CHAPTER XI.

OF COMPOSITION.—HINTS ON METHODS OF ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS, ETC.

CONCLUSION.

"Every man, that can paint at all, can execute individual parts; but, to keep those parts in due subordination, as relative to a whole, requires a comprehensive view of the art, that more strongly implies genius than perhaps any other quality whatever."—REYNOLDS

Every work of art, which is not a copy of another, may claim consideration as an original composition, from an attempt at imitation of the simplest object to the embodiment of the ideal, and ranks in estimation in proportion as the inventive faculties are more or less elicited, and successfully exerted, not only in realizing its design so far as to render it intelligible to others, but also in bringing the utmost effort of genius, and power of art, to bear upon its perfection. In the consideration of a picture, or of any work of art, a motive, or subject, is implied; and clearly to express such motive should be the leading object in its composition or arrangement.

2. It might appear that any one who could draw, paint, or model, having a subject before him, or a clear impression of it upon his mind, would have nothing more to do than to copy what he sees, or to express that which he imagines. This would be true, if Nature and the imagination always aptly met the requirements and enforced no execution of art beyond its capacity. The power of art, it must be remembered, is limited; and, to preserve its congruity, its efforts must be necessarily restrained to its possibilities. Genius may occasionally strain to the utmost its limits, in violation even of consistency, and find allowable excuse and apology in the happy results of successful daring; but the privileges which, to a certain extent, may be allowable to genius, should be assumed with timidity. Those only can safely venture who are fortified with that strength and readiness in the expedients of art, which come not instinctively and coincident with the gift of genius, but as results of its earnest seeking and acquirement.
3. However it may be that emulation of the broad and general impressions of Nature, as they most forcibly affect the mind or excite the imagination, rather than the abstract and material elements which combine to produce such effects, form the higher purposes of art—as the means of its expression are, as in Nature, by combinations of subordinates, a thorough comprehension of and command over all such subordinates becomes absolutely necessary to the artist; this comprehension and command extending, not only to theoretical knowledge of their natures, and power of service to the purposes of art, but likewise to a masterly control over them in their practical application.

4. In the composition of a work of design, is understood to comprise its entire arrangement; and involves, according to the extent of its intention, whether in reference to desired effect, or method, or materials employed, its general _outline—grouping—effect of light and shadow—expression—color_, etc., all harmoniously agreeing together, all directly bearing upon its _motive_ or _subject_, and combining to convey an effective and agreeable as well as obvious impression thereof.

5. The first requisite, therefore, of a composition is that it should tell its story. It matters not how exalted or how insignificant its motive may be, on this point there should be no grounds for doubt or question. The humblest bit of still-life that may be selected—a book upon the table—a fruit, or flower—a weed, or tree—a rock, or mountain—a glass of water, or a lake or river—a rippling brook, or a foaming cataract—a head, a limb, or a figure—anything—singly or combined, whether in their natural arrangement, or artistically composed as principals or subordinates in ideal creations—may be motives or subjects of a composition, so long as they preserve primary importance therein, and form by the scale of their significance and value that of the art which may attempt their representation. The feeblest effort of a child to imitate upon his slate an object which he sees, remembers, or imagines, and the most sublime and successful achievements of cultivated genius, differ only in ambition of attempt and amount of capacity exercised.

6. What story, it may be asked, has a bit of still-life, a portrait, or a landscape-view, to tell beyond that which it brings with its presence to the artist? What composition or further arrangement is required? Do not the subjects themselves afford all the composition ready to his hand? What else is there for him to do than faithfully to imitate that which is before him?

Let us take the table before us, in its confusion of books and drawings, papers, pens, and commonplace conveniences, of an artist's studio. Not a very promising or interesting subject for a picture, it must be admitted; but for a tempting basket of freshly-gathered boughs of fruit, which
have been brought in to serve as studies for the accessories of a picture on our easel. To draw or paint it precisely as it is, a motive might be sustained in that of an exhibition of the confusion and anomalous character of an artist's table, but even that would be done at the sacrifice of many important requisites in a picture. By selection and arrangement—by composition of its contents, as a whole, or into groups and subjects—by giving to almost every object, in its turn, a prominent position—by exhausting the power of art in fidelity of imitation of that which may be in itself insignificant, and thereby elevating it to the consideration of a subject for a picture—the range of service to which this confused assemblage of objects might be appropriated, as leading motives, or as accessories to pictures, may surprise the learner to his profit by practical experiment, and exemplify many important principles, as well as expedients available in art.

7. It is not alone in subjects of an elevated character that the exercise of genius and artistic skill is most requisite. In all there is the requirement of not only an appropriate but pleasing and effective arrangement, or composition, based upon similar principles. It is the want of this which makes the difference between a carefully-studied work by an accomplished artist and the tame and unmasterly attempt at mere imitation of the uneducated. It is this that may give to the most insignificant subject by the one an excellence by which it is received and valued, while the more ambitious effort of the other may not only signally fail in producing a favorable impression, but often degrade the motive itself to the ridiculous. Thus have the Flemish, and artists of other schools, in their subjects from scenes of the lowest life, not unfrequently of themselves of a repulsive and even disgusting character, by the power of their art diffused a charm over their compositions, not only to win the admiration of the most fastidious, but to give to their productions, as works of art, rank with those of more refined taste and higher motive.

8. Few subjects bring with them at once to the portrait-painter's chair all that may be required for faithful resemblance. Those who have practised this branch of art know this full well. Characteristics of action and expression require, in almost all cases, to be elicited by study of the original—to be caught, as it were, in momentary transitions—and, by a happy arrangement, or composition of the picture, to express such characteristic traits in a manner that the portrait shall be more than a mere representation of the individual features of the original.

9. A landscape-view may be strikingly effective in nature, and in its details as well as general characteristics afford ample materials for its representation; but, to bring the resources of art to bear practically and efficiently, more is required than close imitation. He who attempts to pro-
duce in a picture, by minute and servile imitation of details, the broad and emphatic impressions of Nature, will as assuredly fail as he who essays to reach the higher excellency without due regard to the means by which she expresses herself. However these means may not be obtrusively evident to the common observer—as they should not be in a work of art—yet, if sought for, they may be found in the one as they should be in the other—all in just subordination, according to their importance as primary or secondary in the consideration of the motive or subject of the picture. There is no branch of art in which the exercise of proper judgment and skill in composition may be more happily exemplified than in landscape. Thereby the landscape-painter is enabled to elevate his art to a merited rank far above that of mere portraiture, and to bring successfully the ideal within its compass. Thus may he indulge his imagination in allowable combinations of the actual in Nature, and collect the diffusion of beauty which prevails throughout her works, in imaginary pictures possessing all the truth and consistency of reality. Thus may he, even in his representations of actual scenes, exercise allowable license in the arrangement of accessories and effects; and, by adding to the reality that which might consistently exist, or by the omission of that which may be unnecessary or prejudicial to the effectiveness of the whole, or to individual and important features, not only give more forcible and agreeable expression to his picture, but at the same time sufficiently preserve its general characteristics to retain its resemblance, and even to add to such resemblance an impressiveness beyond that of the original subject to an ordinary observer.

11. To bring the expressive power of Nature within the availabilities of art, its resources must be rightly understood and employed, its inefficiencies assisted, and its utmost strength elicited. These should be considered important and leading objects in composition. All the expedients which may be allowable in portraiture in one respect may be equally so in another; and violations of propriety, and truth of resemblance, affect all cases with comparatively injurious consequences as they more or less affect the broad and general impressions of Nature. The artist, therefore, should be ever mindful that the great object of art is to convey such impressions, with all the force and expression of which it is capable; for, by them, as well in the presence of Nature as in the memory and recognition of her truths, art is received and estimated, not only in reference to portraiture of existing objects, but also with regard to ideal creations. Ideal efforts are but the application of portraiture to imaginary models, or impressions, existing in the artist’s mind; which must be based upon familiarity with the realities and truths of Nature, and brought as palpably within the compass of his art as if they were before him, ever to be realized, or to be made intelligible to others by its means.
11. All striking effects and picturesque combinations in Nature are distinctly marked by that which artists designate composition—whether of form—light and shadow—color or expression—or of all together. As relates to the form, or general arrangement of such compositions, the impression on the mind is very apt to assume some conventional shape, by which they are technically designated and recognised. Hence the terms circular—angular—diagonal—horizontal, etc., as applied to compositions. To insist, however, that the excellence of a composition requires the adoption of one or of the other of these shapes, would be as absurd as to contend for the superiority of either class, or to argue for its unconditional acceptation as a general rule.

12. A range of hills encircling a lake or plain—a sweep of seashore—a group or groups of figures—or a multitude assembled around a central point of interest or action—and in many other analogous cases—the natural arrangement may be obviously associated with the circle. Such being the impression upon the mind of a scene in Nature, by which its general features would be marked and retained upon the memory, and by which the fidelity of its representation by art would be received and judged, it is important that the artist should not only conform thereto in its portraiture, but even if necessary emphasize such characteristics; at the same time guarding against affectation or ostentation of the means by which it is effected.

Equally obvious may be the association of other forms of composition with actual scenes or events, and with equal propriety their representations should not only be marked by such peculiarities, but the truthfulness of ideal creations requires the preservation of like consistency.

13. The peculiar shape of a picture, and its adaptation to a given place or purpose, may have a very important influence on its composition; while, on the other hand, the character of the subject may as well regulate the form of the picture. Too little consideration is commonly bestowed upon this point. Thus does it occur that we often see strips of landscape oppressed with unnecessary and unmeaning expanses of sky, while the eye is refused relief by an agreeable extent of horizon. Groups and other objects are frequently cut off by the frame in a manner to produce the most unsatisfactory impression; while the corners, especially of circular compositions, are often as painfully in the way of the observer as they have evidently proved embarrassing to the artist. Equally inharmonious may be the effect of angular compositions in works of a circular or elliptical form. The shape and composition of a picture should as far as possible harmonize, not contrast with, one another, and the selection of both should be consistent with the subject.

14. It is much easier to discover upon what general principles of composition a work of art may have been perfected—whether they relate to its general arrangement, or its peculiar effects of
light and shadow, or of color—than to predicate thereon a rule or recipe by which another may be done as well. Many of the best productions of both ancient and modern masters admit of very allowable classification, yet others seem to set at defiance all attempts to do so under any technical head. In some, the keenest academic and critical acumen is often at fault in endeavoring to investigate and discover the secret of their successful execution, and to reduce it to rules or maxim. Thus, in attempting to establish the premises of the circle for a composition, the pyramid may be developed, which may lead to the diagonal, and so on, until we find ourselves involved in a labyrinth of difficulty from which we may be glad to escape, by closing our books and theories, and admitting the independence of genius of all such arbitrary laws. In granting this admission to genius, however, the possession of qualifications to reach its aims, by means which it can alone derive from cultivation, is implied, and without which its noblest impulses supply but in a very limited degree the requisitions for successful achievement.

15. The elementary character of our work, and the means of exemplification at our disposal, preclude the possibility of treating the subject of composition in design with sufficiently plausible hope of rendering thereby practical aid to the learner to warrant the attempt. A volume would at least be requisite for the discussion of the subject, and numerous and varied illustrations, not only in reference to forms and outlines, but also examples of delicate gradations and effects of light and shadow and of color. And, after all, it may be well questioned, could we do justice to the reproduction of the standard works by eminent masters of the past and present, which we should select—if more real service, in a practical point of view, might not be rendered by placing them before the art-student, and by leaving their investigation and study to his own intelligence, than by endeavoring to deduce therefrom rules and precepts, which, as arbitrary rules and precepts, may be well doubted to have had much if any direct influence in the execution of the very examples upon which they might be, however ingeniously and plausibly, predicated.

16. To the study of standard works of art, based upon that faith in their excellence with which they should be regarded by the student, he may most confidently look for available sources of knowledge, not only of its ways and means, but of its consistency and practical application to Nature, and as well of Nature to art. It is from their study that he must learn to estimate their merits and defects, and, justly balancing both with an enlightened and unbiased judgment, to reduce his investigations to safe and reliable precepts and maxims suited to his individual requirements. Such will profit him far more than any to be obtained in books.

We would not, by any means, be understood as insinuating that much valuable assistance in
such study may not be derived from books, especially those of a practical rather than a merely
critical character. However it may be regretted that so few comparatively of the great masters
of art have left written records of their experience, and with especial reference to the practical
methods and principles by which they were governed, quite enough has been done by them in
this respect to leave little now to be said upon the subject—quite enough to convince us that
there are no secrets to be discovered worth the trouble of searching for—that the way to excel-
ence is plain, and open, and free, to all—and that success is as surely the reward of earnest
industry and faithful seeking—now—as it has been always.

The art-student at every period of advancement—and all artists are and should be students,
both of Nature and of the works of others—can not be too strongly impressed with the necessity
of self-exertion, and of the baneful influence of too great reliance on either books or teachers.
From this error may be traced too frequently the enervation of the strength of the most vigorous,
while it may have an equal tendency to deter the timid from attempt. Thus many fertile minds,
naturally endowed with pre-eminence capacity for artistic achievement, have been, by unwholesome
restraint, or misdirected guidance, diverted from a course consistent with their individual impulses
and qualifications, which, if pursued aright, might have attained to the perfection of one of the
highest privileges, purest enjoyments, and most productive capacities of good to mankind, as well
as to the possessor, that Providence has placed within the reach of human attainment.

One of the leading purposes of education in art should ever be to preserve the natural impulses
and energies unimpaired, and to adapt instruction to their natures; to foster a sensibility and just
appreciation of wants and imperfections; to train the mind to proper judgment in the application
of correctives, and to the appropriation of the experience and knowledge of others to its profit.
Thus may the learner become even from the beginning capable, to a very great extent, of self-
direction. To say that one is, or may be, self-taught, means no more than this; and it is in such
a sense that nearly every artist, who has ever attained to eminence, may be said to have been self-
taught: for all the instruction that can be given, all the aid that can be derived from Nature, or
from others, unless it pass through the mould of a well-ordered mind, and become stamped with its
individuality, will otherwise avail but little.

17. It may be not only interesting but profitable, to the learner, to know more of the methods
and expedients most usually employed by artists in the execution of original compositions than we
have hitherto had the opportunity of presenting.

The idea, or motive, of an original work, may be often founded upon a slight sketch, dashed
off perhaps at the moment of its first impression on the mind of the artist, and embodied by a few
apparently random lines, made with pen or pencil, chalk or charcoal, or anything of the kind within his reach, or by a plastic model. Possibly it may be expressed in color, as frequently occurs when some striking effect is connected with its suggestion.

It would be difficult, in many cases, to trace a first impulse or conception to its source; for, at times, to a fertile imagination, they would seem to come spontaneously, or to be so slightly affected by extraneous causes, that the artist himself may be scarcely sensible of their influence. Such impressions must be necessarily indefinite, broad, and general in character. The sketch, perhaps, may even embody all that exists of them at the moment. In pictorial or in plastic subjects, connected with historical incidents, or with the ideal creations of other minds, the first suggestion may come in a more definite shape to the artist's imagination. That it there receives a remodelling, an individuality of character, and becomes as identical as an original thought, to a very great extent, is evident from the fact that, if any number of artists were to attempt the illustration of a given subject, they would all be different. Their similarity would be greater or less according to the facts and details by which they were restrained. Thus it frequently occurs that such facts and details, whether historically associated with the subject, or the inventions of another, may be most perplexingly in the way of an artist in the adaptation of his art to their exactions. That which may be most effectively expressed by language does not always afford suitable subject for art, and the best subjects for illustration are those which leave a fair and unembarrassed field for the exercise of the artist's skill.

18. It is not always essential that the first impression of a subject of the mind should be embodied by a sketch: if it be there sufficiently defined to form a reliable starting-point, it may be enough. A sketch is but the material evidence of its existence, which, however faint, imperfect, or unintelligible to others, may possess a clearness and impressiveness to its author, rendering it to him at least invaluable. Such memoranda, therefore, however indefinite and rude they may be, should never be destroyed; and no thought or impression, whether original or suggested, that can be thus preserved, should ever be allowed to escape unregistered. For want of this habit of appropriation of its fruitfulness, many a mind naturally fertile has become early and profitlessly barren, while others of far less promise have been made thereby abundantly productive. In the more mechanical operations by which an original sketch may be carried out, and by which its motive may be rendered more intelligible to others, as well as in the severer ordeal to which it is necessarily subjected to meet the requirements of artistic accuracy, it is often extremely difficult to retain its spirit, or realize its suggestive promise. Hence it will be always found serviceable, in the progress of the work, to possess the advantage of recourse to it—thus leading us back, as it were, to our
starting-point, and profitably reviving its broad and vivid impressions, the impulsive tendency of which it is always of the first importance to preserve.

19. The dash and decision of execution which so frequently attracts our admiration in works of art, in which the will and the way of their accomplishment appear as a single impulse, are often more the result of preparatory study and forethought than is generally suspected. If a first sketch should not prove satisfactory, it is better to attempt another than to destroy it. If alterations, or a test of certain changes, may be suggested, or appear requisite, instead of making the experiment upon the original sketch in a manner that may irrecoverably affect its general character, such a course is always most advisable. The effect of alterations in pictures may be very readily tested in most cases on panes of glass suspended by threads, or otherwise, over the part upon which it may be desirable to experiment. In drawings, in like manner, transparent paper may be very successfully employed; and when the expediency of corrections or alterations is decided upon, the whole may be recombined by tracing. Recourse to such expedients is much better than attempting changes and erasures, until we are satisfied of our ability to supply preferable combinations. Thus leaving the way to excellence well marked and open, as much by records of difficulties encountered as the operations by which they have been successfully met and overcome, we learn to know it better, to pursue it with surer steps, and reach its aim more certainly.

20. Upon the basis of a sketch or generalized indication of the subject of a composition, it is the custom of some painters to dispose its arrangement upon the canvass with chalk or charcoal. In doing this, all its parts and details are thoroughly studied, securing their premises when necessary by reference to Nature. Directly thereon, or upon such under-preparation as they may consider requisite, they proceed to paint at once from living and still-life models, cautiously observing to preserve throughout the general propriety and unity of light and shade, of color, perspective, and effect.

Others, instead of painting on their pictures directly from models, adopt the course of making preparatory studies of those parts in which they may require the immediate assistance of the model, even to draperies, still-life, and the minutest details. Thus fortified—with all their resources, as it were, spread out before them—they set to work in a more deliberate and systematic manner. The results of this course, however more business-like it may appear, are often deficient in that freshness which the immediate presence and more direct translation of Nature impart; while, on the other hand, less risk is encountered of the individuality of the model becoming obtrusively predominant, and prejudicial to the general harmony of the picture. Not that it should be
implied that there is a possibility of over-doing the truthfulness of our representations of Nature; but that we should endeavor to preserve that truthfulness, in all its integrity, by representing Nature as it really would appear, affected by the peculiar influences of its position in our composition, rather than if viewed abstractly, as necessarily may be the case when employed as a model.

21. It is rarely that all the parts of a composition can be copied directly from models; hence discrepancies between those in which we have been thus assisted, and those supplied by memory or general observation, will constantly occur: to guard against which, the acquirement of facility of management, and right appreciation of the services of the model, are of great importance, and only to be obtained by expanding our comprehension of the broad and general characteristics of Nature, by investigating study, and thus learning the true value of her abstract peculiarities, as consistent and accessory thereto.

It is not difficult to determine wherein lies the inconsistency, when we hear artists complain that “Nature puts them out.” It can only be so when our requirements of her exceed the limits of propriety. He who looks to Nature as he ought, and seeks no more of her than her truths, will rarely encounter such embarrassment, or meet with difficulty in finding models fully answering to every requirement. If he can not have the individual thing itself, he can always find something analogous in its general character to serve his purpose. It is this faculty of appropriation of the vast resources of Nature, and of making them subservient to the purposes of art, that constitutes the strength of the educated artist. He sees, with expansive vision, beauty and good in everything, and, rejoicing in his high privilege, goes with confidence to Nature for all his wants; and no one who has thus learned to love and reverence her as gratefully and truly as he values her precepts—who exacts of her no impossibilities, nor endeavors to force her to unwarrantable subjection—can ever be “put out by Nature.”

22. In the earnest employment of conveying back and forth, between the model and our composition, abstract observations, comparisons, and conclusions, the eye is apt to lose, in some degree, its sensitiveness to broad and general impressions; to preserve which, may often require the exercise of much firmness of judgment, as well as of practical skill. This difficulty and misleading tendency will be found more generally to occur with those most eager in the attainment of minute accuracy of representation; and hence their works, however perfect they may be in detail, not unfrequently fail to produce agreeable impressions as a whole. It is better, therefore, to secure the broadest and most prominent masses of a composition first, as they may relate to either form, light and shadow, or color. Thus we become fortified by familiarity with the leading character-
istics, their bearing and influence on the general effect of our composition, and are less liable to allow undue preponderance to subordinate parts and details. When we draw, or paint, or model a feature, we should not forget that it is the component part of a head—a head, that it should in all respects accord with the figure—a figure with its group—the group with the leading motive of our composition—the whole with Nature. Not Nature brought in, as it were, in loose, discordant fragments, and promiscuously combined together, but Nature in all the harmonious beauty in which she yields herself with gentle and confiding grace to the imitative power of art.

23. There is a fascination in the presence of Nature—a something so winning in the exercise of the power of conveying her impressions, fresh and glowing with reality, to our creations, and the comparative ease with which certain individual characteristics can be imitated—that we are often led thereby to give undue preponderance to the subordinate portions of a composition. We forget, in our anxiety to secure all that we can of individual excellencies, that we may be losing the more important; and it is only when the model is no longer before us, but with its general impression still fresh upon the memory, that our error may be discovered. Hence it occurs, even with the most experienced, that the best service of the model is often secured in the hour devoted to “setting to rights” after its employment. It is then that the artist becomes more completely master of himself and of his resources, and, as it were, enters more really into the presence of his subject.

24. Such misleading tendencies are discoverable in a very marked manner in the first attempts of all beginners, to either draw, paint, or model directly from Nature, and especially remarkable in reference to the exercise of proper judgment of color and local tints. They almost invariably exaggerate the reality, and fail in giving due consideration to the various circumstances of light and shadow, distance, etc., by which subordinate parts of a composition may be affected. Even in a simple head, they paint the white of the eyes too white, the lips too red, as they do the sky too blue and trees too green in landscape, and it may be often difficult to reason them from their premises. Let them compare a well-painted head with the original model. The tints upon the cheek and lower portions of the face are as purely flesh-like, however subdued and broken by half-shade and reflections, as those exposed to the full force of light upon the forehead. Is there any palpable white in the eye? If there were, there would be no power of the palette left to approach that single touch by which its liquid brilliancy can only be imitated. Is the whole feature less lifelike and real, from the subdued and delicate half-tints and shadows which play around it, gently reducing the strength of its local tints, softening its outlines, and concentrating the utmost power
of light and dark in emphasized contrast at a point? No power of the palette can reach the expression of the intensity of light and dark of a living eye; and, little as there is of either, therein may be found the cause of its wonderful expressiveness, as well as the means by which it may be most nearly imitated. In the lips there are delicate combinations and gradations of color, as unattainable by white and red alone, as the varied tints of the heavens with white and blue. It is poor reasoning, because leaves are green, that we have only to mix our tints, as nearly as we can, to match those of one before us, to paint the tree. Observation, and the close study of Nature, will teach us to know better. The unskilful observer may not see with the acute discernment of the artist; although he may not look so closely to causes, he at least feels their effects; and the art that does not correspond to the general impressions of Nature—that can not be realized by the imagination—that appeals to it in unrecognised language—must ever fail in all high purposes, and receive but limited acceptation.

25. A custom, which prevails to some extent, of making elaborated cartoons for paintings in oil, however, it may afford many considerations of advantage in respect to the perfection of their design and composition; yet, as is frequently the case, if the study of Nature be confined to mere form, and light and shade, their employment may have many misleading tendencies. The best tests of all methods are results arising therefrom; and it must be admitted that where the cartoon has formed the chief study and effort of the artist, the finished work rarely possesses the excellence of color of those executed directly from Nature, or from studies made therein. They are, in truth, often little more than tinted drawings. Could there be discovered in their excellency, either of design, composition, or other attributes, any one quality exclusively attainable by a method which, if not discarding, at least places in secondary consideration, one of the most pleasing and important means of expression in art—could it be shown that all they possess might not be attained with the addition of truth and effectiveness of color—we might feel less hesitation in expressing an opinion adverse to a custom supported by high authority—the authority, however, less of successful achievement than of arbitrary schools. However true it may be that such may have been the practice of some of the most famous masters of art, it arose in a great measure from the peculiar nature and requirements of their works. For fresco, cartoons are absolutely necessary: When it can be shown, in evidence of their advantages for works in oil, that the oil-pictures of Titian, Paul Veronese, Correggio, Raphael, and others of the Italians—with Rubens, Vandyke, Rembrandt, and many more of the Flemish—and such as Velasquez and Murillo of the Spanish schools—are but indirect translations of Nature, through the comparatively dead language of black and white drawings—that to the cartoon we must look for the secret of their excellence—
when the advocates of the system produce by such means equal results, we may more reasonably dismiss our doubts of its advantages.

It does not follow of necessity that the employment of a cartoon, as a preparatory study of compositions for painting, should lead to injurious tendencies. It is the abuse of and too great reliance upon the practice against which we desire to guard the student. There is, in the execution of every original work, a story of incident and exciting experiment—a trial of strength, as it were, between Art and Nature—constituting the intimate and fascinating association between the author and his labors, which awakens and sustains that intensity of interest which expands to ardent love of his pursuits, and impresses the individuality of the artist's mind and character upon all that emanates from his hand. It is this that, while it gives impulse, lightens every labor, and without which the practice of art becomes reduced to a comparatively mere manual operation. The importance of cherishing this freshness of feeling, and sympathy between the artist and his creation, as well as the delightful association with Nature to which they direct, are obviously of value, not only as affecting the consolations and delight by which his executive labors are inspired, but also most materially the perfection of his work. Such impulses are but partially realized by the mere copyist; and hence a copy, or even a repetition of a work by its author, rarely embodies the sentiment and expressiveness of an original production. To exhaust, therefore, the study and interest of a composition upon a cartoon in black and white, and to leave its completion in color to conventional and minor considerations, must inevitably injuriously affect its perfection in that respect.

The custom, common with many, of preparing their compositions by carefully-studied indications thereof in two colors, as groundwork for their pictures, while it may answer in every important practical point the requirement or service of a cartoon, obviates many of the objections which may be urged against its employment as the established premises of composition for paintings, especially in oil. Unfinished works of many masters distinguished for both design and color, as well as documentary evidence to that effect, fully sustain a favorable opinion of this method.

26. Some artists carry out their preparatory studies to a still further extent, and not only make them in color—arrange their general composition by cartoons, and execute their finished works directly from Nature—but also prepare wax or clay models of important groups and masses, and sometimes even of the whole, which they arrange under all the circumstances of light and shadow, color and effect, in conformity to their design. The practice of thus employing artificial models has not been confined to works of a high historic character (chap. x., 3), by which great assistance may be received in the management of bold fore-shortenings and strong effects of light and shadow.
—which often, especially in mural paintings, may be required to be adapted to a position in which a peculiar effect of light may require to be preserved—as, for example, beneath a dome, and in many other cases—but also in smaller works. The advantages to be derived from capacity to make available all expedients that can be employed to aid in the perfection of a work of art have been so repeatedly alluded to, that it is scarcely necessary to press its importance further. Those who seek with earnestness the means by which excellence may be reached, will find by trial the value of their possession, and will never regret the pains by which it has been obtained.

27. The diversity of methods employed by the masters of art, and their successful application by them, render it difficult to form an opinion of preference to one over another. That which may have succeeded most effectively in the hands of one may in those of another prove both embarrassing and inefficient; and the student should rather seek to adapt his methods to his peculiar capacity and requirements, than to endeavor to force upon himself implicit compliance with any one which may not be fully adequate to this only practical end of any process or method, however it may be recommended by high authority. Many are induced, from the successful results attained by certain methods and processes, not only to attach thereto undue importance, to the neglect of more essential requisitions; while others too often waste, not only many precious years, but the best part of a life, in profitless experiment therewith.

28. As to appropriateness of manner, or style of execution, in a picture, as in any other work of art, it is difficult to form a definite conclusion. "Style in painting is the same as in writing—a power over materials, whether words or colors, by which conceptions or sentiments are conveyed"—and is marked with the individuality and character of the artist's mind and impulses. A bold mind impels a daring hand, which finds its means of expression in a bold and dashing touch; while the more gentle and timid is as clearly indicated by its manner. The ambition of either to cast aside its peculiarities, or to assume those of the other, is rarely effectual; and, as these peculiarities often constitute, in a very great degree, the source of individual strength, it is far more wise to seek to train them in a way in which they may be more easily, because more naturally, directed to the attainment of excellence, than to attempt to force them into a contrary course. The discovery, therefore, of the most available sources of individual strength, is of the utmost importance, and, as it is often reached only by many trials and repeated failures, an early beginning is the more advisable. Thus the natural and most available impulses and capacity of the learner are allowed fairer opportunity of timely development, and, if not injudiciously restrained, will of themselves most likely direct to a course for which they are most aptly and congenially adapted, and
which may frequently require no small degree of courage and resolution steadily to pursue when discovered. Those who possess most sincerity and spirit of impartial investigation of their own qualifications, are not unfrequently most apt to undervalue their own peculiar endowments, and, in seeking the rivalry of qualities which they perceive and value in others, most culpably to neglect the cultivation of such as they themselves may possess.

29. The examples of the great masters of art show most clearly that it was not by striving to imitate the excellences of others, but by making them available to the development, cultivation, and perfection of their own, that they most successfully appropriated them to their individual advantage. It was fairly done; for it was with them no base pilfering of other men’s ideas, discoveries, or rewards of labor. That which they took they gave back with interest; thus often rescuing from oblivion happy suggestions, slightly valued or perhaps overlooked even by those with whom they may have originated. To this end they also looked to Nature, and sought not only verification of the truthfulness and practicability of their peculiar impulses, but also aid to realize them by their art. Promptly, now as then, Nature will be found to respond to every requirement of true genius, and as surely to rebuke the affectation and inconsistencies of unwarrantable pretension.

We see, in the successful daring of Michael Angelo, the predominance of an original and colossal mind, bending all Nature as well as all hitherto-accomplished art to its mould; while gentle refinement, purity of taste, with the keenest discernment and love of the beautiful, from first to last, mark all the inspirations of Raphael’s genius. The lifelike tints of Titian, glowing with an individuality of power and voluptuousness of feeling before unequalled, and as yet unsurpassed, may be contrasted, without detriment to either, with the soft and silvery tones of Correggio, harmonizing with a mind exquisitely sensitive to purity of sentiment, if not to the severest types of beauty of form. Thus might we go on to name, throughout the world of art, both past and present, examples of pre-eminence based upon the successful cultivation of individuality of mind and impulse, not only sufficient fully to sustain the opinions advanced, but to make it appear unaccountable that artists have not been more generally emulous of pursuing paths of their own than of endeavoring to follow in the footsteps of others.

It is very certain that none have ever reached distinction of whom it can be justly said that such was their course. Many may have received direction, or have varied both their styles of composition and manner of execution from impulses induced by the observation and study of the works of others; but this has always been most successfully effected by the enkindling of a latent capacity which only needed thus to be developed, rather than by the desire or purpose of either ambitious emulation or mere servile imitation. In many cases impulses thus given have resulted
in the perfection of peculiarities of style often far surpassing those whence they received suggestion.

The history of the difficulties, disappointments, and success of all artists, invariably points to the importance of a good beginning. Many may have fortunately received this induction from early associations, or judicious direction; while others, who have started upon the strong impulses of great natural abilities and energy of character, without it, have been driven to the painful and mortifying necessity of retracing their steps, fairly back to the beginning, whence they should have derived their reliable strength to have borne them onward successfully. Bolder spirits, with a determination worthy of a better fate, have battled through life in accumulated difficulties to its close; while others, lacking the courage to grapple therewith, and industry required to surmount the obstacles common to all beginners, have vainly exhausted more toil for the discovery of easy ways than would have secured to them available strength and capacity if judiciously directed.

It is not alone by the study of the works of other artists that the student may reap advantage, but also from their biographies gather much that may be valuable and suggestive for self-direction. Familiarity with the difficulties with which they have contended will make lighter the burden of his own; and in the perseverance and industry, the singleness of purpose, and love of their vocation, which mark their careers, he will be ever reminded of the only reliable means by which his own hopes of success can be realized.

30. In directing the attention of the student to the value of study of works of art in connexion with that of Nature, a necessity of seeking them out of our own country does not follow. However there may not exist at present in America such extensive galleries and collections of standard works, both ancient and modern, as may be found in Europe, there are sufficient to meet far more than the requirements of a beginner, and quite enough of living, productive talent to give both impulse and direction. This once secured upon a basis of proper training in elementary knowledge of and practical familiarity with the leading principles of design—and, further, with capacity exercised and expanded to original production—it may be then time enough to seek abroad for more ample sources of knowledge and higher examples of art than can be found at home.

Let not the American boy who aspires to attainment in art beyond that of a mere accomplishment or accessory to the various purposes and pursuits of life in which it may be available, be disheartened by the imaginary want of facilities placing him at insurmountable disadvantages in comparison with the art-student abroad. It is an illusion that should be dispelled. The advantages of foreign study, until a certain period of advancement has been attained, are very doubtful. It is at least certain that one who has not mastered the first practical difficulties of a beginner—
whose impulses have not been sufficiently matured to enable him to do so with well-understood purpose, and with a distinct comprehension of the nature and extent of his requirements, and who is not capable, to a very great degree, of self-direction in their attainment—has still much to acquire before he is prepared to go abroad. All this, and more, he can as well, if not better, obtain at home. Profusion of facility in the beginning, however more smooth and easy may be made the way of the learner thereby, may still, for that very reason, have very doubtful tendencies. There are periods of childhood and youth in art to be passed through, in which the strength and stamina requisite to assume a position of manhood must be gradually attained, and home is the place, above all others, where it is best and most healthfully secured. From the Nature we have first learned to love, and which has taught us to love art, and from our native land with all its associations, we should derive our impulses. That early association and familiarity with high artistic achievement, and the most unlimited profusion of facility for study, do not necessarily constitute the generating elements of genius, may be profitably considered in the fact that Rome, to which all youthful artists look with such ardent longing, foster-mother as she has been of so many men of exalted genius in art, can not claim one among them all, and boast that “he was a Roman.”

31. It is not alone in pictures and statues, stately domes and high achievements, that either the impulses or evidences of the existence and influence of taste for art are to be discovered, but in its broader and more general diffusion, germinating beneath the sheltering influences of these its loftier monuments, and scattering far and wide its seeds of usefulness. The gift comes to us as blessed sunshine in the world’s weary way; purifying in its influences, it reaches the perfection of all our resources of comfort as well as of our pleasures and consolations.

In awakening mankind to a sense of the importance of its cultivation as a requirement in popular education—in making its advantages accessible to all—it should be regarded as a matter touching the interest of every one. It extends its aid to the philanthropist in works of blessed charity and mercy; it gives to the public teacher the means of developing more perfectly the resources of the youthful mind and of directing it in ways best suited to its natural endowments—developing light by such happy adaptation, where otherwise might exist but darkness—an immortal mind benighted by diversion of its capacities from their true direction.

To teachers, above all others, we appeal in behalf of those under their charge. That which we want most is the general introduction of drawing in our schools; not as an accomplishment for a few, but for all. We want not drawing-masters to be sent for at the last moment of giving the finishing touches to fashionable education, by a course of “twelve lessons of an hour each;” but we want our children, of all classes, to be indulged in the inclination that God has
implanted in their natures, to be encouraged and to be assisted. If the work be begun in time, it will be found as easy as to teach them to read and write and cipher. The benefits you will thereby confer on those for whose direction in the ways of practical knowledge, and for the development of whose capacities for usefulness to themselves and to their country, you are responsible, require it at your hands. Do it with steadiness of purpose and perseverance, and the result will prove that there is no affectation in the earnestness with which this appeal is made to you. Give our children but the benefit of this starting-point, and our men and women will accomplish the rest; and that, too, without the aid of self-constituted law-givers in art, or special and exclusive schools to preach doctrines and dogmas on the subject.

To exemplify the truth of the first line of our book has been our earnest ambition. Many can bear witness, by results attained through their perseverance, that our efforts have not been in vain. Some, we fear, may have been disappointed to find the requirement of exertion on their part greater than they either expected or were willing to bestow. To the latter we have only to express our sincere regret for what they have lost, with the earnest hope that they may think better of it and renew the trial. To the former we give our hand, with a brother-artist's warmest pressure, and bid them "God-speed" in their future efforts. May we live to learn of them!