of character, exemption from professional jealousy, and, above all, the magnanimity to admit the merits of a rival; with such qualities, his genius will command for him a just proportion of success and eminence. Let me, as an illustration, point to the example of an early native painter, whose history will show the certain rewards of laborious genius when combined with unblemished rectitude of life. I refer to Benjamin West. I select his name from the multitude of American artists, because his noble works, from peculiar causes, have been unworthily decried and undervalued. In singling out his productions, I would do no injustice to the illus-

trious dead of his own generation, nor to the several superior artists of native birth who survive.

Of Copley, Alston, and others of our early painters, it is unnecessary here to speak. The memory of Copley, whose birth-place, training, and formation as an artist were at Boston, is in the safe and pious keeping of his noble descendant, Lord Lyndhurst, who has collected many of his works into his own house in London, which had been that of his eminent father,—a repository worthy of his care, and of their high merit. Alston, whose birth-place was in South Carolina, and his training as an artist, in Rhode Island, where he found in Malbone, a man of congenial qualities, has passed through life, admired for his fine abilities as a poet, and for his brilliant powers as a painter. The reputations of these and others, some of whom are of scarcely inferior note, may be safely left to the informed judgment of the world and of posterity. Of West, therefore, I may be permitted to speak without injustice to them, since he was the first in point of time, and from the troubled period in which he lived, he has been exposed to influences which have injuriously affected his great and well-merited fame.

We have, in two of the Institutions of Philadelphia, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Pennsylvania Hospital, some of the noblest works of this great master. In its neighborhood, which was also his birth-place, are to be seen some of the earliest, as well as more improved, of his younger performances. No one can contemplate the obscurity of his early, or the splendor of his maturer life, or contrast his first rude sketches with the finished efforts

of his riper years, without an intense admiration of the genius, that, triumphing over impediments, produced them. When we consider the immense variety of his works, some of the grandest subjects which the uninspired mind of man ever conceived, or the might of the human pencil ever dared to execute, this admiration increases to wonder. No sooner did I arrive in London, in 1855, than forgetful, for the moment, of the treasured memorials of departed greatness which lie entombed in Westminster Abbey, I repaired to the retired monument of West in the Cathedral of St. Paul. The crypt of that venerable pile contains a simple monument of marble, bearing as simple an inscription, which records only his name, title, age, birth-place, and death. Fie upon the integrity of epitaphs! A truce to the eulogy of lapidary praise! The man, who, for thirty-five years, was the honored inmate of a Palace of the House of Brunswick, who was the chosen companion of the most illustrious and accomplished of its kings, whose works adorn, in large numbers, several of the Royal Palaces of England, and who, by common consent, sat for many years on the throne of British art; who was elected again and again, the President of the Royal Academy, which, if he did not suggest, he was chiefly instrumental, with the Sovereign, in forming:—this great artist lies without one encomium on his tomb. While the marble which covers the mouldering ashes of the painter, has no soothing word of regret or of commendation, the monuments of the artists around him are loud in panegyric; as if posthumous praise could bestow merit, or fill the trump of lasting fame.

But West was in a land of strangers. He went from

America to Italy in 1760, and from Italy to England in 1763, where he was received with pride and affection as a British subject. But the political events of the war of 1776 and afterwards, made him first a rebel, and then an alien. The distinction which he had won in Italy by his productions there, was a passport to artists of English eminence, whose laudations introduced him to the most brilliant society of London; whence he mounted from the intimacy of a primate and the patronage of nobles, to the notice and companionship of the king. The literary tributes to his merit were so general and emphatic, as to contribute to that universality of renown which raised him to the highest honors of popular, academical, and royal favor.

Nothing is more unsparing than the strifes of national jealousy. In proportion to the closeness of former intimacy, is the bitterness of estrangement. Civil contests often produce more intense animosity than wars between nations which had never been united.

It is curious to see in the literature of that day, what marvellous changes of opinion were wrought in British authors, by the wound which the revolution inflicted upon the national pride of England. American mind and talent, which were generously encouraged and commended by the British press before that epoch, were contemptuously criticised, derided, and disparaged, after that event. The inventive spirit of Godfrey, the scientific experiments and theories of Franklin, and the philosophic speculations of Rittenhouse, were each upbraided and denounced. No merit could be found in learning, talent, or genius in a country, however eulogized before, which was no longer a

dependency of Britain, and whose people had ceased to be subjects of the British crown. West experienced the full force of that inimical spirit which was afterwards so intensified by the revolutionary madmen of France. A host of writers rose up to destroy his fame; and so soon as the personal protection of the monarch was withdrawn, the painter, in the midst of his unfinished labors, was unceremoniously excluded from the Palace.

Among the shafts which were aimed at this unpretending benefactor of art, some were shot by Walcott, and others by Williams. The quivers of Peter Pindar and Thomas Pasquin were exhausted. Among the satirists of later times was the poet Byron; who having imbibed the spirit of the prevailing literature, and willing to point a couplet, denounced the amiable and gifted "West," as "Europe's worst dauber and poor England's best."

Is it surprising, that a sentiment which became as universal as the feeling which gave it birth, should have been adopted in this country? American readers, ever prone to rely upon British authority, in questions of literature and taste, too hastily admitted its decrees, and American writers began to reflect the criticisms of the British press.

The bright halo which once surrounded the name of the great American painter, became so enveloped in the mist and clouds of prejudice, as to menace its permanent extinction. But the transient eclipse has passed away; and the name of West has emerged from the shadows which obscured it. That heaving current of English opinion which threatened, in the tumultuous ferment of its overflow, to drown the memory of a great genius, is now be-

ginning to run in an opposite direction. An appreciative spirit is already apparent, in the altered estimate of his performances and capabilities. We may hereafter expect to find in the sequacious and submissive spirit of our domestic critics, an answering and obedient echo.

Among the English judges of authority who first appeared in his defence, were Sir George Beaumont and Sir Thomas Lawrence, names of the first importance in British art. Biography has, indeed, done justice to his memory and merits. Galt and Cunningham have severally lauded him with distinguishing approval.

In the list of his eulogists of later days, is a writer and an artist of the highest reputation. I refer to Sir Martin Archer Shee, whose elegant work, entitled "Elements of Art," thus vindicates his name and pretensions: "He has," says he, "good ground of complaint in the indiscriminating criticism of his day: and may be said to be in a great degree defrauded of his fame. Posterity will see him in his merits as well as in his defects; will regard him as a great artist, whose powers place him high in the scale of elevated art; whose pencil has maintained with dignity, the historic pretensions of his age, and whose best compositions would do honor to any age or country."

This same gentleman, distinguished alike in poetry and painting, rose to the eminent station of President of the Royal Academy, which West had held before him. From his elevated seat, he discourses largely on the characteristic merits of his distinguished predecessor, and pronounces him to have been the indisputable head of art in England. After recounting some of his works, he thus closes his elo-

quent vindication: "Who will hesitate to acknowledge, that the author of such noble compositions may justly claim a higher station in his profession than has hitherto been assigned to him, and well merits to be considered, in his peculiar department, the most distinguished artist of the age in which he lived?"

In view of the grandeur of his biblical pictures, which comprise a succession of connected designs to illustrate the antediluvian, the patriarchal, the Mosaical, and prophetic periods, embracing remarkable events in the New Testament, as well as the Old, Allan Cunningham observes, "A work so varied, so extensive, and so noble in its nature, was never undertaken before by any artist." The historical series was finished, and of his Scripture-pieces all were sketched, and twenty-eight were executed.

In this country, few except in Philadelphia have opportunities of forming a just conception of the pictorial genius of West. There alone, out of England, are to be seen several of his finest pictures. But it is chiefly in the Royal Palaces and the private cabinets of a few noblemen of the kingdom that the compositions of the master are repositied. His pictures are much in request, and command the highest prices. The original of his "Christ healing the Sick," which he duplicated for the Pennsylvania Hospital, sold, nearly half a century ago, for three thousand guineas. No one, alive to the beauties of art and susceptible of religious impressions, can behold this painting without feeling the sentiment of admiration expanding into reverential affection. But not to divide our attention among his many works, whose several merits yet wait for a full and impar-

tial analysis, let me select one which is open to all lovers of the grand and the noble, in the rooms of the Philadelphia Academy. I refer to his transcendent composition of "Death on the Pale Horse," in which the artist is confessed to have placed himself beside the masters and princes of his calling. The King of Terrors, with his withering and blasting might, speeds, in various forms, the ministers of his power, to nip the fairest blossoms of human happiness, and to lay low all the living things of earth. The direful desolation of his path is marked by the fallen, the dead, and the dying, of every condition and race. But the benign influences upon the pale monster, by the advent of him who sits on the *White Horse*, furnish a relief from this woeful spectacle of mortality and misery. But it is fearfully terrible to behold the triumphant march of the ghastly phantom, and to witness the destruction of all animated things beneath his tread. The contemplation of such a painting is no more pleasing than the reading of the deepest tragedy, or the study of the gloomiest passage of the "Inferno." But all amateurs of sensibility, who once look at this pictorial wonder, will visit it again and again. It realizes, by a counter delineation, the character ascribed by Phidias to Homer. Of West we may say, that his pencil, in vivid and graphic power, fills us with the images, sentiments, and emotions of the epic poet. One of West's biographers, after comparing him to Michael Angelo and Raphael, who were respectively believed to resemble Homer and Virgil, thinks that our artist approaches Shakspeare in the diversity, as well as grandeur of his genius. However this may be, as often as one looks upon

the picture of "Death on the Pale Horse," one mentally applies the fine description of Milton by Johnson, to that noble performance; for the power of "displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful," is indelibly stamped upon that epic painting.

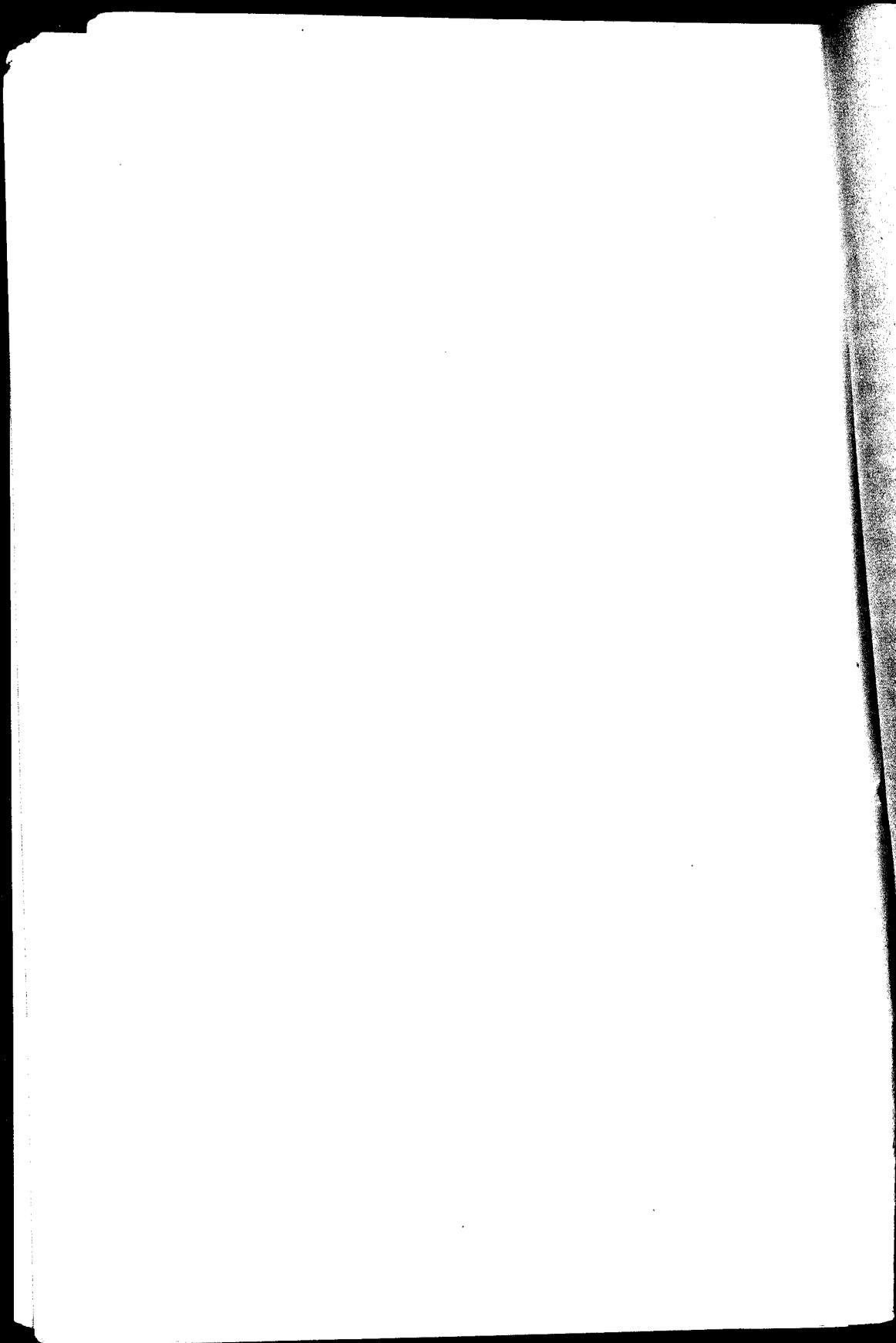
The citations which I have made from British authors, might be extended and multiplied. But these are enough to vindicate the integrity of the original judgment in England, and the unanimous opinion, always consistent and unflinching, of some of the best critics in Italy. But instead of dwelling upon the mistakes of a period which is passing away, let us rather enter into the feelings of the modest but aspiring artist in the beginning of his career. With an eye fixed upon the highest summit of art, he seems insensible to those obstructions and difficulties in his upward path, which superior powers and resolute toil alone can remove. He finds himself almost unknown and unfriended in a foreign land, but step by step, he wins his way through every obstacle, and at length, ascends to the loftier regions of his profession, caressed, encouraged, and applauded. George III admires and appoints him the Royal painter, he reforms the usage of British art, each new picture adds to his reputation, he founds, in conjunction with the monarch, the Royal Academy, secures the co-operation of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who is elected the first President, and, upon his death, is installed as his illustrious successor.

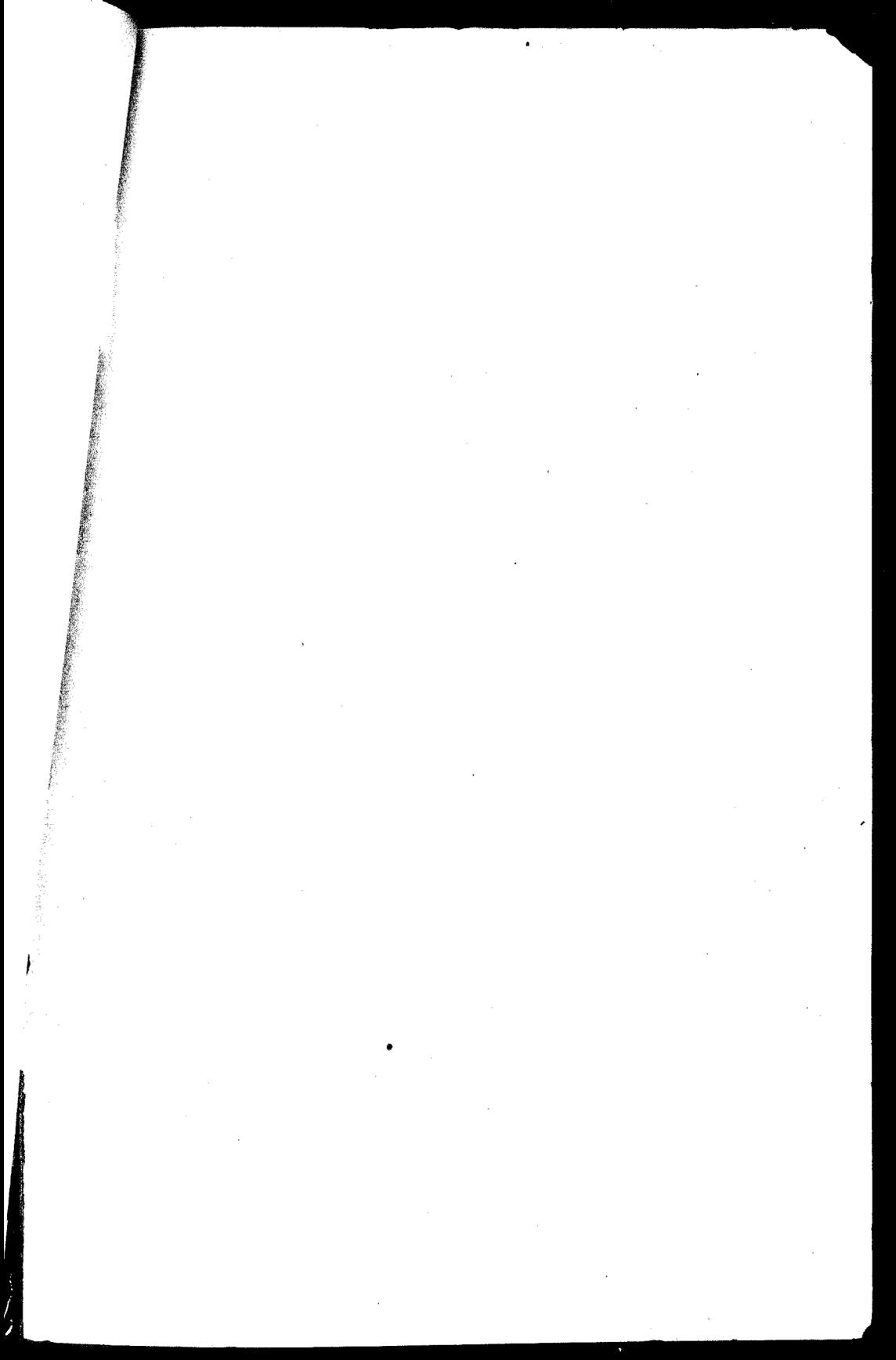
It is unnecessary to pursue further the career of West, except in connection with his personal character, and the lesson which it conveys. His life of moral and religious

purity was, in its daily walks, an exemplification of the *social* virtues which he practised. With the manners of a polished gentleman, he united a cordiality of feeling which charmed all who approached him; and no man of virtue and talent, however humble, ever complained of haughtiness, inattention, or reserve. The fond partner of his cares and triumphs, his noble wife, was heard to declare, when verging to the close of life, after a union of half a century, that he seemed to be without a single vice. His kindness to members of his profession in distress, is represented on every hand as being all that a benevolent heart could dictate or an open hand could bestow. Indeed, his generosity impaired his estate, and sometimes placed him in the situation of the objects he relieved. A stranger to professional jealousy, he assisted merit wherever it was found, by unwearied exertions to secure to it a tangible reward, by counsel for remedying artistic defects, and by suggestions for the attainment of excellence. The state of art in his own country, was a subject which lay near his heart, and awakened his liveliest solitudes. Of course, the idea of forming an Academy of Art in Philadelphia, which was first proposed in 1791, and afterwards happily carried into effect, engaged his countenance and sympathy. No American artist, who visited London, came away without experiencing his elegant urbanity and active friendship. Copley, Stuart, Alston, Trumbull, Peale, Leslie and others,—each bears testimony to his indefatigable, considerate, and judicious kindness.

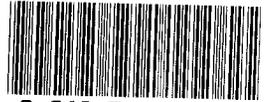
All that remains, is to ask, whether such an example of moral purity, and noble endeavor, may not be presented to

the study and imitation of American artists? That the efforts and fame of West have stimulated the ambition of American painters, and multiplied the claims of meritorious aspirants, no one can deny. It has exerted, too, a powerful and beneficial influence upon the sister department of sculpture, whose numerous professors of native birth, have thrown a new lustre upon American genius. The painters and sculptors who are toiling here with so many shining lights blazing before them from distant lands, will feel, in the honor which has been reflected upon American diligence and skill, potent incentives to braver exertion. It is to be hoped, that the influences of an institution like the present, will catch and concentrate the scattered rays of domestic talent, whether laboring to attract the Promethean fire at home, or to kindle it anew in foreign countries; and that, whether called upon in the beautiful province of statuary, or in the lofty fields of pictorial art, its judgments will be impartially pronounced, and its rewards faithfully distributed, with a single eye to the encouragement of merit and to the formation and advancement of a worthy American school.





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