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Recollections

Forward

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RECOLLECTION is often considered as a way of looking backward, a check on the forward movement, and a damping up of the stream of fresh thought. If it arrests progress, then it would be better not to practise it; on the other hand, if it corrects error and, at the same time, inspires us to fresh quests, then it is desirable. Among the mass of our recollections, only those which inspire us to remain young, strong and tireless are of any value. We cannot always love what was done in the past; because, for the most part, it remained imperfect, and in so considering it, we are quite right, since this leaves open the path to the quest of beauty. Let us not regret the past, which is full of examples for the future. In every failure we can find the seeds of perfection and, for this it has been said: 'Blessed are the obstacles, by them do we grow.'

One need not cry over sour milk, but turn it to good use. Synthesis has been proclaimed, so that co-operation and friendly intercourse can be initiated.

Specialization is useful if it leads to synthesis. No one member of the body can put on airs, even our most active limbs only exist by virtue of the other parts.

Synthesis, the sum total of forces, leads forward. Infinity sounds through such a proclamation, one not based on the absurd divisions of race or class, nor does it give rise to the quarrel of the generations. Generation is a distinction of old age and youth. Thought, however, is outside of time, and thoughts about good, about knowledge and beauty cannot be senile. Senility is a matter of decomposition and can easily be recognized.

Malice and hatred and homicide do not belong to attainment. Forward ; and in this impetuous command all that is of decay or malignance must be left behind.

Should you encounter the old, then make it new by understanding what is imperishably beautiful. He who aspires forward always thinks of beauty and longs to fly and create and merge his efforts with the common welfare. In selfishness there is no horizon opened up, no flight to regeneration. " Per aspera ad astra "

Let us mention, at random, several artists worthy to be hung in the museum. Maso di Banco, Traini, Altichero, Stefano de Zevio, Michele Giambono, Pitocchio, Benedetto Diana, Empoli, Ingegno, Lanini, Licinio, Marziale Moretti Morando, Gerini, Buonacorso, Ortolano, Orsi, Oriold, Pulsone, Stanzioni, one might name many, many others. They were excellent artists. Some of them occupied outstanding places. They were heads of academies and ateliers. Yet the ways of Fate are amazing. Many of their contemporaries outstripped them. More than once their works have been attributed to other masters, and the error has only been found out after a lapse of many years. The frescoes of the Campo Santo in Pisa were, in turn, attributed to Gozzoli, Nardo di Cione and Traini. This often happens with works of art, and certain anonymous works of contemporary painters are cause for argument and discussion.

It is all the more difficult, then, with those remote periods when individual style was, as a rule, merged in some traditional method. It is not always easy to distinguish between the work of the more gifted pupils of Rembrandt, Rubens and van Dyck and that of the master. It is hard to discern the difference between the work of Lastmann and that of his great pupil, Rembrandt. Even Bramer is very often like Rembrandt. Later the works of Jan Victors and Fabricius, who lost his life in an explosion at Delft, came to be mistaken for those of Rembrandt. Think of the immense number of names in Wurzbach's catalogue of Netherlands artists, most of which were absorbed under the names of other artists. Signed pictures are relatively few, and an enormous quantity of anonymous paintings offer a wide field for conjecture. We have records of pictures by Titian, Durer, El Greco and Velasquez, which have disappeared, from fire or vandalism, which are common to all epochs. Some of them may even be hidden away in a garret, somewhere or other, and in recent times we have seen masterpieces of Vermeer, Holbein, and Rubens brought to light.

Great names often cover the work of talented painters, while great works of art often remain unrecognized.

' This is for the future ' (Sophocles)

Works of art have varied destinies. I have many times had occasion to note that pictures can completely change their appearance

not only because of restoration, but due to chemical processes. It is not merely a matter of colour but of all sorts of ingredients. Canvas can play all sorts of tricks and so will wooden panels or composition. Transport of pictures to distant countries may have disastrous results and every journey may be considered as an ordeal for a work of art. The artist is often accused of what he did not intend, in fact most artists have experienced this. On the one hand exhibitions are necessary and yet they damage the pictures. After standing the strain of fifty exhibitions my 'Treasure of the Angels' even changed size. Every time the canvas shrunk at the edges and took in a part of the picture. So great are the risks that pictures have to run in travelling that even the colors sometimes change, or they will come back from distant parts in a damp condition—from Tibet for instance. In Venice a picture was once covered over with dense mould. And then, paintings will darken in store room or fade under the rays of the sun, so that it is impossible to determine the original colours except by the borders which have been covered by the frames. Anything can occur. I was told that one of my pictures was discovered in a custom house on an island. How did it get there?

I saw 'the Summoning' folded up like a handkerchief, 'Viking Song' was lacerated out of all recognition. My pastel 'the Three Magi' was disfigured. 'Unkrada' disappeared during the war. Many pictures have been lost or cut up. Where is the 'Cry of the Serpent', 'The Red Dawn', 'The Boundary of the Kingdom' or 'The Three Joys'?

In one Polish castle were many pictures and six of mine. In the retreat during the war all were burnt. In ancient catalogues we came across the names of sculpture and pictures which have long been lost. Vandalism of all sorts has raged over the face of the earth. To-day, war is thundering in both east and west and many treasures are being destroyed and people beginning to plant underground refuges and sand bag defences.

Even the troglodytes were in a better position, since the drawings on the caverns at Altamira have lasted longer than those in the museums. We have just received a catalogue of Salvator Daly's American Exhibition. We were beginning to wonder whether any new craze would be possible after "Surrealism" and here it is. Daly himself proclaims that his art is derived from 'parancia' which is a state of madness. This, of course, is new since none of the other modern crazes proclaimed that they were mad. Americans, attracted by the novelty of the idea, flocked to buy his pictures. Daly, who appears to be a very astute sort of person, has explained that his pictures are kaleidoscopic, that is, each of them contains a variety of paintings. Whoever cares to purchase any of these master-pieces, then, gets half a dozen paintings for the price of one, since each picture will vary according to his changing mood.

There are, of course, always people who hanker ^{only} after novelty. The latest craze among the 'golden youth' of America is to swallow gold fish alive. One of these amateurs, we hear, scored a record and succeeded in swallowing eighty gold fish at a sitting, and so took first place among these 'golden youth'.

There is no dearth of innovation of this sort in the world to-day, and one has but to glance through a list of modern movements that have arisen in recent years to find a series of strange terms that have no meaning whatever. All of them publish lengthy manifestoes, drawn up in vague language, which pretend to overthrow or improve upon the existing tradition.

When we turn back to the innovators of past ages we find no such pretensions. After Bellini and his beautiful art come the splendours of Giorgione and Titian. They were all innovators in their time, but they did not label their work with some uncouth name nor set it up in opposition to that of their predecessors.

El Greco was a great innovator but never published a manifesto on his very original work. He worked in the way that suited him best, and the song which he sang was natural, spontaneous. And later when we come to the more modern innovators of the time of Manet, we find that they did not think it necessary to apologise for their innovations or threaten the timid bourgeois with their manifestations.

Manet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Wroubel worked in the only way that came natural to them.

It has been said that Van Gogh was mad, and from a doctor's standpoint he might have been, but he himself never insisted that his own art was a product of madness.

But of course we have to progress! Daly's recent exhibition has shown that when an artist to-day can announce that his work is the result of madness, he scores a great success. Once again the bourgeois has been fooled, and so it goes forward.

Anatole France once remarked with a smile: "All that is valued for its novelty or exclusive fashion soon becomes old. Fashions in art soon fade out, like any other fashions. There are phrases which appear pretensions and new like the gowns of some famous dressmaker. But they only last for a season. During the Roman decadence artists began to comb the hair on the statues of the Empresses according to the latest fashion. Very soon they looked ridiculous and had to be rearranged with marble wigs. A style which is combed, in this way, has to be replastered every year. A good style, however, is like the ray of light which filters through my window, as I write, and owes its brightness to the fashion of seven colours."

A simple style has this pellucid quality.
