# SAMUEL GREENE BENJAMIN

## ART IN AMERICA: A CRITICAL AND HISTORIAL SKETCH

**Samuel Benjamin**

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# Содержание

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## PREFACE

THE aim of this book has been to give a historical outline of the growth of the arts in America. But while this has been the dominating idea in the mind of the writer, criticism has necessarily entered, more or less, into the preparation of the work, since only by weighing the differences or the comparative merits of those artists who seemed best to illustrate the various phases of American art has it been possible to trace its progress from one step to another.

It is from no lack of appreciation of their talents that the author has apparently neglected mention of the American artists resident in foreign capitals – like Bridgman, Duveneck, Wight, Neal, Bacon, Benson, Ernest Parton, Millet, Whistler, Dana, Blashfield, Miss Gardner, Miss Conant, and many others who have done credit to American æsthetic culture. But it was necessary to draw the line somewhere; and to discuss what our artists are painting abroad would have at once enlarged the scope of the work beyond the limits of the plan adopted. An

exception has been made in the case of our sculptors, because they have so uniformly lived and wrought in Europe, and so large a proportion of them are still resident there, that, were we to confine this branch of the subject only to the sculptors now actually in America, there would be little left to say about their department of our arts.

The author takes this occasion cordially to thank the artists and amateurs who have kindly permitted copies of their paintings and drawings to be engraved for this volume.

# I.
# *EARLY AMERICAN ART*

THE art of a nation is the result of centuries of growth; its crowning excellence does not come except when maturity and repose offer the occasion for its development. But while, therefore, it is yet too soon to look for a great school of art in America, the time has perhaps arrived to note some of the preliminary phases of the art which, we have reason to hope, is to dawn upon the country before long.

As the heirs of all the ages, we had a right to expect that our intellectual activity would demand art expression; while the first efforts would naturally be imitative rather than original. The individuality which finds vent in the utterance of truth under new conditions is not fully reached until youth gives place to the vigorous self-assertion of a manhood conscious of its resources and power. Such we find to have been the case in the rise of the fine arts in this country, which up to this time have been rather an echo of the art of the lands from which our ancestors came, than distinctively original. Our art has been the result of affectionate remembrance of foreign achievement more than of independent observation of nature; and while the number of artists has been sufficiently large, very few of them stand forth as representatives or types of novel methods and ideas; and those

few, coming before their time, have met with little response in the community, and their influence has been generally local and moderate, leading to the founding of nothing like a school except in one or two isolated cases. But many of them, especially in the first period of our art, have shared the strong, active character of their time; and, like the heroes of the Revolution, presented sturdy traits of character. And thus, while the society in which they moved was not sufficiently advanced to appreciate the quality of their art, they were yet able to stamp their names indelibly upon the pages of our history. But within the last few years the popular interest in art has grown so rapidly in the country – as indicated by the establishment of numerous art schools and academies, art galleries, and publications treating exclusively of art subjects, together with many other significant proofs of concern in the subject – that it seems safe to assume that the first preparatory period of American art, so brilliant in many respects, is about closing, and that we are now on the threshold of another, although it is only scarcely three centuries since the first English colonists landed on our shores. The first professional artist of whom there seems to be any record in our colonial history was possessor of a title that does not often fall to the lot of the artist: he was a deacon. This fact indicates that Deacon Shem Drowne, of Boston town, was not only a cunning artificer in metals and wood-carving, as the old chronicles speak of him, but also a man addicted to none of the small vices that are traditionally connected with the artistic career; for people were

very proper in that vicinage in those days of austere virtue and primness, and deacons were esteemed the very salt of the earth.

During the first century of our colonial existence local painters, often scarcely deserving the name, are also known to have gained a precarious livelihood by taking meagre portraits of the worthies of the period, in black and white or in color. We should know this to have been the fact by the portraits – quaint, and often rude and awkward – which have come down to us, without anything about them to indicate who the artists could have been who painted them. Occasionally a suggestion of talent is evident in those canvases from which the stiff ruffles and bands of the Puritans stare forth at us. Cotton Mather also alludes to a certain artist whom he speaks of as a limner. But in those times there was, however, at best no art in this country, except what was brought over occasionally in the form of family portraits, painted by Vandyck, Rembrandt, Lely, or Kneller. These precious heirlooms, scarcely appreciated by the stern theologians of the time, were, however, not without value in advancing the cause of civilization among the wilds of the Western world. Unconsciously the minds of coming generations were influenced and moulded by these reminders of the great art of other lands and ages. No human effort is wasted; somewhere, at some time, it appears, as the seed sown in October comes forth anew in April, quickened into other forms, to sustain life under fresh conditions.

The first painter in America of any decided ability whose

name has survived to this day was John Watson, who executed portraits in Philadelphia in 1715. He was a Scotchman. It is to another Scotchman, who married and identified himself with the rising fortunes of the colonies, that we are perhaps able to assign the first distinct and decided art impulse in this country. And for this we are directly indebted to Bishop Berkeley, whose sagacious eye penetrated so far through the mists of futurity, and realized the coming greatness of the land.

Berkeley is associated with the literature and arts of America in several ways. He aided the advance of letters by a grant of books to Yale College, and by founding the nucleus of what later became the Redwood Library at Newport; thus indirectly suggesting architectural beauty to a people without examples of it, for in 1750 a building was erected for the library that sprang from his benefactions. The design was obtained from Vanbrugh, one of the greatest architects of modern times; and although the little library is constructed only of wood and mortar, its plan is so pleasing, tasteful, and harmonious, that it long remained the most graceful structure in the colonies; and even at this day is scarcely equalled on the continent as a work of art by many far more costly and ambitious constructions after the Renaissance order. And, finally, we owe to Bishop Berkeley the most notable impulse which the dawning arts received in this country when he induced John Smybert, the Scotchman, to leave London in 1725 and settle in Boston, where he had the good fortune to marry a rich widow, and lived prosperous and contented until his death, in 1751.

Smybert was not a great painter. If he had remained in Europe his position never would have been more than respectable, even at an age when the arts were at a low ebb. But he is entitled to our gratitude for perpetuating for us the lineaments of many worthies of the period, and for the undoubted impetus his example gave to the artists who were about to come on the scene and assert the right of the New World to exercise its energies in the encouragement of the fine arts. It is by an apparently unimportant incident that the influence of Smybert to our early art is most vividly illustrated. He brought with him to America an excellent copy of a Vandyck, executed by himself; and several of our artists, including Allston, acknowledged that a sight of this copy affected them like an inspiration. The most important work of Smybert in this country is a group representing the family of Bishop Berkeley, now in the art gallery at New Haven. A flock of foreign portrait-painters, following the example of Smybert, now came over to this country, and rendered good service in perpetuating the faces of the notable characters and beauties of the time; but none of them were of special moment, excepting, perhaps, Blackburn and Alexander. But their labor bore fruit in preparing the way for the successes of Copley. The first native American painter of merit of whom there is any authentic record was Robert Feke, who was of Quaker descent, and settled in Newport, where portraits of his are still to be seen, notably that of the beautiful wife of Governor Wanton, which is preserved in the Redwood Library. What little art-education he received

resulted from his being taken prisoner at sea and carried to Spain, where he contrived to acquire a few hints in the use of pigments. Feke was a man of undoubted ability; and the same may be said of Matthew Pratt, of Philadelphia, who was born in 1734, in respect of age antedating both Copley and West, although not known until after they had acquired fame, because for many years he contented himself with the painting of signs and house decorations.

But the latent æsthetic capacity of the colonies displayed itself suddenly when John Singleton Copley, at the early age of seventeen, after only the most rudimentary instruction, adopted art as a profession. But, although a professional and successful artist at so early an age, Copley seems to have been preceded in assuming the calling of artist by a Quaker lad of Pennsylvania, one year his junior, but evincing a turn for art at an earlier age, when hardly out of the cradle.

The birth of a national art has scarcely ever been more affecting or remarkable than that recorded in the first efforts of Benjamin West. He was born at Springfield, Pennsylvania, in 1738, a year after Copley. The scientist of the future may perhaps show us that it was something more than a coincidence that the six leading painters of the first period of American art came in pairs: Copley and West in 1737 and 1738; Stuart and Trumbull were born in 1756; Vanderlyn arrived in 1776; and Allston followed only three years later.

The descendants of the iconoclasts who had beaten down

statues and burned masterpieces of art, who had cropped their hair and passed sumptuary laws to fulfil the dictates of their creed, and had sought a wilderness across the seas where they could maintain their rigid doctrines unmolested, were now about to vindicate the character of their fathers. They were now to prove that the love of beauty is universal and unquenchable, and that sooner or later every people, kindred, and tongue seeks to utter its aspirations after the ideal good by art forms and methods; and that the sternness of the Puritans had been really directed, not so much against art and beauty legitimately employed, as against the abuse of the purest and noblest emotions of the soul by a debasing art.

As if to emphasize the truth of these observations, as well as of the famous prophecy of Bishop Berkeley, the artist to whom American art owes its rise, and for many years its greatest source of encouragement, was named West, and was of Quaker lineage. Such was the rude condition of the arts in the neighborhood at that time that the first initiation of West into art was as simple as that of Giotto. At nine years of age he drew hairs from a cat's tail and made himself a brush. Colors he obtained by grinding charcoal and chalk, and crushing the red blood out from the blackberry. His mother's laundry furnished him with indigo, and the friendly Indians who came to his father's house gave him of the red and yellow earths with which they daubed their faces. With such rude materials the lad painted a child sleeping in its cradle; and in that first effort of precocious genius executed

certain touches which he never surpassed, as he affirmed long after, when at the zenith of his remarkable career.

How, from such primitive efforts, the Quaker youth gradually worked into local fame, went to Italy and acquired position there, and then settled in England, became the favorite *protégé* of the king for forty years, and the President of the National Academy of Great Britain – these are all matters of history, and, as West never forgot his love for his native land, entitle him to the respectful remembrance not only of artists, but of all his countrymen. American art has every reason, also, to cherish his memory with profound gratitude, for no painter ever conducted himself with greater kindness and generosity to the rising, struggling artists of his native land. No sooner did our early painters reach London but they resorted, for aid and guidance, to West, and found in him a friend who lent them his powerful influence without grudging, or allowed them to set up their easels in his studio, and gave them all the instruction in his power. Trumbull, Stuart, Dunlap, and many others, long after they had forgotten the natural foibles of West, had reason to remember how great had been the services he had rendered to the aspiring artists of his transatlantic home.

Since the death of West – whom we must consider one of the greatest men our country has produced – it has become the fashion to decry his art and belittle his character. This seems to be a mistake which reflects discredit upon his detractors. Men should be judged not absolutely, but relatively;

not compared with perfection, but with their contemporaries and their opportunities. In estimating men of the past, also, we need to put ourselves in their places, rather than to regard them by the standard of the age in which we live. In no pursuit are men more likely to be misjudged than in art; for artists are liable to be guided by impulse rather than judgment, and the very vehemence of their likes and dislikes renders their opinions intense rather than broad and charitable. Benjamin West appears to have been born with great natural powers, which matured rapidly, and early ceased to develop in excellence proportionate to his extraordinary industry and fidelity to art.

But while a general evenness of quality rather than striking excellence in any particular works was the characteristic of the art of West, together with a certain brick-red tone in his colors not always agreeable, yet a share of genius must be granted to the artist who painted the "Departure of Regulus," "Death on the Pale Horse," and "The Death of Wolfe." It unquestionably implied daring and consciousness of power to brave the opposition of contemporary opinions and abandon classic costume in historical compositions as he did; to win to his side the judgment of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and create a revolution in certain phases of art. Notwithstanding this, however, West was emphatically a man of his time, moulded by it rather than forming it, and inclined to conventionalism. When he entered the arena, art was in a depressed condition both in Italy, where he studied, and in England. But while Reynolds and Gainsborough

gave a fresh impulse to art, West's genius, ripening precociously, early became incapable of achieving further progress.

West established himself as a portrait-painter at the age of fifteen; and in the following year – 1755 – Copley also engaged in the same pursuit, when only seventeen. The former lived to be seventy-nine; the latter was seventy-eight at his death. The art-life of Copley must be considered the most indigenous and strictly American of the two. Although receiving some early instruction from his step-father, Pelham, and enjoying opportunities denied to West, of studying portraits by foreign artists, yet Copley's advantages were excessively meagre; and whatever successes he achieved with his brush, until he finally settled in England at the age of thirty-nine, were entirely his own, and can be proudly included among the most valued treasures of our native art. So highly were the abilities of Copley esteemed in his day, that years before he crossed the Atlantic his reputation had preceded him, and assured him ready patronage in London.

It is said that Copley was a very slow and laborious worker. The elaboration he gave to the details of costume doubtless required time. But if the popular opinion was correct, we must assume that many of the paintings now reputed to be by his hand are spurious. It is a common saying that a Copley in a New England family is almost equivalent to a title of nobility; and this very fact would lead many to attribute to him family portraits by forgotten artists, who had, perhaps, caught the trick of his style. But there yet remain enough well authenticated

portraits by this great painter, in excellent preservation, to render the study of his works one of great interest to the art student. There is no mistaking the handling of Copley. Self-taught, his merits and defects are entirely his own. His style was open to the charge of excessive dryness; the outlines are sometimes hard, and the figures stiff almost to ungracefulness. The last fault was, however, less noticeable in the formal, stately characters and costumes of the time than it would be under different conditions. In Copley's best compositions these errors are scarcely perceptible. He was far superior to West as a colorist, and was especially felicitous in catching the expression of the eye, and reproducing the elegant dress of the period; while we have had no artist who has excelled him in perceiving and interpreting the individuality and character of the hand. A very fine example of his skill in this respect is seen in the admirable portrait of Mrs. Relief Gill, taken when she was eighty years old. Gilbert Stuart remarked of the hand in the portrait of Colonel Epes Sargent, "Prick that hand, and blood will spurt out." It is indeed a masterpiece. No painter was ever more in sympathy with his age than Copley; and thus, when we look at the admirable portraits in which his genius commemorated the commanding characters of those colonial days, in their brilliant and massive uniforms, their brocades and embroidered velvets, and choice laces and scarfs, the imagination is carried back to the past with irresistible force, while, at the same time, we are astonished at the ability which, with so little training, could give immortality both to his

contemporaries and his own pencil.

While the fame of Copley will ultimately rest on the masterly portraits which he bequeathed to posterity, yet it will not be forgotten that he was one of the ablest historical painters of his time. The compositions entitled the "Boy and the Squirrel," painted in Boston, the "Death of Major Pierson," and the "Death of Chatham," will contribute for ages to the fame of one of the most important American artists of the last century.

Charles Wilson Peale, the next artist of reputation in the colonies, owes his celebrity partly to accidental circumstances. Of course a certain degree of ability is implied in order that one may know how to turn the winds of fortune to the best account when they veer in his favor. But in some cases, as with Copley and West, man seems to wrest fate to his advantage; while in others she appears actually to throw herself in his way, and offer him opportunities denied to others. At any rate it seems no injustice to ascribe the continued fame of Charles Wilson Peale to the fact that he was enabled to associate his art with the name of Washington: and that his son, Rembrandt, by also following art pursuits, was able to emphasize the fame of the family name. Peale the elder was not a specialist; he was rather, like so many born in America, gifted with a general versatility that enabled him to succeed moderately well in whatever he undertook, without achieving the highest excellence in any department. Inclining alternately to science and mechanics, he finally drifted into art, went over to England and studied with West, and

returned to America in time to enter the army and rise to the rank of colonel. His versatile turn of mind is well illustrated by one who says that "he sawed his own ivory for his miniatures, moulded the glasses, and made the shagreen cases."

It was the good fortune of Peale to paint several excellent portraits of Washington, representing him during the military part of his career, both before and during the Revolution. Lacking many of the qualities of good art, these portraits are yet faithful and characteristic likenesses of the Father of his Country, and as such are of great interest and value.

It is to another Revolutionary soldier of superior natural ability, Colonel John Trumbull, that the country is indebted for a proof of the national turn for the fine arts. The son of Jonathan Trumbull, Colonial Governor of Connecticut, he received a classical education at Harvard University. But here, again, observe the far-reaching influence of one act. That copy, already alluded to, which was executed by Smybert after a work of Vandyck – the great painter who was welcomed to the banqueting halls of merry England by Charles I. and Henrietta Maria – was again to bear fruit. It inspired the genius of Trumbull with a passion for color while yet in his youth, and ultimately led to his becoming a great historical painter.

But first he had to undergo the discipline of war, which gave him that experimental knowledge of which he afterward made such good use. Of a high spirit and proud, irascible temper, Trumbull served with distinction; first as aid to Washington,

then as major at the storming of the works of Burgoyne at Saratoga; and he had reached a colonelcy, when he threw up his commission and went over to England, and became a student of West, whose style is perceptible in many of the works of the younger artist.

If inequality is one sign of genius, then Trumbull possessed it to a marked degree. The difference in merit between his best paintings, which were chiefly composed in England, and those he executed in this country, in the later years of his life, is remarkable. This probably was due in part to the lack of any appreciable art influences or patronage in his own country to stimulate the artistic afflatus. The talents of Trumbull were conspicuous in portraiture and historical painting. The energy of his nature is illustrated in such powerful portraits as those of Washington and Hamilton. Deficient in drawing, and unlike in details of feature, they are life-like in their general resemblance, and seem to thrill with the spirit of the original. We see before us the heroes who conducted the struggling colonies successfully to military independence and political freedom. Trumbull's miniatures in oil of many of the men who were prominent in the Revolution are also very spirited and characteristic, and of inestimable historic value. He was less successful in the representation of feminine beauty. His talents moved within a limited range, but within that narrow circle displayed certain excellences quite rare in the Anglo-Saxon art of that period, exhibiting a correct feeling for color, keen perception

of character, and great force of expression. But let him stray beyond the compass of his powers, as in the representation of woman, and his coloring becomes unnatural and his drawing inexpressive.

The art of this great painter, for so we must call him in view of some of his works, culminated in the historical compositions entitled "The Signing of the Declaration of Independence," "The Siege of Gibraltar," and the immortal compositions representing the "Death of Montgomery" and the "Battle of Bunker Hill." The last two were not surpassed by any similar works in the last century, and thus far stand alone in American historical painting.

Cabinet in size, they combine breadth and detail to an unusual degree. The faces are in miniature, in many cases portraits from life. They could be cut out and framed as portraits; each also is stamped with the individual passions of that terrible hour – hate, exultation, pain, courage, sorrow, despair. And yet with all this truth of detail the general spirit and effort of the scene is preserved. The onward movement, the rush, the onset of war, the harmony of lines, the massing of *chiaro-oscuro*, the brilliance and truth of color, are all there. One first gazes astonished at the skill of the artist, and ends by feeling his heart stirred and his emotions shaken as the leaves of the forest are blown by the winds of October, and his sympathies carried away by the grandeur and the terror of battle. Yes, when John Trumbull painted those two pictures, he was inspired by the fires of genius for once in his life. His later historical works are so inferior in all respects as

scarcely to seem to be by the same hand.

Trumbull lived to see a taste for the arts growing up among his fellow-countrymen, and the awakening of the first feeble attempts to furnish art instruction in his native land to the artists of the future. He was President of the Academy of Fine Arts, of which he was one of the founders.

In the same year with Trumbull was born the greatest colorist and portrait-painter we have seen on this side of the Atlantic, Gilbert Stuart. The town of Narragansett, in the little State of Rhode Island, was the birth-place of this painter, who came of Scotch and Welsh descent, an alliance of blood whose individual traits were well illustrated in the life and character of the painter.

Fortune was becoming a little kinder to our artists. Stuart's dawning genius was directed at Newport by Cosmo Alexander, a Scotch portrait-painter of some merit, who took his pupil to Scotland and placed him in charge of Sir George Chambers. After various vicissitudes, comprising, as with so many of our early painters, an art apprenticeship in the studio of West, the young American artist settled for awhile abroad, and acquired such repute that he rivalled Sir Joshua Reynolds in the popular esteem: his brush was in demand by the first in the land; and the unfortunate Louis XVI. was included among his sitters. After this, in 1793, Stuart returned to America, painted the portraits of the leading citizens in our chief cities, and finally settled in Boston. The most important works he executed in this country were his well-known portraits of Washington, including

the famous full-length painting, which represents the great man, not in the prime of his active days, as represented by Peale and Trumbull, but when, crowned with glory and honor in the majesty of a serene old age, he was approaching the sunset of life.

The character of Stuart was one of marked peculiarities, and offers points of interest scarcely equalled by that of any other American artist. The canny shrewdness and penetrating perception of the Scotchman was mellowed almost to the point of inconsistency by the warm and supple traits of his Welsh ancestry. An admirable story-teller himself, he in turn gave rise, by his oddities, to many racy anecdotes, some of which have been treasured up and well told by Dunlap, who, although inferior as a painter, deserves to be cordially remembered for his discursive but valuable book on early American painting.

As regards the art of Stuart, it can be safely affirmed that America has produced no painter who has been more unmistakably entitled to rank among men of genius as distinguished from those of talent. We assume that the difference between the two is not one of degree, but of kind. In the intellectual progress of the world the first leads, the other follows. One may have great talents, and yet really not enrich the world with a single new idea. He simply assents to the accepted, and lends it the aid of his powers. But genius, not content with things as they are, either gives us new truths or old truths in a new form. The greatest minds – Cæsar, Shakspeare, Goethe, Franklin – present us with a just combination of genius and talent: they both

create and organize. Now, one may have great or little genius, but so far as he tells us something worth knowing in his own way, it is genius as distinguished from talent.

And this is why we say that Stuart had genius. He followed no beaten track, he gave in his allegiance to no canons of the schools. His eagle eye pierced the secrets of nature according to no prescribed rules. Not satisfied with surfaces or accessories, he gave us character as well. Nor did he rest here. In the technical requirements of his art he stands original and alone. That seemingly hard, practical Scotch nature of his was yet attuned like a delicate chord to the melody of color. Few more than he have felt the subtle relation between sound and color – for he was also a musician. In the handling of pigments, again, he stands pre-eminent among the artists of his generation. Why is it that his colors are as brilliant, as pure, as forcible, as harmonious, to-day as when he laid them on the canvas nearly a century ago? If you carefully examine his pictures you shall see one cause of the result explained. He had such confidence in his powers, and such technical mastery, that he needed not to experiment with treacherous vehicles; and, rarely mixing tints on the palette, laid pure blues, reds, or yellows directly on the canvas, and slightly dragged them together. Thus he was able to render the stippled, mottled semblance of color as it actually appears on the skin; to suggest, also, the prismatic effect which all objects have in nature; and, at the same time, by keeping the colors apart, to insure their permanence. Stuart generally painted thinly, on large-grained

canvas, which gave the picture the softness of atmosphere. But sometimes, as in the case of the powerful portrait of General Knox, he loaded his colors. But even in that work he did not depart from his usual practice in rendering the flesh tints.

It has been alleged by some that Stuart was unable to do justice to the delicate beauty of woman, especially the refined type which is characteristic of the United States. He may have more often failed in this regard than in other efforts; but the force of the accusation disappears when one observes the extraordinary loveliness of such portraits as that of Mrs. Forrester, the sister of Judge Story, at Salem. But, indeed, it seemed to make little difference to him who the sitter happened to be. He entered into the nature of the individual, grasped the salient traits of his character, and, whether it was a seaman or a statesman, a triumphant general or a reigning belle, his unerring eye and his matchless brush rendered justice to them all.

Gilbert Stuart Newton, the nephew of Stuart, is a painter well known in England, where he early established himself; and, having been born at Halifax, and always remained a British subject, he more properly belongs to foreign art. But his education was gained in the studio of his uncle in Boston, and his style shows unmistakable traces of the teacher's methods. Newton executed some good portraits before abandoning his native land, including one of John Adams, which is in the Massachusetts Historical Society. He is known abroad chiefly as a *genre* painter of semi-literary compositions.

James Frothingham was also a pupil, and in some degree an imitator, of Stuart, who possessed unusual ability in portraiture, but it was confined to the painting of the head. Whether from the lack of early advantages – which was so remarkable that he had not even seen a palette when, self-taught, he was able to execute a very tolerable likeness – or because of natural limitation of power, Frothingham's talent seemed to stop with the neck of the sitter. The face would perhaps be reproduced with a force, a beauty of color, and a truth of character that oftentimes suggested the art of Stuart; while the hands or shoulders were almost ludicrously out of drawing and proportion.

Besides Frothingham, there were a number of American painters of celebrity, contemporaries of Stuart, but of unequal merit. Colonel Sargent acquired a repute in his time which it is difficult to understand at present. He seems to have been more of an amateur than a professional artist. His ablest work is the "Landing of the Pilgrims," of which a copy is preserved at Plymouth. Rembrandt Peale obtained a permanent reputation for his very able and truthful portrait of Washington. He bestowed upon it the best efforts of his mature years, and it received the compliment of being purchased by Congress for $2000 – a large sum for an American painting in those days, when the purchasing power of money was greater than it is now. His "Court of Death" is a vast composition, that must candidly be considered more ambitious than successful. In such works as the "Babes in the Wood," Peale seems to foreshadow the *genre* art which has been

so long coming to us. John Wesley Jarvis, a native of England, also enjoyed at one time much popularity as a portrait-painter. He was possessed of great versatility; was eccentric; a *bon vivant*, and excelled at telling a story. It is melancholy to record that, after many vicissitudes, he ended his days in poverty.

Thomas Sully was also a native of England, who came to this country in childhood, and lived to such a great age that it is difficult to realize that he was the contemporary of Trumbull and Stuart. Sully had great refinement of feeling, and reminds us sometimes of Sir Thomas Lawrence. This is shown in a certain favorite ideal head of a maiden which he reproduced in various compositions. One often recognizes it in his works. His portraits are also pleasing; but in the treatment of a masculine likeness the feebleness of his style and its lack of originality or strength are too often apparent. John Naegle, of Philadelphia, was a pupil of Sully, but first began his art career as apprentice to a coach-painter. Like many of our artists of that time, he tried his hand at a portrait of Washington; but he will be longest and best remembered by his vivid and characteristic painting of Patrick Lyon, the blacksmith, at his forge. This picture now hangs in the elegant gallery of the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, where several of the masterpieces of our early painters may be seen hanging in company with it, among them West's "Christ Rejected," Vanderlyn's "Ariadne," and Allston's "Dead Man Restored to Life."

Born the year of the Declaration of Independence, John

Vanderlyn, like most of the leading artists of this period of whom we are writing, lived to old age. His days were filled with hardships and vicissitudes: and, unless he has since become aware of the fame he left behind, he was one of many to whom life has been a very questionable boon.

Vanderlyn was a farmer's boy on the Hudson River. It was one of those curious incidents by which Destiny sometimes makes us think there may be, after all, something more than blind action in her ways, that Aaron Burr, passing by his father's house, saw some rude sketches of the rustic lad with that keen eye of his. Burr discerned in them signs of promise, and invited him to come to New York. When Vanderlyn arrived Burr treated him kindly. Eventually the painter made a portrait of Theodosia, the beautiful and ill-fated daughter of his benefactor; and when Burr was under a cloud and found himself destitute in Europe, it was Vanderlyn who received and gave him shelter.

Much of the art-life of this painter was passed at Rome and in Paris. His varied fortunes, and the constant adversity that baffled him at every step, obliged him to resort to many a pitiful shift to keep soul and body together. It is owing to this cause that he so rarely found opportunity to do justice to the undoubted ability he possessed.

But Vanderlyn left at least two important creations, marked by genuine artistic feeling and beauty, that will long entitle him to a favorable position among American painters. "Marius Among the Ruins of Carthage" I have never seen, and can only speak of

it by report; but that it is a work deserving to rank high in the art of the time seems to be proven not only by the applause it received at Rome, but also by the fact that it carried off the gold medal at the Salon in Paris. Such is the irony of fate that the artist was twice forced to pawn this medal. The second time he was unable to redeem it.

The "Ariadne" has unfortunately begun to show signs of age, and the browns into which the flesh tints are painted are commencing to discolor the delicate grays. An oil-painting, if properly executed, should hold its qualities for a longer time; but unhappily the works of too many good artists are affected in the same way. The "Ariadne" is, however, a noble composition, quite in classic style; and if not strikingly original, is a most creditable work for the early art of a young people.

Newport, Rhode Island's charming little city by the sea, once a thriving commercial centre, but now a favorite resort of culture and gayety and wealth, but always opulent in delightful Colonial and Revolutionary associations, and doubly attractive for the artistic memories that cling to it, and the treasures of our art which it contains – this was the birth-place of Edward G. Malbone, who, after a successful art-life in his native town and at Charleston, died at Newport, in 1807, at the early age of thirty-two. Miniature-painting was a favorite pursuit of our early artists. Some of our best portraits have been done by that means; but among all who have followed it in the United States none have excelled Malbone, although some, like John Fraser, of South

Carolina, have been very clever at it. He succeeded in giving character to his faces to a degree unusual in miniature; while the coloring was rendered at once with remarkable delicacy, purity, and fidelity. His best works are probably the likeness of Ray Green, and the exquisitely beautiful group called the "Hours," which is carefully preserved in the Athenæum at Providence.

With the general public the name of no American artist of that time is probably more widely known than that of Washington Allston. He owes this in part, doubtless, to the fact that as a writer he also became identified with the literary circle at that time prominent in Eastern Massachusetts. He was born in 1779, at Waccamaw, South Carolina. Sent at seven years of age to Newport, both for health and instruction, he lived there ten years; and very likely associated with Malbone, and perhaps met Stuart there.

Subsequently Allston visited Italy, and then settled in London, where his talents received such ample recognition as to gain him the position of Academician. The mistake of his art-life – although it was perhaps advantageous to his fame at home – was probably his return to the United States while yet in his prime. The absence of influences encouraging to art growth, and of that sympathy and patronage so essential to a sensitive nature like that of Allston's, had a blighting effect on his faculties; and the many years he passed in Boston were years of aspiration rather than achievement. Allston has suffered from two causes. Overrated as an artist in his day, his reputation is now endangered from

a tendency to award him less than justice. The latter may be due in part to the fact that Allston himself adopted a course of action that tended to repress rather than develop his art powers. In his desire to give intellectual and moral value and permanent dignity to his productions, and in his aversion to sensationalism in art, he treated his subjects with a deliberate severity which takes away from them all the feeling of spontaneity which is so delightful and important in works of the imagination. If his genius had been of the high order claimed by some, such a result would have been impossible. The emotional element would have sometimes asserted itself, and given to his finished works that warmth and attraction the lack of which, while they are intellectually interesting and worthy of great respect, prevents them from inspiring and winning our hearts, and has impaired the influence they might have had in advancing the progress of art in America.

That Allston might have produced paintings of more absolute power, seems evident from his numerous crayon sketches and studies for paintings, which are full of fire, energy, and beauty, delicate fancy, and creative power. One cannot wholly understand Allston's ability until he has seen those studies; and it cannot be too much regretted that he did not allow a freer rein to his brush when composing the works upon which he desired to establish his fame. When he did so far forget himself, we get a glimpse of the fervor and grandeur of the imagination that burned in that brain, whose thoughts were greater than its

capacity for expression. It must also be granted that the works of Allston have the quality peculiar to the productions of original minds: it is not until they have been seen repeatedly that they reveal all that is in them. "Uriel in the Sun," "Jeremiah," and "The Dead Man Restored to Life," are probably the best of the finished works by which the solemn, mysterious, and impressive imagination of Allston can be best estimated. Without giving us new revelations regarding the secrets of color, as he was rather an imitator of the Venetian school than an originator, Allston can be justly considered one of the most agreeable colorists America has produced.

Few of those who recognize the late Samuel F. B. Morse as the inventor of our telegraphic system are aware that in early life he was an artist, and gave evidence of succeeding both in sculpture and painting. Although his preference was for the latter, we are inclined to think that he was best fitted to be a sculptor. He became the pupil of Allston in London, and modelled at that time a statue called the "Dying Hercules," which won the prize of a gold medal offered by the Adelphi Society of Arts for the best single figure. From that statue he afterward composed a painting of the same subject, which is now in New Haven, a work of unquestioned power, showing thorough anatomical knowledge and a creative imagination. But, while there was reason to predict an interesting art career for the young American, circumstances beyond his control drifted him away from the chosen pursuit of his youth, and his fame and fortune were eventually achieved in

the paths of science. It is interesting in this connection to read the words which Morse, suffering from the pangs of disappointment, wrote to one who asked his advice about becoming a painter: "My young friend, if you have determined to try the life of an artist, I wish you all success; but as you have asked my honest opinion, I must say that, if you can find employment in any other calling, I advise you to let painting alone. I have known so many young men – some of them of decided talent, too – who, after repeated trials and failures, became discouraged, gave up further effort, and went to ruin." Notwithstanding that such were his views when he abandoned art, did not Morse, in the prosperous hours of his life, sometimes look back to his early art with a pang of regret? But while he continued in the profession of art, his activity was such that the National Academy of Design owes its origin to him, and with him closed the first period of art in the United States.

We see that this division of our pictorial art – with the exception of Thomas Birch, of Philadelphia, a marine painter of some repute, and a few others of less note – was devoted to the figure; and, if sometimes feeble in result, was inspired by lofty motives. In historical art and portraiture it was, if not strictly original, yet often very able, and fairly maintained itself on a level with the contemporary art of Europe. Owing to the entire want of opportunities for professional education at home, our leading artists, with few exceptions, were forced to pass a good part of their lives in foreign studios.

We also find that a feeling for the beauty of form, as indicated in black and white, or in sculpture, was scarcely perceptible in this stage of our art. With the exception of Shem Drowne and Patience Wright, who modelled skilfully in wax, the sense for plastic art was altogether dormant in the country; while any progress in architecture, until in recent years, was hopelessly ignored. It is true that the active, restless intellect of Thomas Jefferson sought to endow the nation with a sixth order of architecture, called the Columbian, and patriotically resembling a stalk of Indian-corn. The small pillars made after this design are in one of the vestibules of the basement of the Capitol at Washington, where the ardent patriot may visit them, and see for himself the beginning and the end of the only order of architecture ever attempted in this country.

Through much tribulation, much earnest faith, and enthusiasm for art, our early painters prepared the way for the national art of the future. They met only moderate appreciation in their native land at that time. But we owe much to them; and in our preference for present methods – which must in turn be superseded by others – let us not forget the honor due to the pioneers of American art. In the first articulate utterances of a child, or in the dialect of an aboriginal tribe, lie the rudiments of a national tongue eventually carried to a high degree of culture; and the first rude art or poesy of a young people sometimes possesses touches of freshness, charming simplicity, or virile force which are too liable to be softened away beyond recall by the refinements of

a later civilization.

# II.
# *AMERICAN PAINTERS.*
# 1828-1878

THE generation immediately succeeding the American Revolution was devoted by the people of the young republic to adjusting its commercial and political relations at home and abroad. Early in this century, however, numerous signs of literary and art activity became apparent, and in 1815 the *North American Review* was founded. We mention this fact, although a literary event, as indicating the point in time when the nebulous character of the various intellectual influences and tendencies of the nation began to develop a certain cohesive and tangible form. It was about the same time that our art, subject to similar influences, began to assume a more definite individuality, and to exhibit rather less vagueness in its yearnings after national expression.

Gilbert Stuart, one of the most remarkable colorists of modern time, died in the year 1828. In the same year the National Academy of Design was founded. These two events, occurring at the same time, seem properly to mark the close of one period of our art history and the dawn of its successor; for notwithstanding the excellence of Stuart's art, and the virile character of the art of some of his contemporaries, yet their efforts had been

spasmodic and unequal; much of it had been done abroad under foreign influences; and there was no sustained patronage or art organization at home which could combine their efforts toward a practical and common end. The first president of the new institution was Samuel F. B. Morse.

The National Academy of Design superseded a similar but less wisely organized society, which had led a precarious existence since 1801. With the new institution was collected the nucleus of a gallery of paintings and casts; and from the outset the idea suggested by its name was carried out, by furnishing the most thorough opportunities for art-instruction the country could afford.

Although seemingly fortuitous, the establishment of the Academy of Design really marks the opening of a distinct era in the history of American art; during which it has developed into a rounded completeness to a degree that enables us, with some measure of fairness, to note the causes which led to it, which have nourished its growth, and which have made it a worthy forerunner of new methods for expressing the artistic yearnings of those who are to follow in years to come. It has indicated a notable advance in our art; it has, in spite of its weakness or imitation of foreign conventionalisms, possessed certain traits entirely and distinctively native; and has been distinguished by a number of artists of original and sometimes unusual ability, whose failure to accomplish all they sought was due rather to unfortunate circumstances than to the lack of genuine power,

which in another age might have done itself more justice.

It is interesting to observe at this juncture that our art was influenced by exactly the same causes as our literature of the same period; and, like our national civilization, presents a singular reaching after original expression, modified sometimes by an unconscious imitation of foreign thought and methods.

There is one fact connected with the early growth of our art which is entirely contrary to the laws which have elsewhere governed the progress of art, and is undoubtedly due to the new and anomalous features of our social economy. Elsewhere the art-feeling has undeviatingly sought expression first in earthen-ware or plastic art, then in architecture and sculpture, and finally in painting. We have entirely reversed this order. The unsettled character of the population – especially at the time when emigration from the Eastern to the Western States caused a general movement from State to State – together with the abundance of lumber at that time, evidently offered no opportunity or demand for any but the rudest and most rapidly constructed buildings, and anything like architecture and decorative work was naturally relegated to a later period; and for the same reason, apparently, the art of sculpture showed little sign of demanding expression here until after the art of painting had already formulated itself into societies and clubs, and been represented by numerous artists of respectable abilities.

The art-feeling, which made itself apparent, vaguely and abortively, during our colonial period, began to demand freer

and fuller expression soon after the new Republic had declared its independence; and, with scarce any patronage from the Government, assumed a degree of excellence surprising under the circumstances, and rarely reached by a nation in so short a time.

We recall no art of the past the order and conditions of whose growth resemble those of ours, except that of Holland after its wars of independence with Spain. The bane and the blessing of our art have been in the enormous variety of influences which have controlled its action. This has been a bane, because it has, until recently, prevented the concentration of effort which might lead to grand results and schools. It has been a blessing, because individual expression has thus found a vent, and mannerism has not yet become a conventional net, so thrown around our art as to prevent free action and growth. The American art of the last two generations has resembled the restless activity of a versatile youth, who seeks in various directions for the just medium by which to give direction to his life-work. If there has been, on the whole, a national bias in one direction more than another, it has been for landscape-painting.

Our intellectual state has also resembled the many-sided condition of Germany in the Middle Ages, waking up from the chaos of the Dark Ages, but broken up into different States, and representing different religions and races. But our position has been even more agitated and diverse; a general restlessness has characterized the community – a vast intellectual discontent

with the present. Although strongly moved by pride of country, we have also been keenly sensitive to foreign influences, and have received impressions from them with the readiness of a photographic plate, although until recently the result has been assimilation rather than imitation; while internally we have been trying to harmonize race and sectional differences, which as yet are far from reaching homogeneity.

Together with all these individual influences must be included one of general application, to which nearly all our artists, of whatever race or section, have been subject in turn. In other countries the people have, by a long preparation, become ready to meet the artist half-way in appreciating and aiding him in his mission, either from the promptings of the religious sentiment to which his art has given ocular demonstration, or from a dominating and universal sense of beauty. With us it has been quite otherwise; for the artists have been in advance of public sentiment, and have had the misfortune to be forced to wait until the people could come up to them. In addition to the fact that in New England Puritan influences were at first opposed to art, the restless, surging, unequal, widely differing character of our people, brought face to face with the elementary problems of existence, founding new forms of government, and welding incongruous factors into one race and nation – in a word, wresting from fate our right to be – made us indifferent to the ideal, except in sporadic and individual cases, which indicated here and there that below the surface the poetic sentiment was preparing to

assert itself; and that we, in turn, were preparing to acknowledge the great truth that art is an instinctive yearning of the race to place itself in accord with the harmony which rules the universe.

The result has been that a very large proportion of the artists of this period of our history have been compelled to endure far more than the traditionary hardships of the profession. They have been obliged to devote some of the best years of their lives to trade, and have not been able to take up art until late. To accuse American artists, as a class, of being mercenary – a charge made quite too often – is really something akin to irony, so much more successful pecuniarily would the majority of them have been in mercantile pursuits. The heroism of our early painters, struggling, in obscure corners of the country, for opportunities to express their yearning after the ideal, without instruction, without art-influences, meeting little or no sympathy or encouragement, and in spite of these obstacles often achieving a respectable degree of excellence, is one of the most interesting, instructive, and sublime episodes in the history of art.

Growing out of this hesitating condition of our early art may be discerned a secondary cause, which occurred in so many cases as to be justly considered one of the forces which formed the careful, minute, painstaking style of much of our landscape art. We refer to the fact that many of the best of our early painters were first engravers on wood and steel. This gave them a minute, formal, and precise method of treatment, which led them to look at details rather than breadth of effect.

When we turn to the influences from abroad which stimulated American art during this period, we find that, while they fostered the growth of a certain æsthetic feeling, they at the same time instilled conventional methods and principles that deferred the development of a higher kind of art. It is greatly to be regretted that, notwithstanding the friendly relations between the United States and France, our art, when it was first looking to Europe for direction, should not have come in contact with that of France, which at that time, led by Gericault, Rousseau, Troyon, Delacroix, and other rising men, was becoming the greatest pictorial school since the Renaissance. But Italian art at that time was sunk to the lowest depths of conventionalism; while the good in the English art of the time was represented less by a school than by a few individuals of genius – Turner, Wilkie, Constable – who were so original that they failed to attract students whose first art ideas had been obtained in Italy.

The influence of Italy on our early art was shown by the tendency of our painters in that direction – as now they go to France and Germany – and this was due primarily to Allston and Vanderlyn. The latter, when at Rome, occupied the house of Salvator Rosa – apparently a trivial incident, but if we could trace all the influence it may have had on the fancy and tastes of the young American artist, we might find it was a powerful contributor to the formation of the early style of the landscape artists who followed him to Italy. This bias was also greatly assisted by the many paintings imported at that time from the

Italian peninsula, which were either originals, bought cheaply during the disturbances which then convulsed Europe, or copies of more or less merit. These works made their way gradually over our country, from Boston to New Orleans; and, with the rapidly shifting fortunes of our families, have often been so completely placed out of sight and forgotten, that it is not an unfrequent instance for one to be unearthed in a remote country village, or farm-house that would never be suspected of harboring high art.

The larger portion of these foreign works came first to Boston, and were hidden away somewhere in that vicinity, as in the case of the collection bequeathed to Bowdoin College by its founder; whose best specimens were eventually sold and scattered for a mere song by a faculty who were ignorant of their value, and thought they might at the same time aid morality and add an honest penny to the funds of the institution by selling its precious nudities, and thus remove them from the student's eye. As Allston and Stuart, who were colorists, also settled in Boston, after years of foreign study, these two circumstances contributed to make the Boston school from the first one of color – a fact less pronounced in the early art of New York.

It is to West and Allston and Trumbull that we are to attribute the English element in our arts. The prominent position they then occupied before the American public made their example and opinions of great importance with their countrymen, and undoubtedly contributed to suggest one of the most characteristic traits of American art, that is, the tendency to make art a

means for telling a story, which has always been a prominent feature of English art. May we not also trace to English literature the bias which unconsciously led our painters to turn their attention to landscape with a unanimity that has until recently made our pictorial art distinctively a school of landscape painting? Cowper, Byron, and Wordsworth introduced landscape into poetry, and undoubtedly impelled English art in the same direction; and it was exactly at that time that our own poet, Bryant, undoubtedly influenced at the turning-point of his character by Wordsworth's solemn worship of nature, was becoming the pioneer of American descriptive poetry; while Irving was introducing the picturesque into our literature; and Cooper, with his vivid descriptions of our forests, was, like Irving, creating a whole class of subjects that were to be illustrated by the American artists of this period.

The influences cited as giving direction to the struggling efforts of art in our country during the early part of this century are illustrated with especial force by five portrait, figure, and landscape-painters, who may almost be considered the founders of this period of our art – Harding, Weir, Cole, Doughty, and Durand.

Chester Harding was a farmer's son, who, after an apprenticeship in agriculture, took up the trade of chair-maker at twenty-one, the time when the young Parisian artist has already won his *Prix de Rome*. After this he tried various other projects, including those of peddling and the keeping of a tavern; and

then took his wife and child and floated on a flat-boat down the Alleghany to Pittsburgh – at that time a mere settlement – in search of something by which to earn a bare living. There he took to sign-painting; and it was not until his twenty-sixth year that the idea of becoming a professional artist entered his head. An itinerant portrait-painter coming to the place first suggested the idea to Harding, who engaged him to paint the portrait of Mrs. Harding, and took his first art-lesson while looking over the artist's shoulder; and his first crude attempts so fascinated him that he at once adopted art as a profession, and in six months painted one hundred likenesses, such as they were, at twenty-five dollars each, and then settled in Boston, where he seems to have been taken up with characteristic enthusiasm. On going to England, Harding, notwithstanding the few advantages he had enjoyed, seemed to compare so favorably with portrait-painters there that he was patronized by the first noblemen of the land. Although belonging also to the latter part of the period immediately preceding that now under consideration, yet Harding was, on the whole, an important factor in the art which dates from the founding of the National Academy, and was one of the strongest of the group of portrait-painters naturally associated with him, such as Alexander, Waldo, Jarvis, and Ingham. There was something grand in the personality of Harding, not only in his almost gigantic physique but also his sturdy, frank, good-natured, but earnest and indomitable character, which causes him to loom up across the intervening

years as a type of the people that have felled forests, reclaimed waste places, and given thews and sinews to the Republic that in a brief century has placed itself in the front rank of nations.

While Harding, with all his artistic inequalities, fairly represented the portrait art of Boston at that, period, Henry Inman may be considered as holding a similar position in New York. As a resident of that city and a pupil of Jarvis, he enjoyed advantages of early training superior to those of most of our painters of that day. Exceedingly versatile, and excelling in miniature, and doing fairly well in *genre* and landscape, Inman will be best known in future years by his admirable oil portraits of some of the leading characters of the time. He was a man of great strength and symmetry of character, who would have won distinction in any field, and his early death was a misfortune to the country.

New York became the centre for a number of excellent and characteristic portrait-painters soon after Inman established his reputation – such as Charles Loring Elliott, Baker, Hicks, Le Clear, Huntington, and Page, the contemporaries of Healy, Ames, Hunt, and Staigg, of Boston, and Sully, of Philadelphia – all artists of individual styles and characteristic traits of their own. Sully, owing to his great age, really belonged also to the preceding period of our art.

In Elliott we probably find the most important portrait-painter of this period of American art. It was a peculiarity of his intellectual growth that only by degrees did he arrive at the point

of being able to seize a simple likeness. But it is not at all uncommon for genius to falter in its first attempts; and Elliott was one of the few artists we have produced who could be justly ranked among men of genius, as distinguished from those of talents, however marked. Stuart excelled all our portrait-painters in purity and freshness of color and masterly control of pigments; but he was scarcely more vigorous than Elliott in the wondrous faculty of grasping character. Herein lay this artist's strength. He read the heart of the man he portrayed, and gave us not merely a faithful likeness of his outward features, but an epitome of his intellectual life and traits, almost clutching and bringing to light his most secret thoughts. In studying the portraits of Elliott we learn to analyze and to discern the essential and irreconcilable difference between photography and the highest order of painting. The sun is a great magician, but he cannot reproduce more than lies on the surface – he cannot suggest the soul. He is like a truthful but unwilling witness, who gives only part, and not always the best part, of the truth. But then the genius of the great artist steps in, completes the testimony, and presents before us suggestions of the immortal being that shall survive when the mortal frame and the sun which photographs it have alike passed away.

Baker, on the other hand, has excelled in rendering the delicate color and loveliness of childhood, and the splendor of the finest types of American feminine beauty. The miniatures of Staigg are also among the most winning works of the sort produced by our

art. Among other excellent miniature-painters of this period was Miss Goodrich, of whose personal history less is known than of any other American artist.

William Page occupies a phenomenal position in the art of this period, because, unlike most of our painters, he has not been content to take art methods and materials as he found them, but has been an experimentalist and a theorist as well, and therefore belongs properly to more recent phases of our art. Thus, while he has achieved some singularly successful works in portraiture and historical painting, he has done much that has aroused respect rather than enthusiasm.

If less refined in aim and treatment than Page in his rendering of female beauty, Henry Peters Grey, who was also an earnest student of Italian Renaissance art, succeeded sometimes to a degree which, if far below that of the masters whom he studied, was yet in advance of most of such art as has been executed by American painters, at least until very recently. "The Judgment of Paris" is certainly a clever if not wholly original work, and the figure of Venus a fine piece of form and color.

Daniel Huntington, the third president of the National Academy of Design, is a native of New York city, and has enjoyed advantages and successes experienced by very few of our early artists. A pupil of Morse and Inman, he is better known by the men of this generation as a pleasing portrait-painter; but the most important of his early efforts were in what might be called a semi-literary style in *genre* and historical and allegorical

or religious art, in which departments he has won a permanent place in our annals by such compositions as "Mercy's Dream," "The Sibyl," and "Queen Mary Signing the Death-warrant of Lady Jane Grey."

While portraiture has been the field to which most of our leading painters of the figure have directed their attention during this period, *genre* has been represented by several artists of decided ability, who, under more favorable art auspices, might have achieved superior results. Inman was one of the first of our artists to make satisfactory attempts in *genre*. If circumstances had allowed him to devote himself entirely to any one of the three branches he pursued, he might have reached a higher position than he did. But the most important *genre* artist of the early part of this period was William Sidney Mount, the son of a farmer on Long Island. Associated first with his brother as a sign-painter, he eventually, in 1828, took up *genre* painting. Mount lacked ambition, as he himself confessed; he was too easily influenced by the rapidly won approval of the public to cease improving his style, and early returned to his farm on Long Island. Mount was not remarkable as a colorist, although it is quite possible he might have succeeded as such with superior advantages; but he was in other respects a man of genius, who as such has not been surpassed by the numerous *genre* artists whom he preceded, and to whom he showed by his example the resources which our native domestic life can furnish to the *genre* painter. This American Wilkie had a keen eye for the humorous

traits of our rustic life, and rendered them with an effect that sometimes suggests the old Dutch masters. "The Long Story" and "Bargaining for a Horse" are full of inimitable touches of humor and shrewd observations of human nature. F. W. Edmonds, who was a contemporary of Mount, although a bank cashier, found time from his business to produce many clever *genre* paintings, showing a keener eye for color, but less snap in the drawing and composition, than Mount.

In other departments of the figure at this period of our art, Robert W. Weir holds a prominent position as one of our pioneers in the distinctive branch called historical painting. Of Huguenot descent, and gaining his artistic training in Italy, after severe struggles at home, his career illustrates several of the influences which have been most apparent in forming American art. Although not a servile imitator of foreign and classic art, and showing independence of thought in his practice and choice of subjects, Weir's style is pleasing rather than vigorous and original. It shows care and loving patience, as of one who appreciates the dignity of his profession, but no marked imaginative force, nor does he introduce or suggest any new truths. Such a massive composition, however, as the "Sailing of the Pilgrims," while it scarcely arouses enthusiasm, causes us to wonder that we should so early have produced an art as conscientious and clever as this. The portrait of Red Jacket, and the elaborate painting called "Taking the Veil," are also works of decided merit. Enjoying a serene old age, this revered painter

yet survives, still wielding his brush, and annually exhibiting creditable pictures in the Academy.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.