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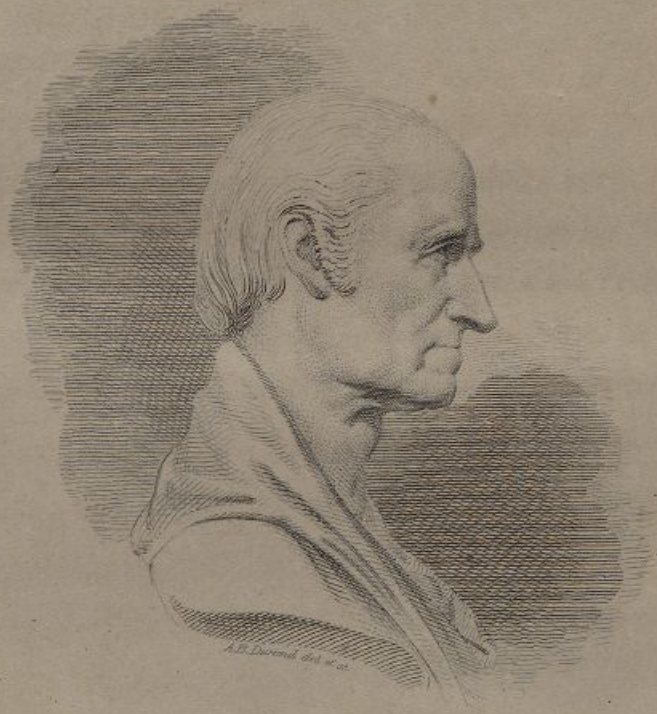
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THE AMERICAN ACADEMY

OF

FINE ARTS.



BY GULIAN C. VERPLANCK.



NEW-YORK:

CHARLES WILEY, 3 WALL-STREET.

—
1824.

29AP. 1874

GULIAN C. VERPLANCK, ESQ.

Sir,

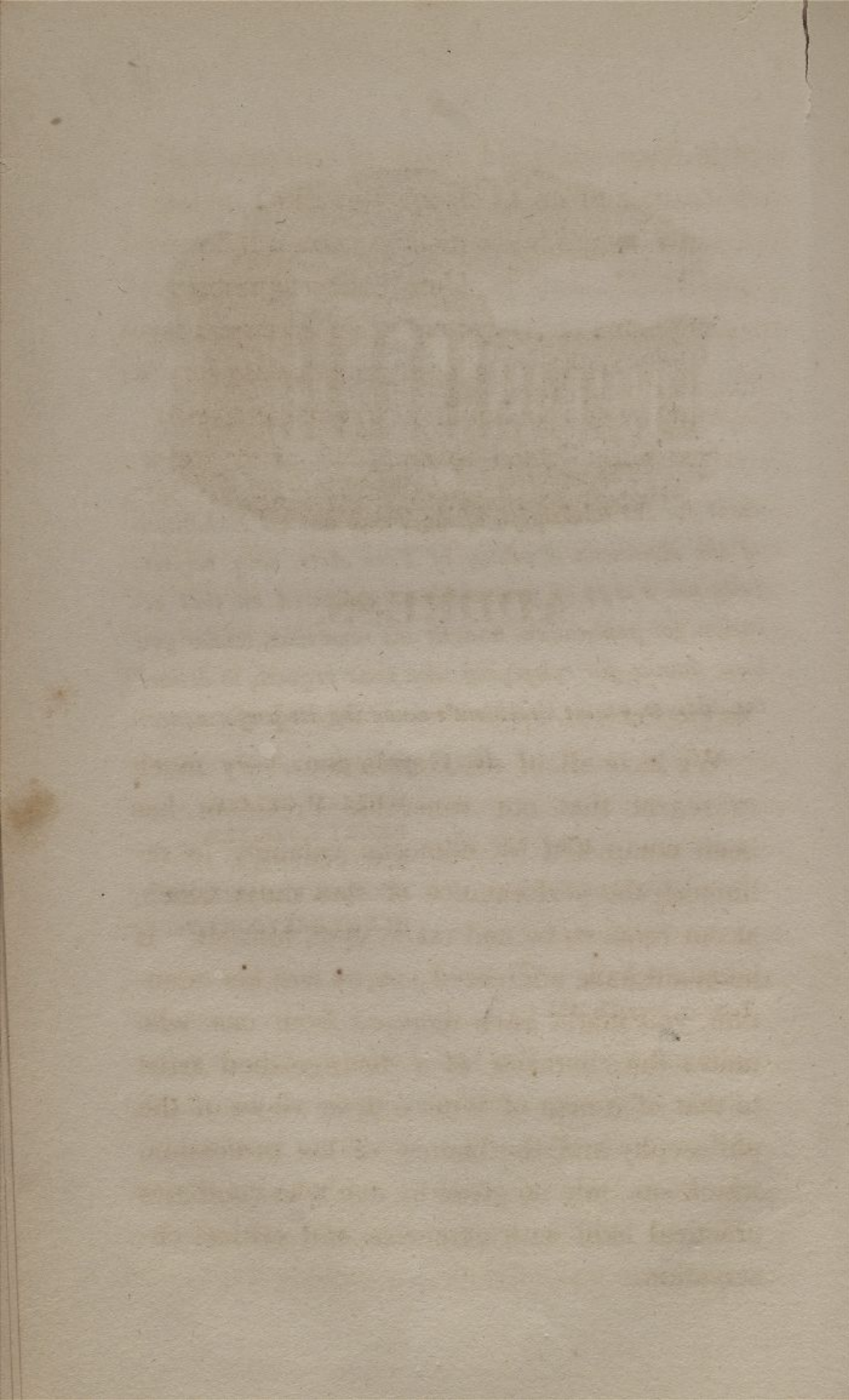
The undersigned, as a Committee of Arrangement for the celebration of the Tenth annual Exhibition of the American Academy of Fine Arts, very respectfully ask a copy of your Address, delivered on that occasion, for publication, and, at the same time, tender you their thanks for complying with their request, to deliver the address, on the President's declining its performance.

Respectfully yours,

WILLIAM GRACIE,
HENRY F. ROGERS,
B. W. ROGERS,
JER. VAN RENSSELAER
HENRY BREVOORT, JR.

Academy of Fine Arts,
Tuesday, May 11, 1824.

134993





ADDRESS.

Mr. Vice President, and Gentlemen of the Academy,

WE have all of us, Gentlemen, very much to regret that our venerable President has been compelled by domestic calamity to relinquish the performance of that duty, which, at our request, he had taken upon himself. If he could have addressed you, as was his intention, you might have received from one who unites the character of a distinguished artist to that of a man of letters, those views of the philosophy and the history of his profession, which can only be given by one who combines practical skill with extensive and critical observation.

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In attempting to supply his place upon this occasion, I can only speak as an uninstructed lover of the arts; and, in speaking of what I have never practised, and have studied but little, must necessarily confine myself to some general and probably vague observations.

Our Academy was founded about twenty years ago, in the hope of contributing something towards the cultivation of taste in this country, and the diffusion and improvement of skill in the arts of design. Amongst its original founders and patrons, were some of the most distinguished men of their times, whose names are durably inscribed in the history of our republic. Among them, together with several who yet live to adorn and guide the councils of their country, were the late Chancellor Livingston, whose active, comprehensive, and accomplished mind was ever fertile in plans of public improvement; and the late Robert Fulton, whose brilliant and solid success in the useful and mechanical arts did not render him either contemptuous or indifferent towards those of taste and ornament. The institution which they established has not wholly failed in its intention. Something has been effected by it in instructing public taste, in affording models to

the student, and in making the works and talents of our artists more known amongst us; yet various circumstances have unfortunately conspired to hinder it from realizing all the sanguine hopes of its early friends, and to interrupt or destroy that unity of action among our few artists and men of taste, which could alone give to it that wide and lasting utility of which it is capable, and thus render it a deserving object of the pride of our city and state. But let us not look back to the past. Indulging the hope that brighter prospects are about to open upon us, permit me to invite the attention of the numerous and respectable audience who have honoured the celebration of our annual exhibition with their presence, to the consideration of the uses and value of the FINE ARTS—not so much with reference to the private studies and pleasures of the artist or the amateur, but, as they deservedly recommend themselves to the notice of the patriot and the philanthropist, as they are fitted to add to the comforts, and multiply the innocent enjoyments of life, to adorn and dignify the aspect of society, to give impulse and exercise to the latent talent, and fresh lustre to the glories of our nation, and by their moral influence upon

all classes, to animate patriotism, "to raise the genius, and to mend the heart."

It must be obvious to all, that the arts of design have a direct and positive utility, far beyond their own immediate sphere, arising from the constant and indispensable aid, which they afford to the mechanical arts, to physical science, and to many of the most important pursuits of civilized life. Drawing, engraving, the scientific principles of construction (as distinguished from those founded in natural or conventional taste) are of daily use in civil engineering, in military and marine architecture, in preserving and making known the discoveries of the naturalist, the observations of the anatomist, the inventions of the mechanic, and in general, all the improvements of natural or medical science.

But, that quick sensibility to the beauties of form and proportion, that relish for purity of design and simplicity of execution, which result from a familiarity with works of taste, have a still wider, and (though less distinctly perceptible in their operation) scarcely a less practical influence, upon most of the arts of civilization, upon commerce and manufactures. The beneficial effect of good taste is to be found,

even where you would least suspect its presence. It every where silently excludes wanton superfluity, or useless expenditure in labour or ornament. It inculcates a wise and dignified economy. It prompts art to achieve its ends by the simplest means. It gives to its productions all the durability and elegance, of which they may be susceptible, by lending to them those forms, proportions, combinations of colours, and agreeable associations, which, because they are most simply and obviously fitted to their peculiar purposes, or are congruous to natural principles of man's physical or moral constitution, have pleased for ages, and will ever continue to please; whilst the caprices of fashion, or the cumbersome splendours of gaudy luxury, are inevitably doomed to become, in a very few years, offensive or ridiculous. The manufactures of France and England, as they are at this day, compared with what they were half a century ago, present a signal instance of the operation of this principle, in assisting to improve the domestic comforts of life, and to augment at once private wealth and national resources. It is true, that this result must be mainly ascribed to the splendid improvements of modern science, and the application of its discoveries to practical

uses. But when, as if to prove that knowledge was not only power, but wealth also, Mathematics and Chemistry issued from the library of the student, and the cell of the alchemist, to mix in the pursuits of commerce and industry, pure Taste followed silently in their train; and that same power, which had anxiously watched over the inspirations of literary genius, and had directed the boldest flights of poetry, eloquence and painting, may now often be found in the workshop of the mechanic, or by the loom of the manufacturer, superintending their labours with just as patient a diligence, and as unwearied a zeal.

But to be thus extensively useful, taste must become popular. It must not be regarded as the peculiar possession of painters, connoisseurs, or diletanti. The arts must be considered as liberal, in their ancient and truest sense, *quia libero dignæ*, as being worthy of the countenance and knowledge of every freeman.

Leaving the consideration of this their indirect utility, in other occupations of industry, let us now view them as they are in themselves.

There is no walk of the elegant arts in which our defects in science and taste are more palpable than in that of architecture. The genius

of architecture, said Mr Jefferson, an ardent votary, and a skilful and experienced judge of that classical and most useful art—"the Genius of architecture seems to have shed her maledictions over this land." Forty years have now elapsed since the publication of the Notes on Virginia, and during that period, we have advanced with unparalleled rapidity in numbers, wealth, power, letters, science ; but, with some few brilliant exceptions, we have done very little to prove that this curse has yet passed away.

When a foreigner lands upon our shores—I do not speak of the bigoted and prejudiced tourist, who comes here only to gather materials for calumny, but of such a one as most of us have probably known many, one instructed in the arts and versed in the learning of Europe, who cherishes as deep a reverence as any of us, for our free institutions, and as ardent a desire for the triumph of those principles, of which our republic is the depository and safeguard—finding here, as he does, much to admire, much surpassing his warmest expectations, the first among several sources of his disappointment, is the general taste and character of our public edifices. He cannot expect to find upon this

side of the Atlantic the gorgeous splendours of Versailles or Blenheim, and still less the lengthened aisles and fretted vaults, the towering domes, and sumptuous decorations of ecclesiastical pomp, but every thought of freedom, and glory, and patriotism, recalls to his mind some recollection of the exquisite works of republican antiquity. He looks around him, and, it need not be added, with disappointment.

There is, in fact, scarcely any single circumstance, which can contribute more powerfully towards elevating the reputation of a people abroad, than the grandeur or beauty of their public structures, nor is there any manner in which a republican government can so appropriately exhibit its munificence. The tinsel trappings, the robes and pageantry of office, which have been affected by some free states, or states striving to be free, are not in harmony with the general simplicity of republican manners, and in their own nature are almost as selfish as the show and pomp of patrician luxury. They may gratify or inflate the individual, who, so bedecked, struts his restless hour on the stage of public life, but they add little dignity to the state which bestows them. But a noble hall for the purposes of legislation or justice, or a grand

pile of buildings for the uses of learning, is the immediate property of the people, and forms a portion of the inheritance of the humblest citizen. An enlightened patriotism should, indeed, rest upon much more solid ground, but no man, who knows and feels that, even in our best and wisest moments, we can never become wholly creatures of reason, will object to the aid of local pride, and natural association, to strengthen and animate his love of country. The ancient legislators understood the force of such principles well. In the mind of an ancient Greek, the history of his country, her solemn festivals, her national rites, her legislation, her justice, were indissolubly combined with the images of every thing that was beautiful or sublime in art. Every scholar knows, too, how much the remembrance of the *Capitolii Arx alta*, the lofty majesty of the capitol, entered into every sentiment of love and veneration, which the Roman citizen, when Rome was free, entertained for his native city. That venerable and vast structure had been reared at the very commencement of the commonwealth, by some of its greatest men, on a scale of grandeur and magnificence, far beyond the needs or the

wealth of the times,* in a spirit prophetic of the future empire of Rome. Unlike the short-lived architectural works of our own country, which scarcely outlast their founders, it stood for centuries, a witness, as it were, and partaker, of all Rome's triumphs and greatness, a silent and awful monitor frowning rebuke upon her crimes and factions.

When danger threatened from without, or civil discord raged within—when the Carthaginian was at the gates, or brother was armed against brother in the Forum, it was there, that the sublime conception of a great and classical modern painter was again and again more than realized;† for the rebellious or the timid remembered that they were Romans, when, in

* Tacitus, Hist. III. 72. "Gloria operis libertati reservata, pulsus regibus Horatius Pulvillus, iterum consul dedicavit, eâ magnificentiâ quam immensæ postea populi Romani opes ornarent potius quam auferent." There is a secret charm in the writings of Tacitus, arising from the constant struggles of an ardent and indignant spirit of Roman liberty, as constantly repressed by that stoical dignity and studious impartiality, which he conceived to belong to the historian. He sees the great friends of liberty fall a sacrifice, one after another, not without very deep emotion, but his stern philosophy suppresses all expression of sympathy for them or of indignation against their oppressors. "Nec amore quisquam nec odio dicendus est." But when he relates the destruction of the capitol, by the armies of Vespasian and Vitellius, he throws off all constraint, and gives vent to Roman feelings, in language such as Livy or Lucian might have used.

† Poussin, in the Vision of Coriolanus.

their mind's eye, they beheld on the sacred walls of the Capitol, the armed Genius of their country, followed by Fortune as her faithful and obedient companion, and casting upon them a withering look of reproof.

Something of this moral effect, it is always in the power of the true and learned architect to communicate to all his greater works. The taste, the rules, the character of architecture, as well as its materials, having not less the expression of durability than the reality of it, tend to lift the mind above the "ignorant present," to connect our thoughts with the past, and expand them into the future. Of all the achievements of human skill or industry, this noble art approaches most nearly to the sublimity and vastness of nature; and it is well worthy of remark, that, when the great poet of truth and nature so beautifully moralizes his scene, and paints in a few impressive words the fleeting state of all earthly things, it is in architecture alone that he can find any material image of the power and talent of men, worthy to be associated with the mighty works of his Creator :

"The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve."

Nor will a benevolent mind overlook, or a wise statesman despise, the effects which such displays of public grandeur may have in imparting "an hour's importance to the poor man's heart," in soothing the natural jealousies which may arise in his breast, and enabling him for a time to forget the comparative hardships of his lot, and to feel a more real and palpable community of interest with his wealthy neighbour.

Had the architecture of this country, like that of antiquity, grown up among ourselves, it is not improbable that it would have sooner attained to the character I have described. But it has fared with this art as with our literature; we have borrowed most of it from France and England, and by no means from the best models which these countries afford; it is only within a very few years that we have begun to think for ourselves, or to draw directly from the purer fountains of antiquity. Hence it is that when our increasing riches enabled us to erect large and expensive public edifices, instead of embodying in them those pure forms and scientific proportions of Grecian art, which have been admired for ages, or, wherever they could with propriety be introduced, correctly

imitating some few of those light and graceful, or those solemn effects of Gothic architecture, which it may be within our power to execute satisfactorily, many of our most costly buildings have been vitiated by the predominance of that taste which prevailed on the continent of Europe, in the reign of Louis XIV, and which was universal in Great Britain throughout most of the last century, though it has now given way, as it did at an earlier period in France, to a much more classical style. I mean that corruption of the Roman, or rather Palladian architecture, which delights in great profusion of unmeaning ornament, in piling order upon order, in multitudes of small and useless columns, and mean and unnecessary pilasters, in numerous and richly decorated windows—in short, in that elaborate littleness, which strives to supply the place of unity and dignity, by lavish embellishment and minute elegance of detail. When this style is carried into execution in buildings, of which the materials are poor, and where, as is too common in this country, artificial stonework, stucco, wood, lath, plaster, and paint, supply the place of marble and freestone, the effect is exquisitely paltry. It reminds the spectator of the tawdry and tarnished finery of an

underling player. This, too, is often made more conspicuous, by an ambitious or ignorant departure from the common technical rules and fixed proportions.

But in its very best estate, this style of architecture can rise to little more than a ponderous and imposing stateliness, which, though produced by infinite labour and immense expenditure, is still poor and contemptible, when compared with the grandeur and beauty of the works of true taste.

In our few attempts at Gothic buildings, we have been generally unfortunate in aiming at too much for our means. Independently of their very peculiar and deeply interesting associations, which, I know not how, throw back the architectural remains of the middle ages to a much remoter antiquity in the imagination, than those of Rome or Athens, and which our familiarity with the history of our nation, at once contradicts and destroys—their sublime and solemn impression is in a great degree produced by their admirable adaptation to the ritual of the Catholic Church, by the sense of the years consumed in their erection, of difficulties triumphantly surmounted, of toil, and labour, and skill, unbounded and unwearied, expended not

with a view to any of those purposes, for which Protestant churches are peculiarly destined, but for solemnity, pomp, impression, and varied rich ceremonial. All attempts to mimic this upon a small scale, partake necessarily of the insignificance of a builder's model. If we imitate the architects of the middle ages, we should take them as our masters throughout, and apply the same style of construction and decoration on the same scale which they did; and, therefore, in our places of worship, we should be content with copying their simpler and less adorned chapels and halls, and smaller parochial churches, without making the vain attempt to exhibit the vast proportions, the numberless and exquisite minute beauties, and the infinity of picturesque combinations of Salisbury Cathedral, or York Minster, in the cheapest materials, and within the limits of a few square yards.

Beside these faults, many of our architects have yet to learn, what may be termed the painting of their own art—that power, too rare elsewhere as well as here, of giving expression to buildings, of making their appearance announce their uses, of assimilating the style of ornament to the objects to which they are applied, of filling the mind with those sensations which

are most consonant to the uses, whether of amusement or learning, of legislation or of devotion, for which they were erected.

Our need of improvement in this art is by no means confined to the public buildings of our national or state capitals. Our domestic architecture is still, for the most part, very exclusively copied, and sometimes not well copied, from the common English books, without variety, and with little adaptation to our climate and habits of life.

Our better sort of country seats have often an air of too much pretension, for their materials and their scale in size and expense. While we despise the humble beauties and picturesque comforts of the cottage, we rarely attain to the splendour of the chateau or villa. In short, our countrymen have yet to learn, that good taste and proportion, so valuable in their effects, cost nothing.

These defects of our rural architecture, are the more to be regretted, because it is in the middle of nature that beautiful art always appears to its highest advantage. The contrast is so pleasing, that any tolerably proportioned building derives a thousand unexpected beauties from being surrounded by rich natural sce-

nery. The colonnade, the portico, or the tower, can never appear with half so much grace and majesty, as when seen through foliage, or "bosomed high in tufted trees."

I have made these remarks, harsh as some of them may seem, with more confidence, because it is evident that public opinion is rapidly awakening to a true sense of the importance of this subject; good taste is every where struggling forwards, and within these few years several edifices have been erected of the purest and noblest character. Mr. Jefferson's patriotic hope seems to be every day realizing, for as sparks of science "fall upon minds of natural taste, they kindle up their genius and produce rapid reform in this elegant and useful art."

Such an improvement is not solely directed to the mere gratification of taste, and to giving pleasure to the critical eye of the architect or connoisseur. Good taste is always the parent of utility. While in works of public dignity it attains the grandest results by the simplest means; in private edifices it suppresses false and gaudy ornament, it prevents all sacrifice of convenience to ostentation, it attempts no unattainable magnificence, no combinations of irreconcilable qualities. When it is once firmly

established, and good models have become familiar, it diffuses its influence abroad on every side, directs the labours of the mechanic, and, where it cannot appear in positive excellence, is scarcely less useful in banishing all that is unnecessary and incongruous, even to the smallest details.

Without assenting in full to that metaphysical theory, which resolves all beauty into the perception of utility, still, though use be not the efficient cause, it is the inseparable companion of true taste, and the same faculty which regulated the proportions of the column, or the composition of the frieze, presides with equal care over the minutest arrangement, which can conduce to personal convenience or pleasure. The prevalence of sound architectural science, in any community, may be traced as distinctly in the increased comforts of the hospital, the improved commodiousness of the prison or penitentiary, and the bold and secure lightness of the bridge, as in the splendour of the palace, or the massive dignity of the cathedral.

I could willingly dilate much longer upon this subject. Without pretending to any exact science in this department, I have always found its study full of peculiar charms. In its philoso-

phy, it is connected with the most refined and curious speculations of intellectual science ; in its theory, it brings together in very singular yet most harmonious union, the rigid and exact rules of mathematics, and the undefinable and unexpressible, but not less certain, laws of sentiment and taste ; in its history, it is throughout interwoven with that of the progress of society, of national character, and of genius ; in its practice, it contributes at every moment to private happiness and public grandeur.

Let us pass on to the sister Art of Painting. Why should I expatiate on the uses and charms of that, with which all who hear me must be familiar? It is so intimately connected with the elegant literature, the general cultivation, and even the amusements of our times, that those who have no practical skill in it, and who have never seen any original work of the very great masters, have some understanding of its theory, and through conversation, books, engravings, and copies, know and feel much of the extent and majesty of its powers. It is a natural and universal language, the language of description through the eye, in its elements common to all mankind, but susceptible of an indefinite and never ending improvement, as it becomes

instructed by close observation, disciplined by practice, judged of by a quick natural sense of the beautiful or the grand, elevated by moral dignity of thought, or animated by deep intensity of feeling. Through the senses it awakens the imagination, and by her aid, reanimates the dead, acts over before us the great deeds of history, realizes to our eyes the brightest visions of poetry, and can transfer to a few feet of canvass the unbounded vastness of nature's scenes, the cheering breath of her airs and heavens, her changes of season, and "glad vicissitudes of night and day."

Many of us have admired, and all of us have heard and read of the chaste beauties, the expressive and varied dignity, and matchless graces of Raffaele—the richness, the truth, the magic of Rembrandt's colouring—the Elysian and ever verdant imagination of Claude, combining all that is venerable or grand in antiquity or architecture, in poetry or mythology, with all that is most bright and beautiful in nature.

In all this, what is there but the triumph of Mind? It is the separating of that which is excellent, and fair, and durable, and universally true, from that which is little, and temporary, and accidental. It is the stripping off from the

forms of matter, the grossness of sense, and investing them with the dignity of intellect and the expression of sentiment.

Can we then, as Americans, be content to look with indifference upon the progress of such an art? Can we coolly say, "All this is well for Europe, for the adorning of courts and palaces, for the amusement of princes, or to enable wealth and luxury, wearied out with their own existence, to fill up the languid pauses of life with new gratifications?" Oh, not so.—Nothing is unworthy or unfitting the attention of a free and wise people, which can afford scope for the employment of talent, or can adorn and gladden life; least of all, should we be indifferent towards an art, thus admirably fitted for the mixed nature of man, an art at once mechanical, moral and intellectual, addressing itself to every part of man's constitution, acting through his senses upon his imagination, through his imagination upon his reason.

But, although it is in the hand of the great epic painter, who fixes upon his canvass the sentiment of religion, or the high conceptions of poetic fancy, that the pencil has gained its chief honours, it is in another and much humbler department, that this art appeals more directly to

the patronage, the judgment, and the natural affections of all of us. It is perhaps in portrait painting, that we are to look for some of its best and most extended uses.

I have called it an humble department of the art, because such is the rank which the aristocracy of European taste has assigned to it, and because it really is so in respect to the narrow field which it presents for the exertion of fancy or science; yet, Reynolds has pronounced that the power of dignifying and animating the countenance, of impressing upon it the appearance of wisdom or virtue, of affection or innocence, requires a nobleness of conception, which, says he, "goes beyond any thing in the mere exhibition of even the most perfect forms."

While, too, the relish and judgment, with respect to other productions of art, are only so far natural as that they are founded in a sensibility, and a power of observation and comparison, common to all men in full possession of their faculties, but which require to be developed, exercised, and disciplined, by experience or study; Portrait appeals more directly to the comprehension of every one. Though it is sometimes applied to the gratification of vanity, it

much oftener ministers to the best feelings of the human heart. It rescues from oblivion the once-loved features of the absent or the dead, it is the memorial of filial or parental affection, it perpetuates the presence of the mild virtue, the heartfelt kindness, the humble piety, which, in other days, filled our affections and cheered our lives. In the hour of affliction and bereavement, to use the words of a living poet—for it is impossible to speak feelingly of the arts, without borrowing the language of poetry, not that poetry for which we turn to books, but that which lives in the memory, because it utters the voice of nature, and seems but to anticipate the workings of our own thoughts, and the impulses of our own breasts. In that hour

Shall Song its witching cadence roll,
 Yea, even the tenderest airs repeat,
 Which breathe when soul is knit to soul,
 And heart to heart responsive beat ?

What visions wake—to charm—to melt !
 The loved, the lost, the dead are near:
 Oh hush that strain, too deeply felt,
 And cease that solace too severe.

But thou, serene and silent Art,
 By Heaven's own light, wert taught to lend,
 A milder solace to the heart,
 The sacred image of a Friend.

No spectre forms of pleasure fled,
 Thy softening, sweet'ning tints restore ;
 For thou canst give us back the dead,
 Even in the loveliest looks they wore.*

It is an exalted and sacred office which art discharges, when it can thus administer to the charities of domestic life. But Painting becomes public and national, when it is employed in perpetuating the expression of the mind speaking in the features of the brave, the good, the truly great—of those whose valour made us free, or by whose wisdom we may become wise; of the heroes of our own country, of the patriots of our own history, of the sages and men of genius of all countries, who have left us those works, which form the intellectual patrimony of civilized man—of the heroes of humanity, of the benefactors of the human race. Then it becomes, indeed, a teacher of morality; it assists in the education of our youth; it gives form and life to their abstract perceptions of duty or excellence; and, in a free state and a moral community, where the arts are thus made the handmaids of virtue, when the imagi-

* These lines are, I believe, by Campbell, but I have never seen them in his works, and know them only through quotations and the newspapers.

nation of the young patriot calls up the sacred image of his country, it comes surrounded with the venerable forms of the wisest and best of her sons.

I well remember the vivid impression which was produced upon my own mind several years ago, when I first saw the University of Oxford. The quiet grandeur and the pomp of literary ease which are there displayed, did not wholly disarm that dislike, which I could not help feeling towards an establishment which, with so much learning and so much real talent, had for the last century, in its public and academic capacity, done so very little for the improvement of education, and had so long been the sanctuary of unworthy prejudices, and the solid barrier against liberal principles. But, when I beheld her halls and chapels, filled with the monuments, and statues, and pictures, of the illustrious men who had been educated in her several colleges ; when I saw the walls covered with the portraits of those great scholars and eloquent divines, whose doctrines are taught, or whose works are daily consulted by the clergy of all sects in our wide republic—of the statesmen and judges, whose opinions and decisions are every day cited as authorities at our bar and in our

legislative bodies—of the poets and orators, whose works form the study of our youth and the amusement of our leisure, I could not but confess that the young man who lived and studied in such a presence, must be dull and brutal indeed, if he was not sometimes roused into aspirations after excellence, if the countenances of the great men which looked down upon him, did not sometimes fill his soul with generous thoughts and high contemplations.

Why should we not also have everywhere the same excitements to laudable exertion and honourable ambition? We should spread wide over our land this mixed and mighty influence

Of the Morals, of the Arts,
Which mould a peoples' hearts.*

We, too, have great men to honour, and talent enough to do honour to them. In our public places and squares, in our courts of justice and halls of legislation, the eye should every where meet with some memorial of departed

* This is the language of our distinguished countryman, Washington Alston, one of the associates of this academy; a poet and a painter, to whom I have often applied the eulogy, which some modern Latinist has given of a great artist of his own times.—“Arte clarus, literis ornatus, moribus pulchrior.”

worth,* some tribute to public service or illustrious talent.

* The series of historical portraits of the Governors of this state, and of a number of the naval and military officers, who distinguished themselves in the late war, together with many of our most eminent magistrates, by Trumbull, Sully, Jarvis and Waldo, which are now in the City Hall of this city, would form an excellent foundation for a national portrait gallery. By adding to it, at the expense of a few hundred dollars every year, the portraits of our Presidents, Chief Justices, Chancellors, and distinguished judges of the Federal and State Courts, and of any great public benefactors in science or art, we should have, in the course of twenty years, an inestimable collection, to which every succeeding year would add fresh interest and value. This would afford scope, too, for the exercise of the talents of many excellent artists, who are now necessarily obliged to restrict themselves to mere face-painting. The historical portrait is a medium between portrait and history; and where naturally, and without affectation, it can be combined with action, (as has been happily done by Jarvis in his picture of Commodore Perry, in the boat leaving his shattered ship, to hoist his flag on board another, in the memorable fight on Lake Erie,) it gives room for the highest powers of the art.

The library of the College of this city, contains a number of good portraits of the most eminent presidents and professors of that respectable institution since its foundation, in 1753, and this little collection is always seen with much interest. But a college which can number among its sons such men as Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Robert R. Livingston, Gouverneur Morris, and many younger men, who are now among the foremost of our citizens in politics, at the bar, or in the pulpit, would add to its own dignity and reputation, by extending this gallery so as gradually to comprehend all those of her sons of whom she has most reason to be proud.

Harvard University, founded in 1639, and Yale College, founded in 1701, two most respectable and useful, and for our country, venerable establishments, have already the groundwork of galleries of the same kind, and if these were to be extended on this plan, they would soon contain the portraits of very many of the greatest men of our nation. This would not be mere ostentation. It is a wise thing as well a proud thing, for a seminary of learning to show itself to the ingenuous youth under its charge, as

—— centum complexa nepotes
 Omnes Cælicolas, omnes supera alta tenentes.

Though our sculptors may never vie with those of antiquity, in the expression of faultless beauty and ideal majesty, yet they could always find a sufficiently ennobling employment in the commemoration of our great men. Sculpture, austere and dignified in its character, is fitted chiefly for public uses, and of all the arts it is that for which private patronage can do least, and which most requires the fostering care of the state. But if there be a demand for it, the ability will soon spring up, and we shall no longer need the chissel of Thorwaldson or Chauntry,* to commemorate our Washington and Franklin, and the sages who shared in their labours, or who may hereafter follow in their footsteps.

We have already begun to call in the aid of Engraving. This is an art of less dignity and fame, but when I consider its multiplied uses to science, letters and taste, and the various

* Almost all the statues and busts of our great men which we have in this country, are by foreign artists, some of them very distinguished. The statue of Washington for the state of North Carolina, is, as is well known, by Canova, and Chauntry is employed on another for Boston. We have in this and other cities very fine busts of him by Thorwaldson and Trentanove; these are all historical likenesses; the best portrait bust is probably that of Houdon. The common casts of Hamilton, Jay, and George Clinton, are from Cerachi. Franklin employed the skill of all the eminent French sculptors of his day.

and very peculiar excellencies of which it is susceptible, I can scarcely call it an inferior one; for it is not, as the uninformed are apt to suppose, a purely mechanical occupation. Whilst in itself it affords room for the exercise of no ordinary talent, it stands in the same relation to the other arts, which printing does to Eloquence and Poetry, and, by bringing their productions within the reach of many thousands, to whom they would have otherwise been wholly inaccessible, more than compensates for the loss of immediate impression by wider diffusion and greater usefulness.

When such an artist as our associate Durand, has completed an admirable engraving of one of the greatest scenes of our history, or of any history, in which the grand truth of the story takes a stronger hold upon the mind, than mere fancy can ever gain, he has not only done honour to his own talent, but he has discharged a part of the debt of gratitude he owes his country.* He has enabled every one of us to bring the great scene, and the great actors of our Independence within our own doors, to make them as it were spectators of the bless-

* Durand's Engraving of the Declaration of Independence.

ings which they have earned for us, to place them before the eyes of our children—and, when our sons read the history of Grecian heroism, or of English virtue, when their eyes glisten, and their young hearts throb wildly with the kindling theme, we can say to them, “Look there, remember that we too had our Epaminondas and our Hambden.”

So great is the effect which may be produced by such and similar means, that it sometimes happens that where a people has degenerated from the virtues of their ancestors, when some wide wasting corruption has tainted their morals, or tyranny has trampled down their liberties, the arts have served to keep the mind of the nation still vigorous, and lofty, to protect its talent from the general contagion, and to preserve the love of country intense and ardent, though without hope of liberation, and without the consolation of power. In Italy—lost, ruined, degraded Italy, the arts still watch, and have watched for centuries, with vestal care over the flame of patriotism, as if commissioned by Providence to preserve it from extinction, until the arrival of that hour when it is destined to kindle up again, and blaze into high and unclouded effulgence. Italy, divided as it has been for

ages among so many lords, has still one common feeling and one common pride. It is still one country—where a great and fallen nation, like Marius among the ruins of Carthage, (such as the classic hand of a member of our academy has portrayed him,*) sits still august amidst the wrecks of former grandeur, powerless, and hopeless, but cherishing an unconquerable will, revolving the thoughts and breathing the spirit of the past.

Foreign criticism has contemptuously told us, that the national pride of Americans rests more upon the anticipation of the future, than on the recollections of the past. Allowing for a little malicious exaggeration, this is not far from the truth? It is so. It ought to be so. Why should it not be so?

Our national existence has been quite long enough, and its events sufficiently various to prove the value and permanence of our civil and political establishments, to dissipate the doubts of their friends, and to disappoint the hopes of their enemies. Our past history is to us the pledge, the earnest, the type of the greater future. We may read in it the fortunes

* Vanderlyn, in his Marius at Carthage.

of our descendants, and with an assured confidence look forward to a long and continued advance in all that can make a people great.

If this is a theme full of proud thoughts, it is also one that should penetrate us with a deep and solemn sense of duty. Our humblest honest efforts to perpetuate the liberties, or animate the patriotism of this people, to purify their morals, or to excite their genius, will be felt long after us, in a widening and still widening sphere, until they reach a distant posterity, to whom our very names may be unknown.

Every swelling wave of our doubling and still doubling population, as it rolls from the Atlantic coast, inland, onward towards the Pacific, will bear upon its bosom the influence of the taste, learning, morals, freedom of this generation.

Considerations such as these give to the lasting productions of our Arts, and to our feeble attempts to encourage them, a dignity and interest in the eyes of the enlightened patriot, which he who looks upon them solely with a view to their immediate uses, can never perceive.

Nor is it only for their indirect influence upon the present or the future state of society,

that the Arts should be cultivated and cherished.

They should be loved and fostered for themselves; because they call forth the exercise of a peculiar sort of talent, which seems native to our soil, and every day springs up fresh and vigorous before us. Our Arts have heretofore unfolded and expanded themselves, not in the genial sunshine of wealth and patronage, but in the cold, bleak shade of neglect and obscurity. The taste of our native artists, of whom so many have risen or are now rising here and in Europe, to the highest honours of their profession, was not formed by contemplating the noble remains of classical antiquity, or the beautiful productions of modern Italy. They had not even the fainter stimulant of listening to the language of that affected and exaggerated enthusiasm, that while it is often wholly insensible to the excellence to which it does outward homage, can sometimes excite in others the warmth which it but feigns itself. Nature was their only teacher, her works their great Academy.

Indeed, it is difficult to account for the remarkable fact, that so many of our countrymen should have become thus distinguished, far beyond the natural demand of the country, or even

its forced patronage, without allowing the existence of some organic physical cause, or some mental peculiarity, strongly impelling talent in that direction.

In spite of the greatest disadvantages, and with little in our public or social habits, peculiarly fitted to foster the elegant arts, we have yet given the most abundant and unquestionable proof, of possessing the highest capabilities of success in them.

But the names and the works of men of genius, become the property of their country. They form a rich and lasting possession, which it is a legitimate object of patriotism to acquire and increase. Older nations, in summing up the long catalogue of their statesmen, poets, and scholars, are proud to add to it, such names as those of Angelo, Canova, Rembrandt, Poussin, Claude, Murillo, Reubens, Reynolds. Why should we not do the same? To be able to do it, very little is needed. The natural talent is here; and, when conscious of its heaven-given strength, but ignorant or uncertain how to apply it, it heaves and pants in the young breast, and rises in vain aspirations after it knows not what, or wastes itself in idle and blind efforts, how little is wanting to unravel to it the secret of its

own powers, to give to it a steady impulse and true direction, and enable it to expand and dilate itself by its own energies, to the full stature and majestic proportions of Genius!

The young student of natural susceptibility and talent, requires but a little instruction in some of the technical and almost mechanical parts of his profession, a few models, even such as the narrow means of an establishment like ours can afford, and which may provoke the scornful smile of travelled connoisseurs—some good casts from the master-pieces of ancient statuary, the architectural publications of Stuart, Wood and Piranesi, some spirited and faithful engravings of Woolett, Bartolozzi, Holloway and Morghen, from the best works of the great painters; the opportunity of studying a few pictures, which, though they may not rank as the prodigies of the art, are of real excellence; add to this something of public interest to cheer and animate his labours, something of cultivated taste to judge and reward his works; and it is enough. You have given him all that is absolutely needful; the way is now open to him, and he treads in the path of fame, with a firm and rapid step. You have done well and wisely, and you have already your reward. You

have given a great man to your country. His name, his fame, his genius, the imaginative or true, the gay or grand productions of his pencil or chisel, belong to us all and to our children.

But at length, perhaps, he finds that our scattered population, the equal distribution of wealth among us, or other peculiarities of our state of society present, if not insuperable, yet certainly very serious difficulties in the way of exercising his talent on the scale, and the subjects of which he is justly conscious that it is worthy.* Perhaps, too, he hopes to build up

* West, Copeley, Trumbull, G. Stuart, Malbone, W. Alston, Leslie, Steuart Newton, Vanderlyn, and Fairman, are among the American artists, in different walks, who have not only studied, but successfully pursued their profession in Europe.

There are obvious reasons which impede the American artist, who aspires to display his talent in the mere poetry of his profession, and in very large compositions. We may look forward to a steady and growing demand for cabinet pictures, and such works as may be fitted for the scale of our houses and our limited fortunes. But our public and national establishments can seldom, with any propriety, or, indeed, in any keeping with their general character, borrow other decorations from the Painter and Sculptor, than such as are purely historical; including in that term not only portraits and statues of great men, but also those strictly historical works, the subjects of which are drawn from our own annals. These, though unquestionably affording scope for great excellence, both in conception and in skill, still allow little room for the bolder flights of the imagination, and the more exquisite refinements of taste. The sagacity of Mr. West, many years ago, pointed out to his American friends, the practice of exhibition as a mode of patronage peculiarly fitted for this country; and it is a subject of felicitation to the friends of the arts, that this is daily becoming more common in the United States.

that talent to far higher excellence, by the assiduous and constant study of those great original models, which age after age has gazed upon with increasing wonder and admiration, and have agreed in pronouncing to be the great examples of Art. He leaves his native land—it may be for ever. Does he therefore rob us of our lot and portion in him? Shall our country look upon him as an outcast and ungrateful son? Oh, no.

Go, child of Genius—go, whither West, and so many others have gone before you. Go where your high duties call you; do justice to that art which you love, and to yourself. Go, show to Europe a specimen of the mind and the virtue of the new world; bear with you the wishes, the hopes, the pride, the benedictions of your native Country, for she well knows that even in the giddiest round of success and applause, you will look with an undazzled eye

To this mode of remunerating talent, we are indebted for numerous works, which otherwise would never have been attempted; and among others for the "Christ Rejected," of Mr. Dunlap. This (as to the idea) is taken from the celebrated picture of Mr. West, on the same subject. But as Mr. Dunlap had never seen West's original, or any drawing or engraving from it, except the heads of two or three groups, in that large and diversified composition, he is, with the exceptions which he acknowledges, entitled to claim to himself the merit of this splendid and interesting picture.

upon the pomps of Europe ; that you will never blush for the land of your birth ; that you will sympathize with all its fortunes, ever venerate its institutions, and glory in its honours.

I have touched very briefly upon some of the prominent points of my abundant and diversified subject ; and that of necessity so rapidly and generally, that I have rather suggested to your consideration those topics which have most impressed my own mind, than given to them that development and illustration of which they are capable, and which their importance so richly deserves. There are yet many more unnoticed. I shall speak of but one.

It is that general moral tendency which must naturally result from the cultivation of the arts of taste, as it does from every thing in science or literature, which habituates man to look for enjoyment elsewhere, than in selfishness or sensuality.

I do not claim for the Arts, the holy power of reforming vice, or illuminating moral darkness. Without Religion and her most fit and natural attendants, education, and freedom, they are weak and feeble agents indeed. It is a presumptuous and terrible delusion to look either to Letters or the Arts, as the moral guides of man,

and his best teachers of truth and duty. But in their proper place and sphere, when controlled and purified, and elevated by holier principles, they can, and they do contribute most efficiently to the moral amelioration of society. Placed as man is, in a world which on every side presents to him some object to exercise or allure his appetites, passions, affections, feelings, talents, reason, he must find something to occupy the better part of his nature, or the worse will be active.

Among a people situated like this, to whom comparative freedom from those more pressing cares of life, which weigh heavily and incessantly upon the most numerous class of society in many other countries, leaves much leisure, is it not wise, is it not prudent, is it not consonant to the nature of man, to provide for him some occupation and objects, far lower, we willingly admit, than the exercise of his religious and social duties and affections, but as far above the vitious gratification of grosser appetites—something, which, while it engages and employs his faculties in innocence, at the same time invigorates his mind, and enlarges his conceptions?

Whatever utility in this regard may be justly claimed for elegant literature, or speculative science, may, on the same grounds, be ascribed to taste and knowledge in the fine arts. If, however, some stern and severe moralist should yet doubt whether society derives any real benefit from either source, we may at least ask him, if the time thus employed is not well redeemed from coarse sensuality, from the calumnies and slanders of malicious indolence, from ostentatious luxury, from the dull, dull round of fashionable amusement, or from the feverish strife of personal ambition?

It is true, that the Arts have been at times the inmates of corrupt and despotic courts, the flatterers of tyranny, the panders of vice. But the alliance is not necessary—it is not natural. If the fertile and spirited pencil of some of the ablest of the elder French school, wasted its powers in allegorical adulations of a despot and a bigot—if the higher genius of Italy has sometimes stooped to yet baser prostitution, let us remember that such is the condition of man. Every acquirement may be abused, all talent may be profaned. Poetry, Science, History, have each in their turn been bent to serve some

bad use. Boileau is the most abject of flatterers, Dryden panders the profligacy of a licentious court, La Place is the advocate of a blind and mechanical atheism, Hume lends his matchless acuteness, and the never-tiring fascinations of his style, to cheerless scepticism, and to cold-blooded defamation of the champions, and the cause, of liberty and conscience!

What then? Is ignorance therefore necessary to virtue or to freedom? Is the cultivation of the imagination, the taste, and the reason—of all those faculties, which distinguish man from his fellow animals, unfriendly to the improvement of the moral powers? Believe it not. Patriot, Moralist, Christian, think not so meanly of your sacred cause—wrong it not by unworthy suspicions. It imposes upon you no useless austerities; it asks no aid from ignorance; it loves the light.

Confident, then, that whatever pursuit or amusement teaches man to feel his own capacity for purer and better delights than those of sense, must in some degree or other improve and dignify his nature, may we not say with Reynolds, that “every establishment which tends to the cultivation of the pleasures of the

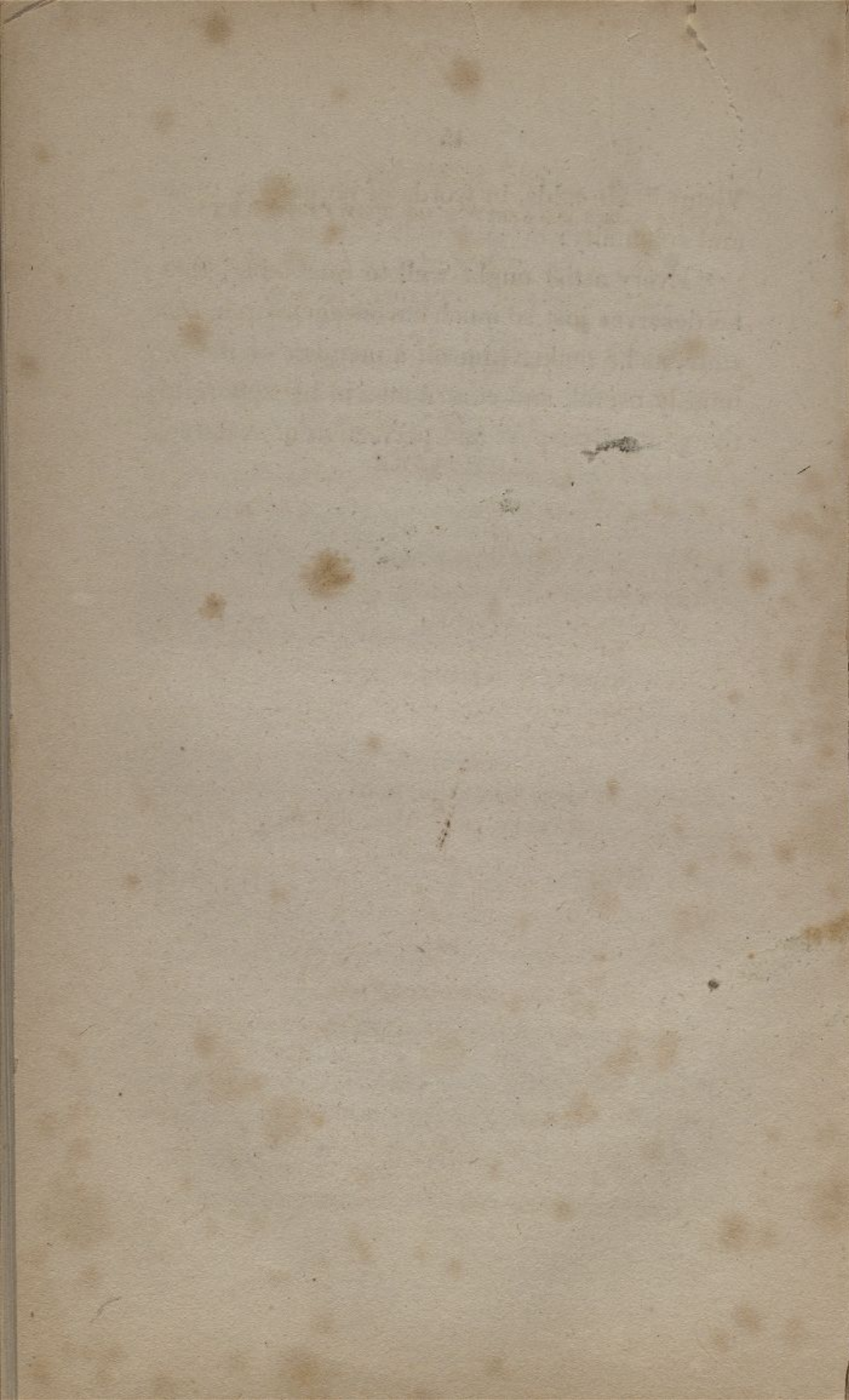
mind, as distinct from those of sense, may be considered as an inferior school of morality, where the mind is polished and prepared for higher attainments."

Let me conclude in the language of the same great and philosophical painter, whose imaginative and almost Platonic philosophy, whose acute perception of the principles of the imitative arts, and placid dignity of eloquence, have raised him to a rank of excellence in literature, even superior to that which he had worthily earned in his profession, and whose works present an admirable example of the beautiful union of just and refined taste, with moral wisdom and elevated sentiment.

"The labours of the artist," says he, "may extend themselves imperceptibly into public benefits, and be among the means of bestowing on whole nations refinement of taste; which, if it does not lead directly to purity of manners, obviates at least their greatest depravation, by disentangling the mind from appetite, and conducting the thoughts through successive stages of excellence, till that contemplation of universal rectitude and harmony which began in taste, may, as it is exalted and refined, conclude in

Virtue." He adds, in words of impressive truth and solemnity:

“Every artist ought well to remember, that he deserves just so much encouragement in the state, as he makes himself a member of it, virtuously useful, and contributes in his sphere to the general purpose and perfection of society.”



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