

CHAPTER II

Learning taketh away all levity, temerity, and insolency by copious suggestion of all doubts and difficulties, and acquainting the mind to balance reasons on both sides, and to turn back the first offers and conceits of the mind, and to accept of nothing but examined and tried.

BACON.

BEING at liberty, and without experienced counsel, I could not light upon any mode of study better than to draw at home from a few casts and some lithographic drawings then sold as copies for learners. I had commenced the study of music, both violin and singing, but as I had no room of my own apart, the remonstrances of the family at my scraping seemed highly reasonable. It was most undesirable to increase the trials caused by my intractability, so I abandoned fiddling to earn more toleration for my special art. Before many days of my freedom had passed, I gratified my desire to visit the National Gallery, to see with my actual eyes the great masters of whose glory I had read with longing fancy. When the mere description of their beauties had given such delight, how wonderful, I thought, would be the perfection of the works themselves when I stood before what every panegyrist declared to be beyond the power of words to express! I went on a very cold day; the warmth of the galleries acted as a welcome. I passed through the nearer rooms; the pictures seemed appropriate enough for introductory examples; there were several that I should

return to, and so satisfy aroused curiosity, but I wanted to see the "real masterpieces." I found myself at last in a gallery apparently without exit. Going back to its entrance, I found a small door to the left. I entered; it was empty, and had no room beyond. Coming out, a tall and handsome official asked me what I was seeking. "Oh," said I, "you will be my guide. I am wanting to find the really grand paintings of the great masters; will you direct me?" He looked suspiciously at me a few seconds, and then said, "Here they are around you." I knew the man afterwards very well. He was said to be a descendant of the Earl of Derwentwater, perhaps only because he would have graced any noble house by his look and bearing! At this moment he had slowly become convinced that I was quite serious. Yet he saw that I needed humiliation. "Why," he said, with extended arm turned to one canvas after another, "that's the 'Raising of Lazarus,' by Sebastian del Piombo, with at least the principal figure designed by Michael Angelo. The French nation made an offer for it, with payment to be made in gold coin to cover the surface entirely. That tall picture is a Parmigiano, thought to be his finest work. There are two very choice Murillos; and that picture before you, sir, of 'Bacchus and Ariadne' is one of the finest specimens existing of the greatest colourist in the world." Here he stopped to understand my paralysed expression. "Can't you see its beauty, sir?" "Not much, I must confess," I slowly stammered; "it is as brown as my grandmother's painted tea-tray." He stared hopelessly and then left me, only adding as a parting shot, "In the other rooms there are some wonderful Rubens, a consummate Guido, a miraculous head by Vandyke, and several supremely fine Rembrandts; they will at least equal your grandmother's tea-tray; perhaps you'll be able to see some beauty in *them*."

I stood spellbound before the Titian, but not with sudden conversion of feeling. It was darker in tone than it is now. The dilettanti of the early century disliked

bright pictures, and the dealers suited their taste with a liberal coating of tobacco decoction and other more damaging washes. About six years later the picture was cleaned, and every one was startled on seeing the difference, many declaring in the newspapers that the work, with others so treated, was absolutely ruined. I did not have to wait so long as this to know how great had been my ignorance in judgment of the work of the Venetian master, for within this period I made a small study of it to discriminate the beauty of its tints and the principles of its coloration. The so-called head of Gevartius I wondered at and bowed before, and there were a few other heads that raised my interest and untrained admiration. "Venus attired by the Graces," from the hand of Guido, was a large picture which then challenged attention, but it offended me by its empty pretension, and this obtrusive painting prevented me from observing pictures which, years afterwards, I grew to love, when I wondered I had not admired them at first, despite the little measure of enlightenment I had on my first visit. Vapid canvases in other rooms lowered my enthusiasm still more, till on further search I was attracted by some works which gave me calm pleasure. The "Dead Christ," by Francia, kept me before it a long time. I never after derived so much enjoyment from it as on this first boyish visit, but it brought me a stage on the way to higher things. The "Marriage à la Mode" taxed another phase of the same feeling of pity. These pictures had then the appearance of having been only lately completed; every touch seemed everlasting and clear as if done in enamel, and they were still in this state some twenty years later when they were sent to the South Kensington Museum. There a monster named Reid, with an overbearing confidence in some system of ventilation, had his own way, and by placing hot air-pipes immediately under the pictures, with a horizontal opening nine inches below, and a ventilator along the ceiling of the room, effectively baked the paintings, cracking one seriously. They were thus per-

fectly prepared for the restorer's hands, who, however, never brought back their pristine beauty of manipulation or sweet colour, as I saw them in the month of January 1841. When returned to the National Gallery, they were still in the exquisitely carved frames designed and executed by Hogarth himself.

I confessed my opinion of the old masters to my drawing and painting master, Mr. Rogers, frankly adding that some of his portraits seemed pretty well equal to the best. He had the honest modesty to assure me that I should think differently when I understood the matter better.

I accepted trustingly the rebuke to my uncorrected judgment, although I had a strong conviction that Guido's "Venus attired by the Graces" and other such-like works would be dead letters to me; the merits of others, too deep in solemn dignity of magnificence to carry on their faces the showy dazzle I had expected, before long convinced me that perfect taste can only be earned by cultivation. The liberty which allowed me to visit the National Gallery at will was soon to come to an end, for after this freedom my father's idea that the pursuit of painting was a dangerous one revived. He told my mother that he would take immediate steps to find me a berth in a strict house of business; not a day, not a moment was to be lost; so I anticipated my father by again settling the matter myself. My engagement this time was at the London agency of Richard Cobden's Manchester business. It was in the days of the Corn Law agitation, and of Cobden's entrance into Parliament. I saw the great warrior in the days of his prime. I read with attention all his pamphlets, speeches, and the works of his friends on one side, and most of the leaders in the *Times* and elsewhere on the other, and feeling strongly the peril which the agitators ignored of leaving our country to depend upon the external supply of corn in the event of war, I wrote an anonymous letter to the papers in opposition to the views of my principal. The

editors disdained to notice my patriotic effusion, but the rebuff did not discourage my ambition to do public service. Writing, indeed, made me a more attentive reader, and my employer's example encouraged me to value the cultivation of a larger ambition than that of the mere making of a personal fortune, which my elders set before me.

On Sundays at times I was given entrance to a picture restorer's in the City who had his house full of paintings of various sizes and styles. Some of these must have astonished their owners on their return home by their brilliancy and freshness, for the cracks and discolorations were effectually removed by a very simple process.

The works under renovation were in different stages of progress, but the painter only seemed to attend on week days, and I never saw him.

About this time my sister, after a visit to some friends at Holloway, told me that a neighbour there had a young nephew who was a perfect wonder in his power of drawing. He was only about twelve, was already a student of the Royal Academy Schools, and four years before had won a medal at the Society of Arts. The boy often came to his uncle's house and made drawings, not only of members of the family, but also of fanciful subjects, which all agreed were marvellous. What surprised me more than all else in this statement was that the boy's family were delighted at the prospect of his becoming an artist. My sister at first thought that his name was Ebemy, but subsequently she discovered it was Millais.

My faith in the future became at times very vague. It seemed as though I had done little good by acting for myself, but suddenly it turned out that even in my unpromising office I was not left without an unexpected aid to the forbidden pursuit. Before I had become thoroughly established at my post—having no previous announcement of the existence of such an *habitué*—a gentleman entered the back office, and after my vainly suggesting that he had better go to the front room, proceeded to take off

his overcoat and hang it up. To my further question as to his business he replied in north country accent that I should see. He then unlocked drawers in a table standing in the corner, and astonished me by revealing a drawing board with strained white paper, a mahogany box of superfine water-colours, a porcelain slab with divided compartments, mathematical instruments, and a set of lead pencils, indiarubber, and vessels for water. "What does all this mean?" I asked. He answered as before, and putting the materials on the desk—my desk—by the window, he then, with the help of notes in his pocket-book, elaborated a design for a calico pattern. I immediately caught the infection, and for some weeks gave myself up with unrestrained devotion to the pursuit of ornamental design, which, it was evident to me, was one of the noblest branches of the art, and ought to be cultivated by every artist. When he left, I devoted myself to painting the panels of the room in oil, with the illustrations, on an enlarged scale, of Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, and of Kenny Meadows's designs to Shakespeare, which were then being issued. I also executed some original designs on mill-board.

At this date Harrison Ainsworth's *Old Saint Paul's* was coming out in the *Sunday Times*. It dealt with the beloved city, and treated of all the streets and by-ways that I knew so well. Solomon Eagle was the very figure of tragic romance for a boy, and I came to the end of each instalment of the thrilling story with nervous reluctance. I could not wait a whole week for the progress of the plot, so I set to work to write down what I deemed ought to follow. When the full complement of matter for the next week was finished, it occurred to me that if the author were ill, or in some way hindered from supplying his quantum of excitement to the expectant public, the loss would be one that the world could never bear, and to save it from such a possible calamity I forwarded my own understudy. When the master's chapters appeared I felt obliged to bow to them as above competition in all but

the startling character of the situations, in which it seemed to me I more than rivalled the original author.

I must not convey the impression that the respite from my routine of duties was unlimited. There was the diary to keep, letters to copy, the sorting and putting in order of sample folios, which contained the patterns of the stuffs from which selections were made by buyers, and between such duties there was running with messages. Art could be followed in the back room only when there was no work to be done. When I had completed pressing tasks, and had to stay in the front office for callers, I could not write other than business papers, nor could I draw on any scale that would be noticed; but often I could read, and took advantage of the opportunity, bringing a book from home. I thus re-read Sir Joshua Reynolds's Lectures, his Notes on De Fresnoy, and Percy's *Anecdotes of Artists*, all of which helped to make the painters of old days familiar to me. Two volumes of the *Library of Fine Arts*, published ten years before, made me well acquainted with British artists, and from articles by travelled architects and artists in it I grew familiar with the appearance of the buildings of Italy, and with many of the great pictures to be found there in churches and public galleries. I also extended my knowledge in the varieties of style of the great masters, and their relations to different schools, which, with what I already knew—not a little of this from the *Penny Magazine*—put me into a position to follow up clues when larger opportunities presented themselves. My weekly evenings at the city portrait painter's still went on. In the summer my only opportunity of painting landscape from nature was on Sundays. I walked along roads adorned with blossoming trees showing their loveliness to the rising sun, and turned into secret lanes, to emerge at the descent into the wide leas with the rushy river in sight. Walking along its banks I spied out the shy fish, and rejoiced with the happy birds quadrilling around the sentinel trees; finally, with a walk along the canal towing-path I arrived, paint-box in hand, at old Chingford Church,

and in shade of the yew-tree unpacked my tools and summoned courage for my novice hand to interpret the rapturous charms of the place. The year before I had gone every Sunday to church, but the combination of three services into one with the reiteration of prayers palled upon me, while the stories that I had met with in Fox's *Book of Martyrs* of the persecution of dissenters by ecclesiastical authority in the Merry Monarch's days made me listen to the praises of a wonderful Nonconformist preacher, whose chapel then became my temple. The minister was so eloquent that it seemed desirable to record his flowing words. I rapidly took down the sermon, but though I could not always get to the end of his successive phrases, I soon found that these concluding sentences were stereotyped, and gradually I learnt from the opening of a new passage of eloquence what the end would be. I represented these by varied forms and dashes, and was thus soon brought to the conviction that I had reached the bottom of the preacher's mine of wisdom, and that I was listening only to a learned parrot. My weekly holiday was not given to me to be used thus, and I had no further misgivings in hearkening to the birds' call and the clang of the bells of Chingford Church rather than to the tinkling of the Lady Huntingdon's Chapel.

Painting from outdoor nature without any preconception of treatment is not done without self-conflict. I had endeavoured to make my transcript true, but I was not proud of the result, so that it was not without hesitation that I showed it to Mr. Rogers. "Oh, dear no, certainly not," he exclaimed. "You haven't any idea of the key in which nature has to be treated; you must not paint foliage green like a cabbage; that'll never do. You say that the ivy on the tower, and still more the grass below, was very bright green, but no one with a true eye for colour sees them so. Constable, who is just lately dead, tried to paint landscape green, but he only proved his wrong-headedness; in fact he had no eye for colour. I'll show you a small picture I did when last in the country; there now, you see

all the trees and grass, which an ignorant person would paint with greens, I've mellowed into soft yellows and rich browns." It was so, and it looked most masterly and exemplary. I could not say that nature ever put on that aspect towards me, but he said encouragingly that if I worked in the right way, an eye for nature might come at last.

One of my father's City friends had a cousin named Anderson who was an artist. We had an invitation to go one evening to see the painter; he lived in Maida Vale, and he gave us generous, though simple, entertainment. He took us into his studio, where the only work in hand was a large Canaletto, of which he was repairing certain damaged parts, all in a perfectly honest and capable manner. What else he did for his livelihood I could not ascertain.

While still in the City, I fulfilled all the duties required of me without stint or complaint. In those days there were no Bank holidays, and no Saturday afternoon releases, and during the whole period of my engagement only once did I obtain leave of absence. It was settled the week before that a whole afternoon in June should be mine for going to the Royal Academy Exhibition. When the momentous hour to leave arrived, my master asked me to wait until he returned from a hasty call; but it was past five o'clock before I was free. Soon after, my father and I were among the pictures. There I was superabundantly gratified, for after we had made an enthusiastic general survey of them, and were returning for a reinspection, there proved to be some unwonted interest in the central room. All the public had pressed themselves into one half of the space, leaving the remainder to an elderly gentleman and a much younger lady, who stood rapt in delight before a painting by Landseer representing in a marvellous manner two very sleek and shiny dogs, and a still more glossy hat. The gentleman talked with undisturbed attention to his graceful companion. He was dressed in a blue coat and white trousers. I stared at all

the company in turn. When I appealed to my father he bade me guess who the honoured stranger was. I had never before seen any national hero; each that I knew of by engravings I had outlined in turn. This personage was undoubtedly like him who in the last struggle for European supremacy had held in his strong hand the baton of England's righteous will, and had not put it down until it was wreathed with the victorious olive branch; it gave to common life a sublime exaltation to have him before us dressed so simply, for slowly it dawned upon me that he was no other than the Duke of Wellington!

I had completed nearly four years of servitude when an incident occurred which in the end severed my connection with the City. In the autumn my master had been out of town for some days, and I had merely to attend in the office at discretion. An old Jewess who perambulated the warehouse offices selling oranges called and asked me to buy of her, if only for a handsel to break her ill-luck of the morning. "I can't buy your oranges, Hannah, but if you like to come into the back office I will paint your portrait," I said. She was delighted, and consented on condition that I should give her a duplicate for herself. I set to work on a sheet of sized paper, representing her as she walked about, with basket on head and oranges in hand. The opportunities were broken and brief, but in a few days the portrait was advanced enough to be recognisable. It was pinned up to dry one day when my master suddenly returned. After I had explained the ordinary business to him, he pursued me into the back office with questions, where old Hannah hung confronting him in all the beauty of new paint. The surprise made him forget the matter in hand. He broke into loud laughter, and went out for a few minutes, returning with friends from the nearest warehouse, who shared his merriment in their recognition of old Hannah. They appealed to me to lend them the portrait for their friends to see, and overruled my objection, taking with them my injunction not to let my father see it. In the evening he told me of an extraordinary

likeness of old Hannah of which he had heard ; he had not yet learned who the artist was, but he thought that I ought to see it. When he discovered the author my father went to my employer complaining that I had not



W. H. H.

OLD HANNAH.

enough to do, and said that if nothing more could be found to occupy me he must get me another berth. All this disturbance prevented the completion of old Hannah's portrait. He then talked to me seriously, adducing all the difficulties of Haydon,¹ and repeated gossip concerning

¹ It may here be interesting to add, as showing that art had its patrons among City warehousemen sixty years ago, that some of Haydon's pictures

Landseer¹ and others, the most elevated in the profession, which proved that even they were in incessant monetary difficulties. He referred to a former proposal of his that I should take to ornamental design, an idea suggested by the history of Sir Walter Scott, who being consulted by a young artist named Hayes as to his future, had advised him to turn to house decoration as a business instead of the career of picture painting. This advice the young man had submissively taken, prospering in Edinburgh very greatly, and becoming known as the author of a book (which my father had given me to read) on *Harmony of Colour*. "Now," he said, "even this prospect is disappearing, for it is the fashion to give such work to foreigners." This had just been done at the Royal Exchange, where Herr Sangg and his assistants had come to paint the interior decoration, leaving behind them a sample of the approved taste of the time.

The contest with my father was a protracted one, and in the meantime my master put in practice the severer discipline recommended ; this I bore for a while with resolve growing in my soul the stronger, until at last I told my employer that I would wait only until he found another to fill my place. I refused increased salary and prospects, and I countermined my father's caution to him not to receive my notice by saying firmly that I would enlist for a soldier rather than stay. To my father himself I said, "When I was twelve and a half I feel you would have been wrong, thinking as you did, to allow me to drift into a pursuit you thought objectionable. I am now sixteen and a half ; if you kept me at business until I were twenty-one I should then become an artist with but a poor chance of accomplishing anything. I will not put the responsibility upon you now ; I know the profession is a hard one, but I have made up my mind to

were hanging in the counting-house of Messrs. Bennoch and Twentyman, a firm long extinct. Mr. Bennoch was a patron of the arts, a poet of no mean order, and was wont to relate many stories of the unfortunate Haydon.

¹ It was only some years later that by the friendly business-like help of Mr. Jacob Bell, Landseer became prosperous in his profession.

trust myself to it. I have promises of work to start with, and what I gain from this will be enough to help me in my studentship." I determined in no way to tax the family funds, as I wished to avoid interfering with a plan he had committed himself to, of adding his savings to a small inheritance from his good aunt, that it might grow into a due provision for old age.

I was resolved, however, to convince them that henceforth they must look upon me as acting, rightly or wrongly, by my own deliberate will, and regard themselves as being without responsibility for the course I took. Considering the condition of affairs at the time, I did not think my father wrong in using all just authority to restrain me. My mother had, I know, wished to take my side, but she too was sure that I was rash, and that the outlook which I faced was a bad one.

I have been the more precise in giving the particulars of the differences between my family and myself because erroneous statements on the subject have been published. In my father's day the view taken of the profession by well-informed people may be contrasted with the equally extreme notion of this day, that success, and even fortune, must attend the pursuit of the arts, a conviction whose consequences too often involve the adventurer in disaster.

My release seemed very long in coming, but at last I bade my sympathetic master, whose portrait I first painted, farewell. My father gave me a letter to Mr. E. Hawkins of the Sculpture Department of the British Museum asking permission for me to draw there. In accordance with my declaration of self-reliance, a suitable room in the City was found to paint the portraits impulsively ordered from me by the admirers of the picture of old Hannah. Alas! the commissions nearly all proved to be empty words. Some of my promised patrons said that as I was now studying seriously for the profession, they would prefer to wait until I had made some advance. One betrothed gentleman had miniatures painted in oil of himself and his intended bride, but his only mark of

true appreciation was in taking them away, leaving me unpaid. I modernised the costume of two portraits painted twenty years before, and corrected the too jovial expression of a likeness taken a decade back for another patron, who thought he had a right to look sober. For a third, I renovated the Sea of Galilee—which certainly was unduly bituminous—in a Dutch panel of Jesus stilling the waves, and for that I gained ten shillings. While waiting for other patronage I made oil copies of prints of Dutch toppers after Teniers, the dullest of a school which had noble members in its ranks. For disciples of Isaac Walton I did some copies of "The Enthusiast fishing in a Tub," for little dealers the picture of "The Cobbler reading the *Weekly Register*," and, in fact, anything that would bring shillings. Two or three portraits which I painted for steadfast admirers were not enough to keep up my studio, and it was abandoned; but a good uncle (who, if he had failed in his word then, would have done so for the only time in his life) gave me the portraits of his children to paint at his own house. Still I was nigh to being bankrupt more than once, on one occasion only escaping by the loan of the contents of her money-box from a good sister; but I went on steadily at the Museum three days a week, and later I worked two days at the National Gallery, and sometimes at the British Institution.

I had by no means forgotten the wonderful young draughtsman of whom my sister had spoken. There was no need of inquiry, for of all the students at the Royal Academy who were looked up to as having already achieved distinction, at least amongst their discriminating fellows, no name was so often mentioned as that of Millais. I was soon to see his work, for Sir Richard Westmacott (from an introduction secured by my father) had kindly written the letter of recommendation for me to be sent in with drawings for my probationership at the Academy Schools, and had also supplied me with a card of admission to the lectures. This was in 1843. I attended

these assiduously, and as December 10 came near I saw the competitors' drawings from the Life and from the Antique with copies of a picture by Vandyke placed on the walls.

The competitors' works were in the middle room, where the light was by no means good, yet the contributions were spiritedly discussed, and there was an earnest dispute as to whether young Millais would get the second or the first medal. The uncertainty arose from doubt as to the standing of drawings by a student of thirty summers. When the clock was near striking, all the students took their places in the lecture room. This was furnished above the dais with the copy of Leonardo's "Last Supper"; Rubens's "Descent from the Cross," copied by Northcott, was on the left, and some copies of Raphael's cartoons occupied the other walls. Attention to the masterpieces was but transient, for no eyes were long withdrawn from the door, where, by the curtain, stood the gorgeous porter dressed in scarlet. After a protracted time he put aside his saucy assumption of indifference, threw open the doors, and the procession entered, led by the stately Keeper, Mr. Jones (the President at the time being an invalid), while at his left hand walked a stunted gentleman, unimposing in form, inelegantly dressed, and shambling in gait. Part of his ungracefulness was attributable to a big head, with somewhat large features, which, although not handsome, bespoke the right to be at home in any presence. Behind came some few, men of dignified appearance and bearing, Cockerell strikingly so, with white hair and black eyebrows, Leslie, Howard, and Ross following—all courtly-looking gentlemen. Next came Stanfield, Roberts, Webster, Mulready, who was then of perfect build and beautiful face, and Maclise, who was singularly handsome, of the same type as Byron, but more handsome, as an old gentleman who had known both in later days told me. Etty, with a great brow and modest deportment, though short and stout, looked distinguished. I turned again,



W. Holman Hunt. 1852.

Juan Blasco Esquivias B. Sc.

Bianca.

with curiosity as to his personality, to the inelegant but honoured member in front, who had then stopped with the Keeper just in face of the rostrum. Mr. Jones could be seen bowing (he could not be heard by reason of the ovation), and with extended hands gracefully inviting the unknown one on his left to ascend and take the duties of the evening. He, however, merely shook himself like an unwilling child; being pressed further in the most courteous manner by the Deputy-president, he betrayed some irritation in his further gesticulation, his coat tails swept from side to side, and he brought the matter to a close by hurrying to a seat placed with its back to the audience. This was J. M. W. Turner. Mr. Jones waited to catch his eye, then bowed, ascended to the chair, and commenced his address. Then the distribution of the medals followed, a function which seemed of eternal moment to the students. When it came to the turn of the antique school, attention was breathless as the preliminary words were uttered slowly, and the name of John Everett Millais was given as the winner of the first prize. A moment's pause, and out of the press a slim lad with curly hair and white collar arose eagerly, and was handed from seat to seat till he descended into the arena, where, remembering his manners, he bowed, and approached the desk. As he returned, the applause was boisterous, occasioning some reluctance to advance in the less favoured competitor.

I had not until now seen either the boy of whom I had heard so much, or his drawings; I had formed so exalted an idea of both, that it would have been a pain to me had either fallen short of my standard. In the conception of a yet unknown living hero the image cherished becomes so dear that too often the reality is a disenchantment. It was not so in this case; the boy Millais was exactly what I had pictured him, and his work just as accomplished as I had thought it to be.

About this date I sent in a drawing to gain admission as a probationer to the Royal Academy. When the

names of the successful candidates were published, I searched through the odd twenty, and mine was not among them. This failure sadly humiliated me, but I found a means of lessening the bitterness of the defeat to my family by explaining that I had but half-time to work at simple drawing. In the schools there were fashions in drawing, as there are in all human affairs, and I had scarcely taken pains to consider the methods in vogue; my apology was not without reason. Sasse's school in particular was recommended by Academicians, and the drawings that issued from it, with their mechanical precision, were favoured by the examiners. Many students who worked there shaded their drawings with the most regular cross hatching, putting a dot in every empty space; thus the figure was blocked out into flat angular surfaces, which ultimately blended by half-tints, produced the required modelling; for all such systems I had neither time nor inclination. My father was not satisfied with my excuse, because behind his declared misgivings was another, not warranted, that I was idle. Having come to the Museum one day in the winter soon after I began to draw in its galleries, he entered the Cast Room when I, with other students, were collected around the only stove on the premises to eat our biscuits, and discovered me just as I had interposed between two equally quarrelsome but ill-matched students who were coming to blows. I knew this misunderstood incident had disturbed his confidence in my assiduity.

Among my fellow-students I had recognised that some were in advance of myself in power of drawing, and of these a few were not so old as I was. I tried hard to judge the question of my relative position impartially before I decided that others were behind me. Some of the students, by natural defect, could not by any chance ever become artists, and many of these were by no means devoid of talent of another order; neither they, nor their compeers who were dull in other respects, were at all discouraged, each fresh effort they made was a

failure to all but themselves; but they were supremely content. Some, indeed, had been favoured with probationership at the Academy, yet there could be no doubt of their incapacity. Was it possible, I questioned, that unwittingly I was as blind as they? After six months of close work, which, however, was still in great part on canvas with the brush, I tried again, without doubting that success would follow, but when I stood before the new list of probationers I had the bitterness of finding that my name was again absent. My father now spoke, with good right, very seriously. I was wasting my time and energy; he added that I could paint well enough to win admiration from friends, but to compete with genius, fostered by the best instruction and opportunities, collected from the whole country, was a very different matter. "Are you not yourself convinced?" he said in conclusion, and indeed his argument affected me strongly, for to be an artist only on sufferance was not my ambition; a student can scarcely judge his own position, and I had no one to tell me the truth. Ought I to conclude that want of success proved my want of ability? In less doleful mood I accounted for my failure by the fact that I had not developed the habit of methodical neatness.

It had appeared to me to be a waste of effort for an artist (not an engraver) to rival the precision of engineering on a watch, and to spend days even on the background of a study made to teach him beautiful form; but when I looked again on my rejected drawing, I could see that, although it might be free from slavish method, it was marked by slovenliness, and even an affectation of indifference to neatness and care, which might justly offend the eye of judges sitting on the works of candidates for promotion even to the lowest stages of strict training. It was on the strength of my determined reformation in handling, which should strike pitilessly at the root of an off-hand style, that I relied when I asked my father to delay for another six months the decision he

asked from me to return to business life of some kind. If on the next competition at Trafalgar Square the verdict were against me, I promised to submit to his wish as final.

Henceforth I drew, not, indeed, on the geometric system, but with great care and delicacy. It being late in the summer, my fellow-students were holiday-making. One day, when absorbed in my work in the Sculpture Gallery, a boy who was going through the gallery darted aside and stood for a few minutes attentively behind me. After close scrutiny he went off as suddenly; observing that he had a black velvet tunic, a belt, and shining bright brown hair curling over a white turned-down collar, I recognised that he was the boy Millais whom I had seen receive the Academy antique medal. Later in the day I went into the Elgin Room with the intention of glancing in passing over the student's shoulder; he was drawing the *Illysus*. As I approached he suddenly turned with, "I say, are not you the fellow doing that good drawing in No. XIII. room? You ought to be at the Academy."

"That is exactly my opinion," I returned. "But unfortunately the Council have twice decided the other way." "You just send the drawing you are doing now, and you'll be in like a shot. You take my word for it; I ought to know; I've been there as a student, you know, five years. I got the first medal last year in the antique, and it's not the first given me, I can tell you." I asked him about the method of drawing most in fashion, explaining that I must not neglect any means of increasing my chance of acceptance. "Oh, the blocking-out system serves to make beginners understand the solidity of figures given by light and shade, modified by reflections and half-tints, and to get over muddling about with dirty chalk; you know all that. Very few fellows stick to it for long. I do sometimes use gray paper with white, but I like white paper just now. You see I sketch the lines in with charcoal, and when I go over with chalk I rub in the

whole with wash leather, take out the lights with bread, and work up the shadows till it's finished; but I do sometimes work altogether with the point, and if either is done well it makes little or no difference to the Council. Don't you be afraid; you're all right. I say, tell me whether you have begun to paint? What? I'm never to tell; it is your deadly secret. Ah! ah! ah! that's a good joke. You'll be drawn and quartered without ever being respectably hung by the Council of 'Forty' if you are known to have painted before completing your full course in the Antique. Why, I'm as bad as you, for I've painted a long while. I say, do you ever sell what you do? So do I. I've often got ten pounds, and even double. Do you paint portraits?"

"Yes," I said, "but I'm terribly behind you."

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Well, I'm seventeen," I replied.

"I'm only fifteen just struck, but don't you be afraid. Why, there are students of the Academy just fifty and more. There's old Pickering; he once got a picture into the Exhibition, and he quite counts upon making a sensation when he has finished his course, but he is very reluctant to force on his genius. Will you be here to-morrow?"

"No," I whispered, "it's my portrait day, but don't betray me. Good-bye."

"Don't you be down in the mouth," he laughed out, as I walked away more light-hearted than I had been for many months, my unexpected conference with the prize student in whose personality I had so long passively felt interest having cheered me up. It was long ere I saw him again. For some reason not remembered I made another drawing for the probationership, which I gained at the next trial, and in due order a student's place. It will be seen that I used to envy those who could work unremittingly only at drawing, since this was prescribed as the proper course; but eventually, although my time at the Antique and the Life was curtailed by continual

practice with colour, I saw reason to change my favourable opinion of the approved routine. Many students who made excellent specimen drawings did them without profit for the end of study, and later they had all the difficulty of painting to encounter, as quite a strange and complicated mystery.

In the National Gallery I contrived to combine discipline with the need of providing means to purchase materials, for often I sold the copies I made, and sometimes I acted as journeyman for others, who, from want of a place on the oil list, or from the discovery of the difficulty of the task, could not do the commissions they had received. Once, late in my course there, a shrewd fellow-student asked me to do for him a copy of all the figures in Rembrandt's "Woman taken in Adultery." As we could not tell how much I could finish, it was agreed that the question of pay should be left till the conclusion of the work. In thirteen days I painted the whole group of figures and the immediate background, and considering the opportunity, I did it nearly as well as ever I could, for this incident is given somewhat in advance of date. I stated the time I had spent, and left the question of payment to him. He said he thought fifteen shillings would be fair. Astonished, I represented that a full palette with use of brushes would cost a shilling each day, but he turned the tables, saying, "But I observed that you were very wasteful, often having madders and expensive colours when the day's work could have been done with none but cheap ones." This was unanswerable. I bowed to him as to a superior genius, and took his price. In painting the background and slobbering his glazings over my work he effected its debasement. (I heard later that, by screwing in all transactions and leaving art altogether, he became a rich man.) Thus exercised, I gained a practical knowledge of the ancient masters then represented in London; and this was fast becoming of importance in my eyes, helping me for my own guidance to look more independently upon the state of art as developed by living

men. I had gained much by my humiliation before being accepted as a student, the principal good lying in the discovery that an artist must ever sit in judgment upon his art himself, and throw away the "worse part." I was never successful in working for medals—many dunces made more presentable drawings than mine; but except that I should have been glad to cheer up my parents, I fretted little at my failures in competition. Feeling that I had many defects to eradicate, I strove with each new study until, discovering faults in the outline, I scored it to pieces with corrections rather than adorn it with fine work as an example of my latest power. Without self-satisfaction one's work is too joyless to please others, yet the satisfaction in undisturbed contentment is but ephemeral.

The British Museum, where I had commenced the special study of the human figure, was in many respects not the best drawing school for a tyro. The Pheidian marbles realise one type of perfect human form, but the mutilations they have suffered make few of them of instructive value for the copying practice of a novice who has not a connected knowledge of human proportions. The hours spent by *beginners* on slavish reproduction of the injured surfaces of the Theseus,¹ for instance, would be more wisely devoted to drawing from a figure whose proportions are less damaged, even though these bear less Attic dignity of design. Many of the better preserved and good figures which were in my youth placed in dark corners are now brought out in a good light and convenient to the student's service.

Notwithstanding all the disadvantages suffered at the Museum, it provided the opportunity essential to every student of art to trace the growth of Sculpture from Egypt and Assyria, Greece and Rome, with their national differences. In the Print Room we surveyed the pious uprising of art in Italy, her robust glory, her intermittent

¹ In referring to the pedimental figures I use the names in use in my student days.

decline, and final corruption, and we noted the national character in the intensity and humanity of German design. The works of the Van Eycks showed the first achievements of perfect realisation of natural form and colour, and their successors (who formed what for distinction is termed the Flemish School) revealed the fact that astounding facility and power do not always banish coarseness and vulgarity. We saw also how, with honest workers of humble aspiration in the neighbouring Dutch School, there could exist side by side with boorishness a never-to-be-surpassed power of representing sweet homely life with a perfect perception of the dignity of the human face, and with even poetic conception, as in the work of the home-staying Rembrandt. Related to these last, although of Latin parentage, came Spanish art, as perfect in external observation as that of the Low Countries, but without evidence of the barest breath of design, for which reason it fell like a tower of cards when the hand of Velasquez, its arch-builder, was withdrawn.

Further, we had the opportunity of comparing with earlier men and with one another the compositions of Hogarth, Reynolds, Gainsborough, Flaxman, and other English workers, and summing up these observations we were led to ponder on the lesson of transmutation from stage to stage in all art of the past. It declared that, where men in humility strove against their worst nature and diligently wrestled to express the higher truth, their work bore the character of a message from heaven; but when their successors, provided with the skill gained by this hourly sacrifice, were inflated with vanity, the whole current of wisdom was turned aside, and it became ever after impossible to regain the path leading to national art life.

Seeing thus before one's eyes manifold proofs of rise, decline, and death, but never of the renovation of art except with the infusion of new blood, I felt the need soon arose of deciding in what respect I could accept the verdict of the world about the old masters, and what was the position of the British school which had been in its course

so pre-eminently endowed with genius in individuals, but which had proved itself unable to hand on its teaching, and from the first had been impatient of submitting to that course of strict and childlike training which in earlier history had always preceded the greatest art. Day by day I tried to settle these questions, I carried them about with me, and weighed them in the galleries of modern art, that I might decide among the living whether there was any master to set up as a model, and, if so, with what reservation.