

BOOKS ON PAINTING

R.H. Ives Gammell

INTRODUCTION

The following list does not pretend to be exhaustive. It is made up of books which have seemed to me valuable because they reflect the ideas of competent painters about their art and because they illustrate an attitude of mind which is a concomitant of a painter's training and of his experience in picture-making. The list does not include books dealing with the practice and technical procedures of painting. These things can only be learned under the guidance of an experienced painter. But their acquisition and their effective application are closely interrelated with the development of a very specialized mental attitude, the possession of which, more than any other one thing, sets a man apart as a trained painter. This attitude devolves from an awareness of extremely subtle visual reactions coupled with a knowledge of the use which can be made of these reactions as a means of communication through the art of painting. This awareness only comes to one possessed of highly trained visual perceptions. On the other hand, while a painter's vision grows more accurate and sensitive as he learns to reproduce the colors and shapes of things correctly, his development in this respect will not pass a certain point of mechanical accuracy unless his intellectual and emotional perceptivity are correlated with his visual reactions. The non-painter is apt to be misled by the introduction of the intellect and the emotions in this connection, because their function in the painting of pictures is rather different in character from what is ordinarily thought of as intellectual or emotional in other arts, such as literature, for instance. In painting we are dealing with a particular world of thought and feeling from which the layman is more or less excluded and into which the budding painter enters gradually as his technical powers increase, a world whose elements so elude language that painters, even when talking among themselves, habitually resort to their pencils or their brushes to demonstrate their meaning. This explains the reluctance of most painters as regards writing about their art, a reluctance which a number have disregarded in our century in an attempt to preserve at least a small part of the rapidly vanishing lore of painting.

The books mentioned below seem to me to serve this purpose to a greater or lesser degree. But, as I have felt it necessary to repeat again and again in these pages, they do not readily yield their meaning to the uninitiated reader. The meaning of many passages will become clear to him only as his own painting experience throws light on the idea which the painter-writer was trying to express in words. In some cases he will probably continue to feel, as I do myself, that the meaning continues to elude him because of the inferiority of his own esthetic perception to that of the artist responsible for the idea. Perhaps I can

illustrate my meaning with two examples. Both are quotations from Ingres, whose studio-talk has been transcribed more fully than that of any other painter of comparable stature.

Ingres is quoted as telling his students that the navel is the "eye of the torso" and this studio-comment has been ridiculed in a recent book as an example of the inanity of the aphorisms enunciated by this painter. Except that a certain wariness might be in order whenever one endeavors to make fun of any remark about drawing emanating from one of the world's greatest draftsmen, the dictum may appear absurd enough to the general reader, for whom incidentally, it is never intended. But a painter will see that it is not without value. And the fact is that many years ago the metaphor helped to change my perception of the elusive forms of the torso, making me realise that thinking of the navel as an eye looking in a given direction helps the draftsman to express the precise turn of the torso and the action of the model. In later years I have quoted the remark to students from time to time with appreciable results. So the statement which has seemed imbecile to a "connoisseur" and writer on art has proved itself a reasonably useful hint to students drawing the human form.

The second quotation, in my own translation, reads as follows: "In matters of veracity I prefer that one should be a little on the extreme side, regardless of the risk, for, I know it, the truth can appear improbable. Very often a mere hair's breadth is required for that." In this case, I am by no means certain that I grasp Ingres' meaning, though I can interpret the remark in several ways that make sense to me. The man who said that was a great painter who made very great art by rendering observed visual truth, and it is only reasonable to suppose that he was trying to express an idea that was important to him. I leave it at that for the time being and hope some future experience will bring me better understanding.

And so I suggest that the student-painter when reading these books should gauge the value of comments by eminent painters on the art of painting by the artistic rank and intellectual authority of the painter who made them, rather than by the meaning it at first conveys to himself. Re-reading the same phrase, after a lapse of several months, or years, or decades spent in making pictures of his own, he may find that what he took for an empty platitude or a cryptic utterance was the statement of a valuable truth.

En matière de vrai, j'aime mieux q'on soit un peu au delà, quelque risque qu l'on court, car, je le sais, le vrai peut n'être pas vraisemblable. Bien souvent il ne faut pour celà qu l'épaisseur d'un cheveux.

(When it comes to veracity, I prefer that one should be a little on the extreme side, regardless of the risk, for, I know it, the true can look unlikely. Very often a mere hair's breadth is required for that.)

ARTISTS ON ART

Compiled and edited by
ROBERT GOLDWATER & MARCO TREVES
Pantheon Books, New York, 1945.

The title of this volume, as well as the expressed intention of the editors, would seem to make it an ideal

book in which to study the ideas discussed in the foregoing pages. Actually, it serves to reveal the utter confusion which can be created by a collection of quotations taken more or less at random from the published writings of artists without due regard to their type, their professional capabilities or the conditions under which the writing was done. An uninformed reader would certainly be justified in putting down the book convinced that painters are guided by contradictory principles, whimsical judgements and little logic. This anthology seems to provide a complete refutation of everything I have been trying to demonstrate.

The fact is that it contains rather little of the kind of thinking I have had in mind, and most of what there is of it is confused by the lack of an adequate context. Many of the painters quoted here were of inferior rank. A substantial number were bad painters by any standard and have long been classified as such. Some, like William Blake and Van Gogh, do not enter into the category of trained painters at all, however interesting one may find their work as expressions of personality. "Artists on Art", yes, but the kind of writing I have been discussing should properly be called "Painters on Painting", which is a very different thing.

A good many of the excerpts included in this volume would justifiably come under such a heading. However, unless they can be interpreted with the pictures of each artists clearly in mind and with a very complete understanding of his relation to the art of his time, they will throw very little light on his fundamental approach to picture painting. The quotations are culled from varied sources, which include personal letters, reported conversations, diaries or studio talk, as well as carefully prepared lectures and statements made for publication. Letters written by young painters still in the immaturity of their early twenties are quoted, together with scraps of wisdom garnered from the conversation of older masters. Taken for just what they are, these comments are by no means without interest and may serve to direct the student's attention to the books from which they were culled.

The bibliography is excellent.

THE WRITINGS OF KENYON COX

I never have any hesitation in recommending to a student the five books by Kenyon Cox as the best possible general introduction to the study of European painting as understood by a painter. I have read these volumes many times at different stages of my working life and I have never failed to be impressed by the author's analyses of his subjects and by his ability to express his ideas in a way which should be comprehensible to the layman as well as to the painter. Although his own work as a painter is uninteresting for the most part, and occasionally even offensive in taste, it is competent, learned and intelligent, and it gives ample evidence of Cox's intellectual and technical understanding of several types of painting.

The writings cover a surprisingly large aspect of European painting from Giotto to the end of the nineteenth century and includes a good deal of the American painting of Cox's own time. Even when one happens to disagree with his estimate of a painter or a painting, a careful consideration of his views leaves one with a clearer understanding of the subject. It is extraordinary that these books are so little known

today. They are to be found in many public libraries and second-hand copies not infrequently turn up in the book stores.

The titles are:

OLD MASTERS AND NEW, Fox, Duffield & Co., 1905.

PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS, Duffield & Co., 1907

THE CLASSIC POINT OF VIEW, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911

ARTIST AND PUBLIC, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914

CONCERNING PAINTING, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917.

THE NOTEBOOKS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI

The contents of these notebooks are available to the English reader in several translations and editions. It would be difficult, of course, to exaggerate the importance of this work, one of the most remarkable documents in existence. But only a small portion of it is likely to interest the average art student. Every painter should be familiar with the passages pertaining to painting, for they are the direct statements of one of the greatest painters of all time. Oddly enough, it has recently become fashionable to jeer at them.

THE LECTURES OF SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

No list of painter's books on painting would be complete unless it included these lectures. Yet most students who start to read them because of their celebrity and the author's eminence as a portrait painter give up the effort in boredom and fatigue.

I think there are two perfectly valid reasons for the modern student's inability to profit by these lectures. In the first place, they are very much of their time and express a point of view about pictures which few of us share today. Furthermore, this point of view is couched in language which now seems pompous and stilted, however appropriate to a President of the Royal Academy addressing his students in the eighteenth century.

In the second place, Sir Joshua discusses a form of art for which he himself had little aptitude, as his attempts in that form reveal. The fashion of the time made it imperative that the academies should focus their attention on historical or poetical painting and the lectures perforce deal with this kind of painting. Reynolds undoubtedly admired it and gave it his most serious consideration. But his talents were those of a portrait painter and, outside of his own field, his opinions necessarily represented those of his era rather than ideas evolved and matured by his own practice. His inordinately high estimate of the Bolognese

school, for instance, clearly reflects the views of the academic painters of the time, themselves third rate artists for the most part. Had Reynolds lectured on portrait painting, I have no doubt his discourses would be of much greater interest.

An excellent edition of this work was published by Seeley & Co., Ltd. (London, 1905) with good reproductions and illuminating notes by Roger Fry.

There exists a little known book of excerpts from the notebooks which Reynolds kept during a trip through Italy when he was a young man. The observations are those of a student, not the analyses of a mature painter. They are not without interest.

ITALIAN CITIES

by E.H. Blashfield & E.W. Blashfield
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912.

These essays on the great decorations of the Italian Renaissance constitute the best writing on the subject which I have read. The beginner will read these volumes to increase his general knowledge of painting but when, and if, he is confronted with specific mural problems of his own, he will find Blashfield's analyses extremely valuable.

Blashfield's book entitled *MURAL DECORATION IN AMERICA*, (Charles Scribner's Sons) though definitely dated and dealing with a phase of decorative painting that is at the moment in disrepute, this book is not without interest. Blashfield was a thoroughly professional mural painter of great learning and considerable skill, in fact, the most generally competent of the group of which he was leader, and from his approach the young painter of today can learn a great deal, however little sympathy he may have for the symbolism and subject matter in vogue at the turn of the century.

A short essay by Blashfield on Jean Paul Laurens is included in this volume on Modern French Painters listed below.

Charles S. Ricketts (1866-1931) was one of those artists whose preoccupation with the poetic and imaginative aspects of painting was insufficiently balanced by visual and technical elements. He apparently devoted more time to the study of pictures than to the painting of them. Nevertheless, his familiarity with the world's great paintings and his broad culture, added to a by no means negligible knowledge of practice, made him a keen and perceptive critic.

Especially valuable to painter and student is *THE PRADO AND ITS MASTERPIECES*, (E.P. Dutton & Company, New York, 1903). The title, which suggests a museum guide book, may have contributed to the neglect of this remarkable work. Actually, Ricketts, taking the pictures in the Prado as a point of departure, has given us a comprehensive study of the masters represented in that collection and an absorbingly interesting essay on painting as an art.

His second book, *TITIAN*, (Methuen & Co., Ltd., London, 1910), is of less immediate interest to the art student and young painter. But it contains much understanding criticism and the author's analyses

of individual pictures are illuminating. Ricketts relied for his historical data largely on Crowe and Cavalcaselle and subsequent research has, I believe, thrown a new light on a number of details.

LES MAITRES D'AUTREFOIS

by Eugene Fromentin

Few painters who have written about painting have been more skilled in their own art than Fromentin, none have had a literary gift comparable to his. This book, the product of the author's dual talent, is a masterpiece of its kind. In my student days it was generally considered the best book on painting in existence.

It seems to be addressed to the layman rather than to the student or to the painter and the virtuoso writing tends to conceal the professional painter from the unwary reader. Fromentin uses his vivid style to emphasize the effect which the pictures in question were intended to give rather than to point out, as most painters try to do, the means by which that effect was achieved. That is to say, Fromentin describes the show as it looks from an orchestra seat, not as seen from one of the wings.

In speaking of Reubens, for instance, Fromentin himself seems to have been dazzled by the magic of the performance. At least the brilliantly written pages give no certain evidence of the writer's awareness that the seemingly spontaneous improvisations of the great Fleming were produced extremely methodically from carefully prepared sketches, with the collaboration of a group of assistants, in an ordered procedure of prepared underpaintings followed by superimposed scumbles and glazes, all of which presupposed a very deliberate and soberly laid out way of working. It seems to me important that the student should not be deceived in this respect, whatever Fromentin's own ideas on the matter may have been. Our present knowledge, based on sketches and studies, unavailable to the public in Fromentin's time, precludes any doubt as to the cool-headed thinking behind Reubens' execution.

Fromentin's somewhat romanticized approach may be the cause of his small appeal to students today. Nevertheless, *Les Maitres d'Autrefois* remains a masterpiece of interpretive criticism which can hardly fail to increase the reader's understanding of the artists discussed in its pages.

THE JOURNAL OF EUGENE DELACROIX

This diary of a gifted artist is interesting for the light it throws on the dramatic personality of the author as well as for its picture of the Parisian intellectual world in his time. While a mature artist may possibly profit by studying Delacroix's ideas on painting they can only confuse and mislead a student insufficiently grounded in his art to recognize and discount the irrational character of this painter's

emotionally toned thinking. This very irrationality is doubtless responsible for the reference in which the journal is nowadays held in certain quarters. The fact is that Delacroix's critical faculty was conspicuously poor and his approach to painting more akin to that of the amateur than the trained professional, as is attested by innumerable passages in the full French edition of the journal. His successful pictures may be attributed to his inborn genius, and the training he received under Guerin; his failures to the defective thinking which increasingly undermined his talent as he grew older.

An understanding of nineteenth century painting is especially important for a young painter, growing up in the twentieth century. His interpretation of the art history immediately preceding his own time will be one of the determinative factors in his development. This interpretation will greatly influence both his approach to the old masters and his attitude to contemporary painting. Because the history of nineteenth century painting, especially after 1864, has been rewritten in our time in a manner which virtually reverses the estimates generally accepted before 1914, eliminating even the names of painters formerly considered to be of great importance, the student can only reach a true understanding of that period by consulting earlier sources of information and studying as many of the pictures of the period as he finds available, bearing in mind that numerous fine examples have been made inaccessible to the public by recent museum administration.

The epoch was opened, so to speak, by Louis David, who through his personality and teaching, proved to be one of the most influential artists in history. Fortunately we have an authentic report of this painter written by one of his pupils.

LOUIS DAVID, SON ÉCOLE ET SON TEMPS

Souvenirs par M.E.J. Dolecluze

Didier, Paris, 1855

This informative book is surprisingly little known. Dolecluze, having been a pupil of David, apparently became a painter of considerable competence, judging from the record of his accomplishment, but later abandoned painting in favor of writing. A shrewd observer, a man of the world possessed of wide culture, he was admirably equipped to record his first hand knowledge of painting in France under the Empire. The book does much to correct the distorted view of David's teaching now generally accepted.

This teaching, the foundation of the nineteenth century academic tradition, was carried on, with notable modifications, by his greatest pupil, Ingres. We are fortunate in having a remarkably full record of this painter's ideas and precepts. His thought is more accessible to us than that of any other painter of comparable stature. Several books on the subject are available to the reader of French. The most interesting, *L'ATELIER D'INGRES*, by Amaury Duval, is by a pupil of Ingres, himself a painter of merit and a fine draftsman. Another book, *INGRES, D'APRÈS UNE CORRESPONDANCE M'EDITÉ* by Boyer d'Agen contains a collection of the painter's letters, to which the editor has added a considerable amount of information about Ingres and his work. A recent publication, *INGRES RACONTÉ PAR LUI-MÊME*

ET SES AMIS, Vés****-Genève, 19**, contains most of the maxims and items of interest to be found in the books mentioned above and some culled from other sources. The book is marred by an introduction which is perhaps the most inept ever affixed to a book devoted to a great painter.

The middle of the nineteenth century witnessed the resurgence of an approach to painting which is now generally known as the impressionist approach. For various reasons, many of them quite extraneous to painting, the impressionist painters worked and taught in open opposition to the men who were carrying on the tradition of David and Ingres. This schism, one of the most destructive episodes in the history of painting, is directly responsible for the character of the painting done in our time. I have endeavoured to analyze the causes and effects of this schism in a book "Twilight of Painting" (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1945).

Everything written by painters about painting between 1880 and 1930 or so must be read with some consideration of the bias of the author towards the academic tradition or the impressionist attitude. Most of the writing emanates from the latter side, which during that era, had the greater vitality, with varying degrees of anti-academic prejudice. Much of it is of very great value and interest. Among the most informative are the reminiscences of Sir William Rothenstein, *MEN AND MEMORIES*, two volumes, Coward McCann, 1931, and *SINCE FIFTY*, Coward-McCann, Inc., New York. The picture he presents of the artists of his time is of extraordinary interest. Also valuable, to the reader of French, are the volumes by Jaques-Emile Blanche, *PROPOS DE PEINTRE*. These three volumes are made up of essays, very unequal in quality, originally published between 1905 and 1928. The best deal with the important painters he had known as a young man, Fantin-Latour, Manet, Degas and Whistler, men who were dead when Blanche was writing about them. The later ones, not infrequently written for special occasions, are too often couched in a tone of graceful eulogy which even a brief lapse of time makes unbearable. Whenever Blanche wrote about a living contemporary his views must be taken with reservations. It should be added that his critical sense was both narrow and unsure.

VELASQUEZ

by R.A.M. Stevenson

In a sense, this book is an exposition of impressionist principles which takes Velasquez as the supreme example of impressionist painting. Read from that angle, it is one of the most valuable books on painting in existence. The author, a pupil of Carolus-Duran, did not continue painting and I have never heard that he achieved any sort of distinction in that field. But the book shows that he acquired a very clear understanding of the nature of impressionist painting, as it was understood by the men practicing it in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Equally important in content, though less well written, are the writings of Philip L. Hale, the most important of these being

JAN VERMEER OF DELFT

by Philip L. Hale

Small, Maynard & Co., Boston, 1913.

This book is not only a penetrating analysis of the art of Vermeer but it is equally remarkable as a study of the entire impressionist approach to painting. A painter's book about a painter's painter, probably nothing hitherto published contains so complete a presentation of the working outlook of painters at the turn of the nineteenth century and during the years immediately following, or as much studio-lore. It cannot fail to remain an invaluable source of information about what is now a nearly lost form of art.

A second edition was published in 1937, six years after Philip Hale's death. It had been Hale's intention to revise the book to include data on Vermeer which had come to light since the publication of the first edition. Some valuable information is included in the new version and some of the revisions indicate slight modifications of the author's judgements. Hale's stylistic mannerisms are less in evidence and the book is probably more acceptable to the general reader. For the art student and painter it is very inferior to the earlier edition. Some of the most valuable disquisitions on painting have been omitted and the very repetitiousness of the first book succeeds in making clear many elusive points which are of major importance to the understanding of painting.

Philip L. Hale also wrote several very informative and penetrating articles which were published in the magazine, *Masters in Art*. Bound volumes of this excellent periodical should be available in most of our larger public libraries. Hale's exasperating style, more in evidence in these articles than in the Vermeer, may easily keep the reader from giving them the very serious study they deserve. They are to be found in the magazine numbers devoted to MILLAIS, ALBERT MOORE, MORETTO, WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT, FORTUNY, BASTIEN-LEPAGE and ALFRED STEVENS. Two small publications, "The Child in Art" and "Portraits of Women" though obviously written for the general public, contain a number of observations which will interest those who find Hale's criticism provocative.

MODERN FRENCH MASTERS

by American Artists

Edited by John C. VanDyke

The Century Company, New York, 1896.

Fortunately, this absorbing and forgotten volume is still to be found on the shelves of public libraries. It cannot be too highly recommended to every art student. The essays which make up its content were written by painters, all of them trained practitioners, several of them ranking with the best which

America has produced. In many cases the writers knew personally, or had studied with, the artists they discuss. In every case the point of view is professional, the criticism penetrating, the information correct. The book is as valuable for what it tells about the authors as for the picture they present of painters whom they understood and admired.

Of particular distinction are the chapters on Léon Bonnat and Jean Paul Laurens by E.H. Blashfield, on Paul Baudry and Puvis de Chavannes by Kenyon Cox, and on Gustave Courbet by Samuel Isham, the latter being the finest appraisal of Courbet that I have read anywhere.

IMPRESSIONS ON PAINTING

by Alfred Stevens

(A translation of this book by Charlotte Adams was published by George J. Coombs, New York, 1886)

This little collection of studio aphorisms, gleaned from the talk of the most accomplished master of oil painting of his time*, makes profitable reading at intervals throughout a painter's life. The fact that the remarks are quoted without context gives them a certain ambiguity and the reader will interpret them according to his experience and temperament, which may sometimes be in a sense not intended by the author.

The book reflects the outlook of a nineteenth century impressionist. It is easy to recognize the bias of his type, of the artist irresistibly drawn to painting what he sees as beautifully as possible. Stevens' lack of interest in decorative painting is evident enough, as is his hostility to the academicians of his day. So his views are of special value only as they apply to painting falling within the range of his interest and experience. Many of these sayings will be understood by a painter only as he reaches an advanced stage of artistic development.

Other collections of aphorisms have been culled from the class-criticism of painters, most of them compiled by students after the death of the master. The sense of the original statement is often obscured by the interpretation of the disciple. I confess that the artistic merit of the teacher quoted is in most cases not sufficient to arouse much curiosity as to what he did mean. This last comment does not apply, of course, to William Morris Hunt, whose *TALKS ON ART*, edited by Helen Knowlton and published by Houghton, Mifflin & Company in 1875, are available. But even making allowances for Miss Knowlton's possible misinterpretation, these chats indicate rather superficial thinking on the part of the brilliant, very gifted artist that was Hunt. They give some interesting information about the methods taught by Couture.

Those interested in Thomas Couture and his very considerable influence on mid-nineteenth century painting will read his *MÉTHODE ET ENTRETIENS D'ATELIER*. The book reveals the intellectual limitations of the author rather than the knowledge that went into his fine painting "The Romans of the Decadence".

* *Edmund C. Tarbell went so far as to call him the greatest master of beautiful pigment of any time, not excepting the seventeenth century Dutchmen.*

NOS PEINTRES DU SIÈCLE

by Jules Breton

Société d'Édition Artistique, Paris (No date given)

It is strange that this account of the French painters of the second half of the nineteenth century, written by a contemporary colleague, is so little known. The author was a thoroughly competent painter, received on an equal footing by the leading artists of his day, and the things he sets down about his fellow painters have the stamp of authenticity. Furthermore, unlike the average historian, he tells us precisely the details which are interesting to painters.

And his estimates and judgements are those of a painter, intelligent, reasoned, professional. Modern readers will probably be startled to find that the painters discussed by Breton as important artists are not those whom recent art criticism and art history has accustomed them to consider representative of the French nineteenth century. Some will be inclined to dismiss this book as a quaint record of a mistaken point of view, now happily discarded. It is certainly not that. Even should the esthetic outlook which Jules Breton held in common with most of the accomplished artists of his time never again be considered valid - which is highly improbable - this book will contribute to the understanding of nineteenth century painting. But I venture to predict that in the not too distant future Breton's evaluations will be to a very great extent vindicated and that the world's eventual estimate of the relative merits of the painters he discusses will not differ very materially from his. Jules Breton knew what he was writing about. Most present day art writers do not.

THE HISTORY OF IMPRESSIONISM

by John Rewald

Museum of Modern Art, New York

(Distributed by Simon and Shuster) 1946

This informative and well documented history of the Impressionist movement figures on this list by virtue of the numerous excerpts from the letters and sayings of painters to be found in its pages. The sources of these quotations are given in footnotes which, together with an admirably documented bibliography, enable the curious reader to delve into valuable sources of information concerning the Impressionist approach to painting.

The student will encounter special difficulties when he tries to study the development of American painting between 1880 and 1930. All the books dealing with this period which are currently in evidence were written with a bias and a lack of understanding which renders them valueless as historical records of a period which used to be termed the golden age of American painting, because of the number of excellent painters working in this country during those years. Even the pictures by these men are not readily accessible now, most of them having been taken from the walls of the museums which they once adorned.

Fortunately, one excellent history of the period is available, **THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN PAINTING** by Samuel Isham.

Isham was himself a painter, as his thoroughly painterlike criticisms indicate. He knew personally many of the artists he discusses and was familiar with the studio talk of the time. His section of the book was finished in 1904 and will probably always be considered an invaluable account of a phase of painting which cannot fail to be again prized highly. The addition to the volume written by Royal Cortissoz is an example of the mixture of platitudes and misjudgements characteristic of that amiable art critic.

TEN O'CLOCK

by J.A.M. Whistler

In the days when Whistler was considered one of the greatest figures in modern art, many people regarded the Ten O'Clock lecture as a sort of revelation from the holy of holies. It now reads like a Victorian museum piece, one of its charms being its evocation of the background of British taste as it existed in the eighties.

The little essay expresses poetically Whistler's artistic credo in all its opinionated narrowness. But he was a genuine artist and many of his statements express permanent truths. It is eminently worth reading.

John LaFarge wrote several books on painting. They are intelligent and informative and the student may find suggestive ideas in them. They have always seemed to me to be the expression of a cultured amateur rather than that of a professional painter. So, for that matter, have his pictures.

THE ART OF PORTRAIT PAINTING

by The Hon. John Collier

Cassell and Company, Ltd., London, 1905

The rather crassly anecdotal character of John Collier's pictures is doubtless largely responsible for the oblivion into which his books have virtually disappeared. They deserve to be thoughtfully studied by every art student. Two of them being technical manuals, and excellent ones at that, have no place in the present list. The book on portrait painting, technical though it is in part, consists chiefly of just the sort of critical thinking which has been the subject of the preceding essay. As I have endeavoured to indicate,

it is characteristic of this professional thinking to point out elements in pictures which sharply redefine estimates that have become blurred through long and general acceptance.

Mr. Collier's book provides a salient example of this, which I quote for its own worth as well as to make doubly clear the sort of thinking I have in mind. Speaking of Hals, whom he greatly admires, after praising many of the qualities to be found in his work he makes the following reservations: "His flesh-painting - and this is, after all, the real test - is distinctly inferior. In his heads he is more a draughtsman than a painter; it is to his marvellous draughtsmanship that he owes the animated expressions for which he is so justly famous. Of course the painting is vigorous enough, but vigorous painting is not necessarily good painting. Nor do I complain of its being sketchy. Rembrandt's latest work may also be called sketchy, but it is full of the most subtle truth; whereas Hals' heads are not quite true either in color or texture, and they are certainly not subtle."

The writer makes his point with precision and clarity. We know exactly what he means. No one with an eye sensitive to the actual appearance of a human head can deny the truth of these remarks. The criticism may be dismissed as irrelevant, though I doubt whether any painter who has progressed in his art far enough to paint a head really well would so dismiss it. At any rate it is the kind of observation which, if genuinely understood, leads towards an understanding of painting.

The book is full of such observations, as well as of interesting information on the methods of the masters. I have never seen any pictures by John Collier but his criticisms lead me to suppose that they show the typical British predilection for prettiness, that their tendency is probably towards a certain hard edginess and that they are lacking in feeling for pattern and design. These traits are implicit in his criticism, which in other respects seems to me remarkably penetrating and sound.