THE BRITISH SCHOOL

And, curiously enough, the effect is not hard, although a trifle thin.

In Gainsborough's paintings there is rarely any decided impasto. Perhaps because of their thinness his pictures do not crack; but they are often chalky in their whiteness.

The blue and golden brown, with the black hat on the red setting, is a striking harmony; and all these are but thinly stated. There was an old superstition that no picture was durable that was not loaded. Gainsborough settles that point for us, and we see that his meagre but clean white grounds uphold his light and freshness.

In the "Parish Clerk" the exquisite hand on the book is fine in the quality of its shadow, and is in direct contrast to "Mrs. Siddons." The light and shade of this picture are fused together in wet state, and very subtly.

The "Musidora" is somewhat patchy with its overglazed colour.

"The Duke of Bedford's" head is brimful of nature. There is also a portrait of a dignified old man, and a tenderly coloured group of "The Baillie Family."

The best technical lesson to be learnt from this artist's manner is the safeguarding of the fascinating freshness, and looseness of the sketch in the finished work. Why is the sketch often preferable to work completed from it? For one reason mainly: it is done in one painting, and therefore the light of the ground is not lost.
THE BRITISH SCHOOL

What, when our pictures are overloaded, are we to do to restore something of this looseness? Firstly, we should scrape away the heavily loaded passages with the "plush mat," and then, if necessary, scumble a little light opaque colour over them. When this is thoroughly dry, we have a new ground over which the paint should no longer suffer from the want of transparency. This process gives little trouble, and will regain for our work what over-labouring will have lost for us.

Gainsborough's later landscapes are somewhat summary, dark, and scratchy. The earlier wood scene, "Village Cornard," more Dutch in feeling, has none of these faults; it is juicy in colour, and more solidly handled.

ROMNEY

There are Romneys in our gallery that have their charm, but there is a flat emptiness about them. The flesh is rarely flesh for the want of greys, and his red shadows are monotonously mannered. It is hardly fair to judge him by examples that are in many respects not his best.

CONSTABLE

Constable broke new ground; and so strong was the prejudice against the greenness of his work that he was requested to brown his pictures in the early days. For all that, he has had more
CONSTABLE

THE VALLEY FARM

National Gallery
A sparkling richness due to the use of the palette knife.
THE BRITISH SCHOOL

influence on modern art than perhaps any other painter.

The "Flatford Mill," if seen alone, in spite of its hardness and lack of unity would appeal to lovers of light and nature, but by the side of his richer and more sparkling trio, next to be mentioned, it seems tame and uninspired. Such free use of the palette knife, as in his three notable canvases ("The Corn Field," "The Valley Farm," and "The Hay-Wain"), has always a taming effect on surrounding pictures that are painted without its aid, and, as with the craving for narcotics the doses of the reckless who are bitten with the craze, are gradually increased till the scintillations play havoc with a whole wall of neighbours. But there is a day of reckoning with these dust-traps, when all the glory is for ever departed. Constable could use his palette knife, but even with him the surfaces are sometimes a wee bit mechanical, as in the stag and tomb picture on the east wall, known as "The Cenotaph."

"The Valley Farm" is finely dramatic. The accidental shadows and the concentrated light on the white house are conceived and executed with real mastery.

CROME

Crome had a singularly broad outlook. His "Mousehold Heath" and "Slate Quarries" claim consideration. The "Quarries" is done on a rough canvas similar to those on which Paolo Verone
THE BRITISH SCHOOL

worked, and in touch recalls the great Venetian. Such is the effect of surface on style.

SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE

The half-length of “Miss Fry” is well painted, if small in treatment. Larger in manner is “Mrs. Siddons,” whose eyes, partly shaded by the overhanging fringe, are a fine study. The liquid play on the white draperies considerably enhances the attractions of this portrait, one of Lawrence’s chef-d’œuvres.

The unfinished “Portrait of the Princess Lieven” shows clearly his direct method.

HOPPNER

This artist is not seen to advantage in “The Countess of Oxford.” The cast shadow is inevitable in his silvery portraits. The whiteness in this is exaggerated; one longs for a little more warmth.

RAEBURN

The lady in a white dress by Raeburn is undersized. The question of scale is a perennial subject of controversy.

Portraits should not exceed, and be rather under life size, but only slightly so.

There is a loss of dignity and a certain meanness in a portrait that is too large to be considered half
SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE

PORTRAIT OF MRS. SIDDONS

National Gallery
PORTRAIT OF MRS. SIDDONS. BY SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE.
J. M. W. TURNER

CALAIS PIER

National Gallery
Both this and the Shipwreck are great and dramatic compositions. The weight and the whirl of the water are superb.
THE BRITISH SCHOOL

life size and is plainly intended to be full in scale. An irreverent friend calls it “monkey size.”

A really big head in nature suffers by much reduction in the portrait. Everything depends on the space around. An 8½-inch man’s head would be quite big enough for a small canvas, and may perhaps swim in a large area.

JAMES WARD

Some cattle by Ward in a picture entitled “Regent’s Park in 1807,” at which most Londoners will be surprised, are treated vigorously with a full brush in the lights.

LANDSEER

His facility is extraordinary—quite a conjurer with his materials; but for all its ease, the work is superficial rather than great.

TURNER

Now let us turn to the work of one of the greatest men of genius England has produced—perhaps the strongest landscape painter of any age. He may be equalled in some of his themes, but he has so many that his versatility appears truly phenomenal.

Who ever painted the sea with all the depth and heaviness of its volumes, as in “The Calais Pier”.

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and "The Shipwreck"—to say nothing of the
dramatic intensity, of the whirl and boil of the
waters, and of their light and shade. Mark, too,
the juiciness of colour in his active life-giving
little figures. Then think of his ingeniously con-
structive invention in the "Garden of Hesperides,"
with its mass of rock and its fearful dragon, and
of the piecing together of innumerable studies into
a homogeneous whole in the "Childe Harold's Pil-
grimage, Italy," "The Bay of Baiae," and many
others. For technical soundness, which is not
Turner's forte—for he often fights the impossible
with impossible agents—note the freshness of one
of the finest of all his productions, "Crossing the
Brook." This, like his other "inventions," required
careful thought in its preparation and, unlike his
more impetuous efforts, remains fine in surface
and colour. We shall see that the foliage in the
middle distance has under it a substratum of solid
white pigment, and we may surmise that the light
passages throughout are done over a solid under-
painting. The velvety tree against the sky is thick
in its darks, and thinly drawn over the sky, and so
its softness and roundness are felt. Look around
and appreciate how varied are his resources and
his ability to command his material in a hundred
ways, to fit in with his mood and his wishes.
J. M. W. TURNER

CROSSING THE BROOK

National Gallery
The fine preservation of this superb work, so rare with Turner's pictures, is undoubtedly due to careful preparation of the grounds.
CROSSING THE BROOK.  BY J. M. W. TURNER
CHAPTER XII

ON COPYING

You may perhaps wonder that but scant allusion has been made to other than technical expression in the works reviewed.

Firstly, there are innumerable and able writers who have dealt with the historical and intellectual aspects of these and kindred works. The most elegant litterateurs of the last century have spent their lives, not without effect, in such analyses of the arts, and to quote them here would confuse the issues and force me to overstep the necessary limits of a manual which, to be fully useful, should be portable.

Our visit to these galleries is but a sequel to the preceding lessons, in which an attempt has been made to explain without elaboration two separate ways of working with an oil-painter's materials. In the galleries we have an opportunity of learning how, with the given processes and with variants on them, great results have been produced, or, I should say, appear to me to have been produced, by men who have mastered most of their possibilities.

However imaginative or otherwise gifted the
ON COPYING

painter may be, he has first of all to be a painter, a sound craftsman. The knowledge of his medium of expression and its capacities are his first essential requirement; without it he is dumb—dumb as a thinker who is incapable of properly reducing his thoughts to words.

To teach the alphabet of our art and a few useful expressions, is the primary object attempted.

Advice has been given you during our visit to make copies of certain works. These should be begun after about a year's painting from the life; and the experience gained in the making of such copies should be applied to the painting of succeeding studies from nature.

The order in which they are done should be decided by your weaknesses, and works should be selected as correctives. If, for instance, you are able to deal with broad masses and fail in finish, copy such a work as Van Eyck's small head of a man with the red head-dress. If, on the other hand, you are too much tied down to your outline and are too timid to depart from it, or are inclined to over-model, try "The Age of Innocence," or the dark head in Reynolds's "Portraits of Two Gentlemen." They should certainly check any tendency to smallness. Later on you may attempt Van Dyck's "Van der Geest," and the small "Philip IV." by Velazquez. While painting the nude, first make a study of the two arms in "The Abduction of the Sabine Women" by Rubens, later "The Good Samaritan" by

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Bassano, and last of all Rembrandt’s “Woman Bathing.”

In every case select the picture which in your opinion, or, better still, in the opinion of others competent to advise you, is best calculated to counteract any obvious weakness to which your work leans.

The student invariably follows his strength, which, until he is many-sided, is the last thing to do. You may neglect for a time what comes easiest to you, and turn to fortify the weaker links in the chain of your accomplishments. Do not lack the moral courage to exhibit your failings before your fellows, and do not let a childish vanity urge you on to a constant repetition of what you think your forte, or you will end in strengthening one set of muscles at the expense of all the others. Your performances will be lopsided and unequal. Value as nothing the praise of the incompetent, and value your studies in the making even less.

AIDS TO COMPOSITION

You will, of course, need to consider many things besides the manipulation of your materials—things to which, in the course of a little chat with you, references may occur.

What I have just said with regard to a partiality in your painting study applies with even greater force to a neglect of composition.
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You probably have, even if you are not conscious of it, some constructive ability, like the man who, on being asked if he could play the fiddle, replied that he didn’t know, he’d never tried. You may not know. Anyhow, try! I remember well that in a class of students whose work I supervised, and whose sketch compositions I criticised, there were some who mistrusted their capacity for artistic arrangement, and who with a little persuasion were induced to make an attempt in this direction. They gained in the course of time much facility, and developed in some instances undoubted power.

You may desire to make natural effects your chief aim, and if there lies your strength, by all means do; but do not forget at the same time to make them decorative. They will be studies, and not pictures, if within the four corners of their frame they are ill-balanced.

The first demand one makes of a work of art is that it be satisfactorily disposed, not necessarily on worn conventional lines, but that its pattern or “blot” be adjusted conformably to the shape and proportion of its setting, and that it obeys the laws of what is called decorative effect. These laws are very wide, for a good Japanese print is as decorative as a fine Titian, a complete Dutch genre picture, a Turner landscape, or a Velazquez portrait group. There are no actual limits to decorative laws; you may even make new ones for yourself. An industrious striving to create
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and record impressions you will find the best schooling.

A knowledge of modelling in wax or clay is helpful in composing figures that are in action or that might be sculpturesquely interwoven. Nothing is more suggestive than some such plastic material. Lord Leighton, the grace of whose line is rarely equalled, modelled most of the groups for his classic compositions; and for flying or clinging draperies a fairly modelled clay figure, on which the material used has been previously dipped in a mixture of clay and water, and is arranged in folds which will remain in condition for an indefinite period, is hard to improve upon.

Then there is a little secret of my own which I will now divulge to you.

You have probably heard of a smoked plate—that is, a common white plate held over a lighted candle to blacken its surface. With the finger lights are touched out, and can be made often to suggest effective arrangements and fancies. It is a favourite pastime with students. But I think I have improved on this practice; for china is fragile, to say nothing of the difficulty of storing piles of it; the regrettable alternative is to efface what might one day prove a useful design. You should always keep your sketch compositions; the best pictures are frequently done from sketches made many years before the final painting—from them.

With the assistance of an old friend I developed
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this substitute for a smoked plate. We took a millboard about 20 by 16 inches—a convenient size—and covered it with Aspinall’s enamel. When this dried, as it does in a day or so, we had an excellent surface for experiments. A wash of water-colour ivory black replaced the candle smoke, and with a wetted brush we amused ourselves making all sorts of fantasies. A few such prepared millboards are now to me indispensable, and I advise you to make some in the same way. They will greatly facilitate your management of line, grouping, and light and shade. In the same manner you can work in colour with water-colours, and you will find it the most fascinating thing possible.
CHAPTER XIII

ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITION

I feel that after advising you to set about analysing compositions I ought perhaps to give you some idea what to look for, and how to look for it, so that you may learn to follow the working out of the problems which the artist has set himself to solve.

I have selected for this purpose Titian's "Bacchus and Ariadne," a very complicated design; and if I succeed in bringing home to you the main points in its construction, simpler themes should present to you few difficulties.

The canvas is an unusually square one. The main upper line of the groups is convex—an arc—which in the rough outline sketch is indicated by the arrow-heads, which describe also the general convexity of the base line.

The secondary lines flow to the curves of the crowning drapery. The dots indicate their course, on the one hand starting from the folds of the flying drapery, curving through the right arm of Bacchus, along the arm of the satyr with the snakes, towards the centre, through his upper leg, to the lighted foot of the Bacchante, and so on to

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the dog. This line is picked up through the arms and back of the hinder satyr, taken through the upheld leg of the calf; it then descends across the small Silenus, and again up through the curved arm with the tambourine.

On the Ariadne side there is a moral connection between the crowning lines and the folds of the blue dress, which are turned the reverse way and upwards, to the hand that gathers them.

The central group as a mass—detached from the Ariadne and the back figures—is shaded in the sketch, and is pyramidal in its generalised outline, and within that mass is another beautiful shape marked by the oblique shaded lines, of the group made up of the snake-charmer, the Bacchante with the timbrels, the little satyr, and the dog; extended towards the bronze vase.

Let us try to appreciate the part the little satyr plays. Firstly, without him the picture would be cut in two, and the perpendicular made by the tree, the uplifted arm with the timbrel, and the lighted leg of the central Bacchante, would check the forward movement into the picture, and there would be a somewhat objectionable block contained within its boundary and the upright of the frame.

Now what does our little friend do? He conducts this recalcitrant group across the Rubicon, and, aided by the light fold of the golden drapery that flaps out behind his little head, he becomes part of the foreground group of three, amplifying and thereby beautifying its form.
ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITION

And again, without his assistance and that of his adjuncts, the base of the picture would be concave, which at all hazards had to be avoided. You will see in diagram B, sketched without him, that not only is such concavity weak, but that here it repeats throughout the arc of the upper line—which is still more objectionable! The little fellow, however, comes along with his calf’s head and his barking dog, and the difficulty of the base line is removed; and then he cuts through the chariot wheel, which, were he not in front of it, would be an almost isolated curve too near the centre of the composition.

Titian was no doubt jubilant when the inspiration of the little imp came to him; and that must account for its joyous handling.

The satyr with the raised calf’s hock and the fat Silenus against his head, made beautiful by his pattern, not only lift up the line that would otherwise descend too symmetrically, but add the note of accident which makes for the gaiety and movement of the picture. When a figure in a composition moves as the Bacchus does, everything has to move. One unresponsive figurant would be enough to spoil the party.

The foreshortened pointing arm of Bacchus conducts all the lines into the picture—a subtle and satisfying factor. His descending foot cuts well through the wheel. Were this foot only to meet the upper curve, its owner would never alight, but would appear to be standing on it.
TITIAN

BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

National Gallery
BACCHUS AND ARIADNE. BY TITIAN.
ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITION

Apart from helping to distract attention from the arc of the main group, let us see what is the function of the Bacchante with the tambourine. Her arm doubles the line of the group in front of her, thus enriching it. She is a connecting link that takes the eye on to the distant Silenus, thereby adding fresh planes to the grouping; and her echoing of the timbrels gives to the picture the music that is in it, for one musician would hardly impress us as a very full orchestra.

The trees are finely disposed; the foliage against the sky directs the eye towards Ariadne, and the doubling of the stems imparts a fulness. One alone, like the single musician, would not be satisfying. The cumulus cloud on the left carries over in a similar manner to the foliage the interest from the other side of the canvas.

All shapes should make a pleasant pattern, whether in their silhouettes or in the masses left between them. See how beautiful is the passage of sky between the arm of Bacchus and the tree.

By comparing the half-tone reproduction with the outline sketch, you will see more clearly the importance of the arbitrary shadows and tones—those, for instance, across the leopards whose forms are merged into the shadowed background; and with reason, for had they been fully lighted and clearly outlined, they would have arrested attention and spoilt the tête-à-tête between the chief actors.

Just those passages in the picture have been
ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITION

illuminated where the eye is asked to wander, the rest being discreetly shaded.

The little isolated white cloud aids the arc and the agitation, and the sweeping horizontals divide up into a decorative pattern the otherwise heavy mass of blue sky.

These are a few of the thoughts that have been at work in the construction of this masterpiece; and I hope the analysis is not too confusing for you to realise some of the enormous difficulties that the making of so perfect a work entails.

By contrasting the “Bacchanalian Dance” of Nicolas Poussin and Stothard’s “Greek Vintage” with the Titian, we shall see how the theme has degenerated in less skilful hands. There are enough good points in the Poussin to redeem it, in spite of the lack of science displayed, but to those I shall not allude. There are many weaknesses in it, and they equally demand attention at the hand of the student; although a final judgment on any work should be invariably formed on the good, and not the bad, which is there, for few of the finest pictures are faultless.

To the solecisms already demonstrated, this composition will afford a fresh stock, and drive home more completely the earlier examples. Like in the Titian, the main upper line describes an arc, and so does unfortunately the base line, and it is not corrected by a little satyr or any solid mass. The group is the same width and value practically throughout. Remember what I am
ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITION

here insisting on are the weaknesses, so that I need not repeat with every sentence, "This is a thing to avoid." The arc is too symmetrical; its sides are too equally inclined. The terminal figure of Pan, put where he is to raise the line, is only partially effective. The top row of heads runs parallel to the horizontal of the frame, and is

![Fig. 21](image)

further depressed by the hole of light under the foliage. The raised arm with the jug comes too late, and, if anything, accentuates the rectangular feeling brought about by the horizontal line of heads and the perpendicular Pan. The space above the figures is too equal in width to the mass of those figures contained between their upper and lower convex and concave limits.

In the Titian picture the hinder satyr with the
ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITION

calf hock is cut off by the frame, and we imagine that the procession continues beyond it. Here the one group that constitutes the whole of the human interest is silhouetted, and it lacks accident thereby. True, the head of the struggling babe is cut by the upright, but we are certain there are no more wine-seeking infants than we see before us. He is cut off in the wrong place to convey the impression that more are to follow. The line of arms falls in its intended rhythm—they are too equal in length, too tied on one level, and repeat too closely each other’s movement; and so it is with the dancing legs, one right angle repeating or just reversing the other.

The outline of the grape-juice dispensing lady runs along with the line of the man’s back and leg next to her; and her own left leg supports that man’s, which weighs on it at an awkward angle. Together they almost make a T-square. Her outstretched arm, too, runs parallel with her raised leg, and so appears to hold it up with a cord; and the space left between those limbs and the body is an ugly square. The flying drapery designed to fill up this gap fails of its purpose, for the insisted rectangular line of her figure renders the drapery useless for the purpose of its design. The open spaces between the three dancers are too similar in value.

Perhaps the most unfortunate passage is the profile view of the central man. The left half of the group ends with him, and with the assistance
NICOLAS POUSSIN

A BACCHANALIAN DANCE

National Gallery

THOMAS STOTHARD

A GREEK VINTAGE

National Gallery
A Bacchanalian Dance. By Poussin

A Greek Vintage. By Thomas Stothard
ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITION

of the trees and the outline of the woman's leg beyond, which is attached to his elbow, effectively cuts the picture into equal halves. The trees also weigh down on the dancers, and take the eye in too direct a line to the corner of the picture.

There are other weak points, when considered thus hypercritically, which you may find for yourself. This work of destruction is not pleasant, but Poussin is big enough to suffer little by these dissections. It goes to show that the arranging of a complicated design is no easy matter; there are pits at every turn, into which even the masters stumble at times.

The "Greek Vintage" by Stothard has nothing of the science of composition in it—only the nescience that makes confusion worse confounded—but just one little word apropos of it: beginners who would introduce some nude in their compositions do what Stothard has done, and cover all but the arms and legs. These nude arms and nude legs offer so many equal masses that the novice's picture looks more like a game of spelicans than a coherent design. I need not now add, avoid this peculiarity.

What I have just written is only sanctioned when looked at educationally, like the cautionary stories that are told to children. I should dislike to encourage a carping spirit in the student. Take these remarks as warnings for your own benefit, but make the search for the beautiful in all things your real pilgrimage through life.

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CHAPTER XIV

A FEW WORDS ON THE STUDY OF AESTHETICS

It is important for a figure painter to acquire some acquaintance with architecture. The made-up architecture of painters who are ignorant of its principles is a frequent subject of ridicule among professional architects. Such lapses are perhaps not quite so humorous or tragic as the average seaside memorial to a departed sovereign; but in days when archaeological accuracy and correctness of detail generally are exacted, no man of taste can afford to ignore the principles of ornament and construction, or any other subject that is at the base of the science of aesthetics, which most of us unfortunately have, as best we may, to acquire late in life. At school we should have been taught its elements, for it should form part of the curriculum in every school, high or low.

The Minister of Education who desires to leave a solid contribution to the country's material and intellectual welfare might, I respectfully submit, consider this suggestion. The study of aesthetics is a refining factor, and might react beneficially on all art productions. Nor will a general level
A FEW WORDS ON MURAL PAINTING

of excellence in these productions be reached till the people are able to take more than a subjective interest in works of the independent arts, and see in applied artistic output the difference, for instance, between a Greek vase of the best period and the often hideous ware that is expected to beautify their homes.

You are not likely to find in any one volume an introduction to the rudiments of aesthetics, a textbook, by the way, that is sorely needed. Meanwhile, till such a work is compiled, there are to be found in most libraries treatises on architecture, the potter’s art, and some estimates of the artistic crafts as a whole. Specimens, or good casts, of antique sculpture are to be found in most towns, and the museums are filled with choice products of the skilled craftsmen of all ages. On these things feast your eyes and your brains. A knowledge, however intimate, of one craft alone is but a poor equipment for a painter, to whom a critical taste in all things is of the highest importance.

A FEW WORDS ON MURAL PAINTING

This leads me on to the consideration of a branch of our art, to which reference has already been made—namely, mural painting—which can now very properly come under the heading of oil-painting. Pure fresco may or may not regain its old ascendancy, but since the invention of the
A FEW WORDS ON MURAL PAINTING

system of "Marouflage," or a fixing of the painted canvas in such a way as to resist damp, and to make it practically a part of the wall itself, decorations can be painted in the studio with pigments that are analogous to oil-paints.

The chief distinction to be borne in mind is, that a mat or dull surface which will not shine at any angle from which the decoration is viewed must be safeguarded.

Colours for such work are mixed with but little oil or wax. Petroleum, spike oil, or turpentine as vehicles ensure the all-important dulness of surface.

Although many attempt it, one can hardly dogmatise on the forms of design admissible. The pedant, if he had his way, would rule out of court even the great works of Raphael, Paolo Veronese, and Titian theelseyes; for by him the law is laid down that only figures or groups on one plane are orthodox. This would confine all decorations to processional or kindred subjects that could be treated in this manner. Fortunately, however, these purists do not always get their way. Theorists may go to extremes, but the man who does the work will be wise to digest the theories and take a middle course of his own choosing. Designs should undoubtedly harmonise with the architectural character of their setting, and in appearance be sufficiently flat, or unrelieved, and not detach themselves from the wall or make a hole or holes in it. There are no rules that will
A FEW WORDS ON MURAL PAINTING

guide us with regard to scale, which only the size and nature of a panel can determine; but the pattern should be so decoratively disposed as to make its intention clear at a glance, even from a distance, and be made up of dark flat masses of drapery or other incidents, and not depend overmuch on chiaroscuro for its blots of light and dark.

A running frieze simplifies for us the question of scale. Generally, in such cases, the heads should approach very nearly the upper limits, as with the Parthenon frieze, the most perfect example of the kind.

Realism is entirely incongruous. Rather is a degree of conventionalism and severity to be favoured; for what is fitting in an easel picture should not be looked for in mural work. In a classic building, a classic spirit and calm is called for; in a Gothic, something of the quaintness of Gothic forms; in a Renaissance, an echo of the age.

The point of sight chosen should in almost all cases be placed longitudinally in the centre of the panel; the height of the horizon high or low according to the level of the panel with the eye.

By the time, however, that you are commissioned to decorate a public building, you will have gone further than this manual can take you. In the meantime these few hints may smooth your way and advance you one step in the direction of deco-
A FEW WORDS ON MURAL PAINTING

tative designing, and emphasise the significance of the study of architectural forms.

Apropos of mural decoration and constructive composition in general, I would remark, unfortunately in these days there are painters who, lacking the imaginative faculty—partly because of the neglect to use it—like the tailless fox in the fable, endeavour to impress on the over-credulous student the futility of attempting any forms of painting that may soar beyond a lively representation of Nature as she is arranged and unadorned. There are, or should be, as many kinds of art as there are temperaments; and the highest is not beneath you. Greece and Italy stand intellectually and aesthetically pre-eminent among the nations by reason of the great monumental outcome of their genius. What, you might well ask, would be their real place in the hierarchy of art had their great masters stopped short at the empirical gleanings so characteristic of the soulless realist? This is not said to belittle sincere attempts to discover, for the enjoyment of the uninitiated, the beauties, great or modest, that abound, and for the reproduction of which some men are endowed with special ability.

Born experimentalists like Monet or Sorolla y Bastida—I regret having to name living painters, but their efforts are so typical of the newer schools of thought that my remarks would be pointless without such aid—evince an extraordinary insight and analytical power; but an un-
A FEW WORDS ON MURAL PAINTING

relieved army of experimentalists in paint, like the locusts in Egypt, would too easily exhaust the already narrowing field; and, moreover, many of these attempts at the impossible are technically unsound. Their problems appear to be solved while their paint is fresh, and when that goes nothing worthy remains; for these solutions are in the nature of studies, with no real aesthetic foundation. Indeed, there is little more of this essential, which should form the base of every true picture, than is to be found in the average snapshot photograph.

The narrowing of artistic effort into a single groove is the outcome of a reaction from sentimentality, and an abuse of subjective interest divorced from those aesthetic purposes to which every other should be subsidiary in the conceiving of a work of art. But this violent reaction, like all that is revolutionary, tends to exaggeration. There is little discrimination, and far too much iconoclasm, in the revolting spirit who rushes headlong to the other side. Time invariably sobers the spirit that ostentatiously dissociates itself from the powers that were, and proclaims in its every constituent that henceforth it has no connection with them, and is blind to the lesson of history. Time finds for us a middle course, which it had been wiser for us to steer for from the first. Your hat will be longer serviceable in a fast-moving age, if it is not built on the lines of the latest mode in hats; and provided you
A FEW WORDS ON MURAL PAINTING

keep yourself green, which you may do by laying for yourself a thorough foundation and a varied resourcefulness, you will not fail to move quietly along with the flowing current.

If you are born to be a pioneer and can direct the ebb and flow of artistic thought, advice is unnecessary; but make sure that nature, and not the fashion, has made you one.

There are few things more depressing than the sight that meets one on the walls of some continental exhibitions, where the decadent spirit of revolt—anarchy is the fitter word—excites the would-be famous to make little fireworks of their own with their private and special brand of matches, on the chance that the fermenting critic may be impressed by the glare; unfortunately he not rarely is, and so the contagion rages, and sanity is voted commonplace.

Should you ever be fascinated by what appears "over-strange," first ask and assure yourself that what is there is technically sound and workman-like. There may be to you no ordinary criterion by which to judge it. It may be none the worse for that. But in its way is it decorative? Has no one of its qualities been bought at the expense of any other essential quality? If it deal with humanity, does its humanity tally with the experiences of observant human beings? Then, however strange the work may seem to you, it deserves serious consideration. A narrow judgment is a right-of-way with fields, blooming and
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rich with prejudices on either side, and there is no limit to their acreage if the judgment be only narrow enough.

This brings one to the question at which I hinted in discussing the Correggio pictures: the proclivity to apply to modern work a standard of criticism or appreciation totally different from that applied to the works of the older masters.

With a man of catholic judgment who is not a propagandist for his own or any particular school, all is equally considered. His knowledge of the history of art, of the spirit of the ages, of the influences of environment, is naturally bound up in his criticisms; but even these adjuncts are little needed, except in the case of works that mark the developing of artistic effort. All others stand or fall by reason of their merit want of it, irrespective of extrinsic reflections. Even the respectful awe that bids us be reticent before the works of the greatest, cannot prevent a feeling of preference for one or other among several products of a master’s hand, for no man’s works are all equal in merit. One is more happily conceived, better drawn or handled, more harmonious in colour, and so on; and, as the French say, Le mieux est l’ennemi du bien, the greater excellency of the one points to the relative weaknesses in the others. And with the craftsman this selecting need not, as with the “man in the street” or the inexperienced, be due to bias or mood, but to a
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grasp of the varied attainments that go to the making of a work of art.

Be on your guard against the petty-minded, who would have you admire one type at the cost of others. His is a sort of narrow exclusiveness—"blinkers" worn by the half learned in the presence of what is modern, and taken off before the works of the past. Young people who are carried off their feet by the enthusiasm of the moment feel sure that what they are enthusing over is right, and the rest, of course, wrong—and not only wrong, but a negligible quantity. Quaintly enough, these same men can run from a Holbein to a Rembrandt, from a Velazquez to a Titian, from a Van Eyck to a Watteau, and are perfectly content that an old mansion can have many windows letting in the light, but a new house only one at a time; the others must have their shutters closed. Nor are the young the only sinners. There is an able book written on Velazquez which no doubt you will and should read, and you will better understand the aims of that master. But the writer was fired with a desire to explain through the work of Velazquez the aims of a certain school of impressionists. He was perfectly at liberty to espouse any appealing cause, and with all the more force when that cause was little understood and was attacked by those accustomed to the old, and chary about accepting the new. But there was small need for this writer himself to belittle the old that
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is sincere and fine, by way of lauding the attributes of another, however great that other is. To make a bonfire of the Venetians and Flemings, whereby to light up with a brighter light the achievement of Velazquez and lesser men who sought inspiration from him, is not justifiable. Velazquez gains nothing by such special pleading, and the advocate of a cause loses the sympathy of his tribunal.

A want of the sense of proportion is one to which we are all prone, and I cite this merely as an instance of what you may be tempted to do in your partisanship for the last of your discoveries. As you proceed you will find that there is no finality for many years of these last and only loves. Successive periods of such infidelities are but a phase of your evolutionary growth, from the grub to the chrysalis stage, out of which you may fly with wings of your own. Let this thought make you tolerant. Know beforehand that your fancy of to-day will give place to a new one to-morrow, and that a wide outlook is not achieved or expected without long experience, and then only with improving practice, “a rubbing of minds” with the most capable advisers, a reading of all upon which you can lay your hands that is written by acknowledged judges, a cultivating of the broadest sympathies, and then perhaps, after an apprenticeship to such training and influence for about twenty years, you may arrive at what may be called an
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independent judgment. Meanwhile, look askance at the verdicts pronounced by the immature who, like yourself, are yet to pass through the stress and storm inseparable from intellectual growth.