

(Written for Baldwin's Monthly.)

STUDIO OF AN ARTIST.

ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

I like to step from the noise and bustle of a busy thoroughfare into the studio of an artist, where the contrast of the world without and that within is as marked as that of light and darkness. All within the artistic precincts is found at once tranquilizing, soothing, ideal.

I sometimes observe the white gulls and other sea-birds winnowing their way amid the innumerable vessels of the beautiful Bay of New York—now soaring heavenward, and now dipping their red feet into the water; and they seem entirely undisturbed at the roaring of the cannon, which ushers in some national holiday; the shrieks of the steam-whistle, or the wheezy puffs of the little tug-boat—all sounds are alike to them in their supreme indifference. So it is with the pigeons, sparrows, and other birds flitting amid locomotives and cars and innumerable horses; they lead a serene, beautiful life, all their own, undisturbed by the commotion and din that half madden sensitive human nerves.

Artists lead this same kind of isolated life in the midst of the multitudinous disorders of the great external world. They are no part of it. They are set apart, like those denizens of the air of which I have spoken, who observe their own holy, beautiful laws of being, irrespective of all disturbing elements.

You turn your back upon the street; you ascend one, two—it may be even more than three flights of stairs; you knock softly, and a gently-modulated voice says *come in*. Of course the light falls as it should, and imparts a halo to the head of the artist. He holds his pallet and moul-stick in his left hand, and gives you the other, cool and quiet, which you touch as you would that of a young girl robed in white and wearing lilies.

He turns to the easel and touches here and there a head before him, talking all the time in a clear, low voice. You notice that his hair is long and glossy, and that his thread-bare blouse is tasteful in color and make; that he affects the moustache, perhaps beard, and that he looks artistic and picturesque.

There is something wondrously harmonizing in the tone of everything: The neutral tints; the green base; the streak of sunshine falling upon a golden robe, or purple velvet, which some fair sitter has thrown over a chair, is quite a different thing from the same ray upon the dusty pavement. The room is very simply furnished; the cost is nothing; but it impresses you as something gorgeously beautiful—a touch of fairy-land. There are lovely blue eyes peeping out from pictures half turned to the wall; threads of golden hair now and then; a child's chubby limb; a woman's rounded arm.

There are models in plaster of classical hands and feet; bits of drapery to be copied into the folds of some lovely syren, where rich, voluptuous beauty demands gorgeously of coloring; here a pearly shell—there a vase of flowers; and huddled one side is the tawney-faced *Loy-figure*, with her staring eyes, and ricketty joints, looking like a cross Spanish *Duenna*, guarding like an old dragon the portals of Beauty.

The library of Genius and the studio of Art are holy ground; and there, if ever, we feel the sacredness of being; the most giddy and thoughtless talk in these places in a subdued tone, as we do in a church, for indistinctly it may be, still they are associated with our holiest affections. We look to the child of genius for words of comfort or inspiration, when the hand of death stirs up the fountains of our being; and we go to the artist, that he may restore to us the dear lineaments of the departed and beloved. Nor is this all; the sentiment of the beautiful is religious in character, and when we meet those who best represent it, a feeling of awe instinctively falls like a tender shadow over our hearts.

Twenty years ago the artist or painter was better appreciated than now, and his presence more sought after; but even now he is better appreciated than those engaged in any other field of art. At that time Giovanni Thompson was a great favorite with the then

literati—so many, indeed most of them, have gone the long bourne.

Mr. Thompson was the son of an artist, and had married into a family of distinction, his wife being the sister of Anna Cora Mowatt, actress and authoress. Mr. Thompson was singularly sincere in character, constant in his friendships, and pure in life. His motto upon his easel was, "Truth is the garment of the soul."

A group of persons—Mrs. Embury, the poetess, and wife of the banker; Mrs. Keese, a very beautiful blonde, and wife of John Keese, so well known in that day as a wit; Mr. Charles F. Hoffman, poet, and gentleman in the true sense, and Mr. Henry T. Tuckerman, essayist and poet, were assembled in the studio of Mr. Thompson, examining a portrait which he had just completed. The handling was very simple—a two-third face, amid clustering curls, and a girlish figure draped in white.

"She is not at all beautiful," said a lady.

"Beautiful is a great word," returned the artist, with an expression which lent force to the remark.

"It is a unique face," replied Mr. Tuckerman, "full of deep sensibility."

"By Jove! a rare face," exclaimed Mr. H. "I should not like to meet the original."

"My very thought," rejoined the former. "It is not best to encounter eyes like those."

"Zeus! what a nose and brow," resumed Mr. H., in his bright, impassioned way. "Her mother must have dreamed of Plato, and bathed herself the nine lunes in ambrosia. Don't tell me such a face ever came from Yankee-land. It has the glow of the tropics!"

Mrs. Keese, who had been looking at the picture in silence, here remarked, "Beauty is but skin deep."

"No, indeed, my dear madam," he continued, "it is soul deep. We see only the surface, but deep beneath is the mysterious power that gives it expression, like an alabaster vase lighted from within. Take this picture, for instance. A face like that may be covered with wrinkles, yet it would be still beautiful. It is a Cleopatra with the halo of a saint. It makes you think of Shakespeare,

'Age cannot wither, nor custom stale her infinite variety.'

It makes me sad to look upon it," and he turned away.

"It made me sad to paint it," said the artist in a low voice. "I think she has a history."

"Did you try to learn it?" asked Mrs. K.

"By no means, she has great reserve, and I did not wish to learn it."

"I think that woman could look superbly ugly, as well as divinely beautiful," said Mr. H., still drawn towards the picture. "Is she married?"

"Yes." This briefly by the artist.

He laughed in irony. "I dare be bound she is married to some Hodge or other, some ten per cent., old sharper, some vile Goth, who knows no more the value of such a woman than a barn-yard cock, who swallows a pearl and thinks it corn. The supreme impertinence of these shallow fellows in appropriating to themselves some marvellous creature of intellect and beauty, fills me with astonishment.

'Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread.'

I should be content to kiss the hem of the garment of a woman like that. I should look upon her with awe. A beautiful and gifted woman is more an object of dread than desire," and he turned away once more from the picture.

"She is a sphynx," remarked Mrs. Embury.

"Janthe has defined the face exactly," he replied.

"What a glorious wife for an artist? A myriad of models in one!"

The artist shuddered and shook his head.

"Why not! Here you have Aspasia, Sappho, Kate, the Shrew, Medora—anything you like; oriental, occidental, all in one!"

"But where is the artist to be all this time?" asked Mr. Thompson.

"True, true! I forgot the human, and thought only of art. Poor fellow! he would be nowhere."

"Such women enslave and annihilate us, at best," exclaimed Mr. Tuckerman. "Have you read *Faustina*?

That book shows how fatal is the love of such a woman."

"Good heavens, yes! Such as the Faustina's make us slaves or Blue Beards. I should want such a woman, if she fell to my lot, small enough to carry in my breast-pocket, and keep her there, and no peeping."

All laughed at the sally, for the subject was becoming not only suggestive, but oppressive.

Mrs. Embury was sitting to the artist for a portrait, and it was pleasant to see the living semblance grow under the delicate touch of the pencil.

It would be a curious study to learn what it is, emanating from some persons and not from others, which so strongly and mysteriously effects the observer. We may see the portraits of a thousand, and they do not arrest more than a passing glance, while another will live in the memory, and penetrate our whole being.

Poets and romance writers delight in delineating the impassioned and unfortunate attachments which sometimes spring up in the studio of an artist, and there surely must be great hazard to a susceptible heart, where on one side is placed a critical and appreciative student of beauty, and on the other a consciousness of charms which are about to be reproduced in their loveliest aspect, divested of any little defects which nature with all her bounty was unable to avoid; but as art is essentially religious in character, and the artist, by the very nature of his profession, is cast upon his highest sense of honor, and is supposed to be, and if true to himself and his art, must be pure in heart and pure in life, it is to be hoped that these tragical results of artistic companionship are more the creations of a fertile imagination than any actual experience of life.

Mr. Thompson with his family went abroad several years ago, and were quite domesticated under the sunny skies of Italy. There the artist is relieved from the shackles of conventionalism, and can live in his own way, and that much cheaper than at home. Mr. Thompson is now pursuing his profession in New York, and I trust with that success he so richly deserves.

PATCHOGUE, L. I., December, 1873.

"FRIEND," said the guide to Mohammed, "loose thy camel and commit him to God." "Friend," said Mohammed to the guide, "tie thy camel and commit him to God."

THE WOODMAN AND THE SANDAL-TREE.

Beside a sandal-tree a woodman stood,
And swung the ax; and, as the strokes were laid
Upon the fragrant trunk, the generous wood,
With its own sweets, perfumed the cruel blade.
Go, then, and do the like; a soul endured
With light from heaven, a nature pure and great,
Will place its highest bliss in doing good,
And good for evil give, and love for hate.—*Bryant.*

(Written for Baldwin's Monthly.)

"I DIDN'T MEAN TO!"

MRS. M. A. KIDDER.

Look at the rosy lips pursed up,
The pretty eyelids falling—
While you above the culprit stand,
A figure quite appalling!
You tell the little penitent
"Tis time that she was "seen to"—
You rave—she lifts her tearful eyes:
"Papa, I didn't mean to!"
She knows by heart your weakest point,
And there, sly rogue, she takes you;
The tearful eyes, the pretty plea—
Your sternness quite forsakes you!
You take her in your loving arms,
The little restless fairy;
You seal forgiveness with a kiss,
And send her up to Mary!
We older ones, could we but find
Our judges soft and lenient,
Might plead, ourselves, the same excuse—
Aye! find it quite convenient!
For all shortcomings, and all faults
That human natures lean to,
We'd say, like your sweet erring child:
Forgive—I didn't mean to!