KINDRED SPIRITS

ASHER B. DURAND
AND THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

Edited by Linda S. Ferber

Contributions by

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APPENDIX

"Letters on Landscape Painting"

MANY OF THE observations concerning plein air practice that Durand had articulated in letters from the field to family and friends found a public voice and a much wider audience with the publication of his "Letters on Landscape Painting." These essays appeared between January and July 1855 in the *Crayon: A Journal Devoted to the Graphic Arts, and the Literature Related to Them*, an ambitious weekly publication founded and coedited by Durand's son, John, a critic, and the landscape painter and critic William James Stillman.[1] Although the editors would later recall the enterprise as an ultimately disappointing project born of youthful idealism, the eight volumes of the *Crayon*, published between 1855 and 1861, are recognized today as the most important American art periodical of the period.[2] The editors invited the elder Durand to contribute the "Letters" to the early issues of the journal, and according to John Durand, his father composed these texts "in his leisure moments, and somewhat 'against the grain,' as literary efforts were now out of his line."[3]

Indeed, in a publication whose content focused primarily on the intellectual aspects of art making, the "Letters" were one of the few features that offered practical advice to the landscape painter.[4] As Durand and the editors noted, they were written in response to many appeals for instruction and advice that the artist had received over the years from aspiring landscape painters. Among those seeking his tutelage had been Stillman himself, who had intended to study with Thomas Cole and unsuccessfully petitioned Durand for instruction after Cole's death in 1848.[5] Jervis McEntee had also written to Durand early in 1848, asking to "come with you as a pupil."[6] Other landscape hopefuls, unknown today, wrote for advice from as far afield as Virginia and Illinois.[7]

Stillman recalled that Durand had declined to serve as his mentor in 1848 out of "an excess of humility as to his own work . . . and he could not bring himself to accept a pupil."[8] Although the voice of the "Letters" is that of a seasoned master, Durand still retained the reticence of the self-taught. "I have offered to you these remarks and opinions as the result of experience," he could declare in one sentence, only to add a disclaimer in the next: "I do not desire that my humble productions shall be regarded as the evidence of their correctness."[9]

Nevertheless, the "Letters" constitute a detailed and often eloquent exposition of the landscape painter's mission and Durand's own practice, as well as his beliefs about the salutary influence of these images on the viewer. The informal format of these epistolary essays looks forward to that adopted by John Ruskin in his highly popular autodidactic manual, *Elements of Drawing*, published two years later.[10] Durand's articles demonstrate his embrace of not only Ruskin's ideas about truth to nature but also the sentiments of William Cullen Bryant's Romantic nature poetry, which he liberally quotes and often paraphrases.

The influence and impact of the now-famous "Letters" in the artistic community were immediate and lasting. Thomas Hotchkiss, just beginning to paint and soon to become a member of Durand's circle, requested in May that the *Crayon* be sent to him in Palenville, New York, so that he might read the "Letters" while working in the Kaaterskill Clove.[11] In June a grateful reader from Oxford, Ohio, wrote to Durand: "I cannot

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let this opportunity pass without expressing to you my sincere thanks for the advice which you have given me in your 'letters on landscape painting.' . . . They were just what I wanted, and I doubt not that they have been welcomed by many a poor young painter struggling like myself with adverse circumstances which cut him off from the world of art and force him to grope his way with no guide but his own experience."[12]

Durand was not the first American landscape painter to work *en plein air*, but he was an early and influential proponent of outdoor study, and the significance of the "Letters" as part of Durand's larger contribution was recognized immediately by critics and historians as well as artists. In 1867 Henry Tuckerman described the "Letters" as "precious written testimony," closing his chapter on Durand in *Book of the Artists* with quotations from them.[13] George William Sheldon also quoted liberally from the "Letters" in his discussion of Durand in *American Painters* (1879), as did John Durand in his biography of 1894.[14] Art historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have fruitfully mined the "Letters" for many decades. In 1965 John W. McCoubrey published excerpts in the series Sources and Documents in the History of Art, as did David Lawall in his 1978 documentary catalogue of Durand's paintings.[15] A facsimile reprint of the eight volumes of the *Crayon* was published in 1970.[16] The present volume is the first to reprint Durand's texts in their entirety, however, placing these important documents within easy reach of the scholar, the interested reader, and, as Durand originally intended, the landscape painter.

1. Letter I, *Crayon* 1, no. 1 (January 3, 1855): 1-2; Letter II, *Crayon* 1, no. 3 (January 17, 1855): 34-35; Letter III, *Crayon* 1, no. 5 (January 31, 1855): 66-67; Letter IV, *Crayon* 1, no. 7 (February 14, 1855): 97-98; Letter V, *Crayon* 1, no. 10 (March 7, 1855): 145-46; Letter VI, *Crayon* 1, no. 14 (April 4, 1855): 209-11; Letter VII, *Crayon* 1, no. 18 (May 2, 1855): 273-75; Letter VIII, *Crayon* 1, no. 23 (June 6, 1855): 345-55; Letter IX, *Crayon* 2, no. 2 (July 11, 1855): 16-17. For the *Crayon*, see John Peter Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism in Nineteenth Century America," Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1952, 57-119; Roger B. Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967); Janice Simon, "'The Crayon,' 1855-1861: The Voice of Nature in Criticism, Poetry, and the Fine Arts," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1990; Marion Grzesiak, *The Crayon and the American Landscape* (Montclair, N.J.: Montclair Art Museum, 1993).
2. J. Durand, 189; Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism," 116-18; Simon, "'The Crayon,'" 1.
3. J. Durand, 189.
4. Grzesiak, *The Crayon and the American Landscape*, 13.
5. William James Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), vol. 1, p. 113.
6. Durand Letters, Jervis McEntee to Durand, March 9, 1848, reel N20, frame 377.
7. Ibid., M. C. Lyle to Durand, January 18, 1854, reel N20, frames 790-91; George W. Copley to Durand, October 31, 1854, reel N20, frames 857-58.
8. Stillman, *Autobiography*, 113. Stillman appealed successfully to Church and was his first pupil.
9. Durand, Letter I, 2.
10. John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing. In three letters to beginners* (1857; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1971).
11. Hotchkiss to editors of the *Crayon*, May 27, 1855, cited in Barbara Novak, *Dreams and Shadows: Thomas H. Hotchkiss in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (New York: New-York Historical Society in association with Universe Books, 1992), 25n13.
12. Durand Letters, Cornelius Ballows to Durand, June 2, 1855, reel N20, frames 876-78.
13. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1867; repr., New York: James F. Carr, 1966), 196.
14. George William Sheldon, *American Painters* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), 130-33.
15. John W. McCoubrey, *American Art, 1700-1960: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 110-15; Lawall 1978, 169-70, 182-84.
16. *Crayon* (1855-[61]; repr., 8 vols. in 4, New York: AMS Press, 1970).

LETTER I

The numerous applications of young artists to Mr. Durand to be admitted into his studio as pupils, has suggested to him to reply at length through THE CRAYON for the benefit of all who have been, or might be hereafter, applicants for the like privilege. ED. CRAYON.

DEAR SIR:

I AM compelled to return an unfavorable answer to your application for admission into my studio as a pupil. Among the many instances in which I have found it necessary to return a refusal, your own case is most painful to me, on account of the earnest love of nature which you manifest, and the strong desire you have expressed to devote your whole time and energies to the study of Landscape Art. I hope the disappointment will not be regarded by you as discouraging, for I can readily imagine you may have overestimated the advantage of such lessons as you desire at my hands, and I take occasion to submit for your consideration, by way of encouragement, some remarks resulting from my own experience under circumstances very similar to your own. With the same *love* of beautiful nature from my childhood, and the corresponding desire for *its* development through the knowledge and practice of Art, I was, by several years, older than yourself before I was able to devote even a small portion of my time to the favorite pursuit. I then thought as you now think, that if I could but obtain a few lessons by seeing an experienced artist work, or working myself under his eye and direct instructions, most happy should I be. That privilege, however, I never enjoyed, and subsequent years of toil and study have somewhat modified my estimate of the value of such privileges. Indeed, I am almost certain that instead of any great final benefit resulting from it, the greater chance is, that in most instances its result will prove pernicious.

It is true that the pupil may thus save time in the acquisition of certain technical knowledge, mechanical processes, most suitable colors, &c., &c., at the same time, he is, at least, in danger of losing his own identity, and from the habit of seeing with the eyes and following in the track of his master, become in the end what is most degrading in the mind of every true artist, a mere imitator, a mannerist.

You need not a period of pupilage in an artist's studio to learn to paint; books and the casual intercourse with artists, accessible to every respectable young student, will furnish you with all the essential mechanism of the art. I suppose that you possess the necessary knowledge of drawing, and can readily express with the lead pencil the forms and general character of real objects. Then, let me earnestly recommend to you one STUDIO which you may freely enter, and receive in liberal measure the most sure and safe instruction ever meted to any pupil, provided you possess a common share of that truthful perception, which God gives to every true and faithful artist—the STUDIO of Nature.

Yes! go first to Nature to learn to paint landscape, and when you shall have learnt to imitate her, you may then study the pictures of great artists with benefit. They will aid you in the acquirement of the knowledge requisite to apply to the best advantage the skill you possess—to select, combine and set off the varied beauty of nature by means of what, in artistic language, is called treatment, management, &c., &c. I would urge on any young student in landscape painting, the importance of painting direct from Nature as soon as he shall have acquired the first rudiments of Art. If he is imbued with the true spirit to appreciate and enjoy the contemplation of her loveliness, he will approach her with veneration, and find in the conscientious study of her beauties all the great first principles of Art. Let him scrupulously accept *whatever* she presents him, until he shall, in a degree, have become intimate with her infinity, and then he may approach her on more familiar terms, even venturing to choose and reject some portions of her unbounded wealth; but never let him profane her sacredness by a willful departure from truth. It is for this reason that I would see you impressed, imbued to the full with *her* principles and practice, and after that develope the principles and practice of Art; in other words, the application of those phenomena most expressive of the requisite sentiment or feeling. For I maintain that all Art is unworthy and vicious which is at variance with Truth, and that only is worthy and elevated which impresses us with the same feelings and emotions that we experience in the presence of the Reality. True Art teaches the use of the embellishments which Nature herself furnishes, it never creates them. All the fascination of treatment in light, and dark, and color, are seen in Nature; they are the luxuries of her store-house, and must be used with intelligence and discrimination to be wholesome and invigorating. If abused and adulterated by the poisons of conventionalism, the result will be the corruption of veneration for, and faith in, the simple truths of Nature, which constitute the true Religion of Art, and the only safeguard against the inroads of heretical conventionalism. If you should ask me to define conventionalism, I should say that it is the substitution of an easily expressed falsehood for a difficult truth.

But why discuss this point—is it not a truism admitted by all? Far from it! Or if it be admitted as a principle, it is constantly violated by the artist in his practice, and this violation sanctioned by the "learned" critic and connoisseur. The fresh green of summer must be muddled with brown; the pure blue of the clear sky, and the palpitating azure of distant mountains, deadened with lifeless grey, while the grey unsheltered rocks must be warmed up and clothed with the lichens of their forest brethren—tricks of impasto, or transparency without character—vacant breadth, and unmitigated darkness—fine qualities of color without local meaning, and many other perversions of truth are made objects of artistic study, to the death of all true feeling for Art,—and all this under the name of improvements on Nature! To obtain truthfulness is so much more difficult than to obtain the power of telling facile falsehoods, that one need not wonder that some delusive substitute occupies the place which Nature should hold in the artist's mind.

I have offered to you these remarks and opinions as the result of experience. I do not desire that my humble productions shall be regarded as the evidence of their correctness. I am more certain as to their aim in accordance with these opinions than in their successful attainment of that aim; and I will only add that neither their faults nor their merits are chargeable to any instructions received in the studios of artists, though many an useful lesson has been taught me by intercourse with professional brethren—even often from the student and the tyro. But by far my most valuable study has been

"Under the open sky"—

and there would I direct you to

"Go forth and list
To Nature's teachings, while from all around
Earth and her waters, and the depths of air,
Comes a still voice"—

a voice that no student can disregard with impunity, nor heed without joy and gladness—broken, it is true, too often by repeated failure, and by the conviction that the most successful transcripts that Art is able to produce must appear but abortions in her presence, and only tolerable when withdrawn and examined in the seclusion of the painting room.

There are, however, certain motives in Art which I am persuaded the young landscape painter may do well to consider with reference to directing his studies. These I will give you as opportunity offers, in some future letters.

Truly yours,
A. B. DURAND.

LETTER II

DEAR SIR:

IN recommending you, in the beginning of your studies, directly to Nature, I would not deceive you with the expectation, that you will thus most speedily acquire the art of picture-making—that is much sooner acquired in the studio or the picture gallery.

I refer you to Nature early, that you may receive your first impressions of beauty and sublimity, unmingled with the superstitions of Art—for Art has its superstitions as well as religion—*that* you may learn to paint with intelligence and sincerity—that your works shall address themselves to intelligent and sympathetic minds, and spare you the mortification of ever seeing them allotted to swell the lumber of the garret and the auction room.

Form is the first subject to engage your attention. Take pencil and paper, not the palette and brushes, and draw with scrupulous fidelity the outline or contour of such objects as you shall select, and, so far as your judgment goes, choose the most beautiful or characteristic of its kind. If your subject be a tree, observe particularly wherein it differs from those of other species; in the first place, the termination of its foliage, best seen when relieved on the sky, whether pointed or rounded, drooping or springing upward, &c., &c.; next mark the character of its trunk and branches, the manner in which the latter shoot off from the parent stem, their direction, curves, and angles. Every kind of tree has its traits of individuality—some kinds assimilate, others differ widely—with careful attention, these peculiarities are easily learned, and so, in a greater or less degree, with all other objects. By this course you will also obtain the knowledge of that natural variety of form, so essential to protect you against frequent repetition and monotony. A moment's reflection will convince you of the vital importance of drawing, and the continual demand for its

exercise in the practice of outline, before you begin to paint.

I know you will regard this at first thought as an unnecessary restriction, and become impatient to use the brush, under the persuasion that you can with it make out your forms, and at the same time produce color, and light, and shade. In this you deceive yourself—as many others have done, till the consequent evil has become irremediable, for slovenly and imperfect drawing finds but a miserable compensation in the palpable efforts to disguise or atone for it, by the blandishments of color and effect.

Practice drawing with the pencil till you are sure of your hand, and not only that,—till you shall have learned by heart the characteristic forms of all objects, animals, and the human figure included, so far as you may require their use in pictures; no matter how long it takes, it will be time gained. You will say that I impose on you a difficult and painful task: difficult it is, but not painful nor ungrateful, and let me assure you that its faithful performance is accompanied by many enjoyments that experience only can enable you to appreciate. Every step of conscious progress that you make, every successful transcript of the chosen subject, will send a thrill of pleasure to your heart, that you will acknowledge to give you the full measure of compensation.

As a motive to meet with courage and perseverance every difficulty in the progress of your studies, and patiently to endure the frequent discouragements attending your failures and imperfect efforts, so long as your love for Nature is strong and earnest, keeping steadily in view the high mission of the Art you have chosen, I can promise you that the time will come when you will recall the period of these faithful struggles with a more vivid enjoyment than that which accompanies the old man's recollections of happy childhood. The humblest scenes of your successful labors will become hallowed ground to which, in memory at least, you will make many a joyous pilgrimage, and, like Ro[u]sseau, in the fullness of your emotions, kiss the very earth that bore the print of your oft-repeated footsteps.

There is yet another motive for referring you to the study of Nature early—its influence on the mind and heart. The external appearance of this our dwelling-place, apart from its wondrous structure and functions that minister to our well-being, is fraught with lessons of high and holy meaning, only surpassed by the light of Revelation. It is impossible to contemplate with right-minded, reverent feeling, its inexpressible beauty and grandeur, for ever assuming new forms of impressiveness under the varying phases of cloud and sunshine, time and season, without arriving at the conviction

> —"That all which we behold
> Is full of blessings"—

that the Great Designer of these glorious pictures has placed them before us as types of the Divine attributes, and we insensibly, as it were, in our daily contemplations,

> —"To the beautiful order of his works
> Learn to conform the order of our lives."

Thus regarding the objects of your study, the intellect and feelings become elevated and purified, and in proportion as you acquire executive skill, your productions will, unawares, be imbued with that undefinable quality recognized as sentiment or expression which distinguishes the true landscape from the mere sensual and *striking* picture.

Thus far I have deemed it well to abstain from much practical detail in the pursuit of our subject, preferring first to impress you with a sense of the elevated character of the Art, which a just estimate of its capacity and purposes discloses, and this course may still be extended in reference to the wide field for its exercise, which lies open before you. If it be true—and it appears to be demonstrated, so far as English scenery is concerned—that Constable was correct when he affirmed that there was yet room for a natural landscape painter, it is more especially true in reference to our own scenery; for although much has been done, and well done, by the gifted Cole and others, much more remains to do. Go not abroad then in search of material for the exercise of your pencil, while the virgin charms of our native land have claims on your deepest affections. Many are the flowers in our untrodden wilds that have blushed too long unseen, and their original freshness will reward your research with a higher and purer satisfaction, than appertains to the display of the most brilliant exotic. The "lone and tranquil" lakes embosomed in ancient forests, that abound in our wild districts, the unshorn mountains surrounding them with their richly-textured covering, the ocean prairies of the West, and many other forms of Nature yet spared from the pollutions of civilization, afford a guarantee for a reputation of originality that you may elsewhere long seek and find not.

I desire not to limit the universality of the Art, or require that the artist shall sacrifice aught to patriotism; but untrammelled as he is, and free from academic or other restraints by virtue of his position, why should not the American landscape painter, in accordance with the principle of self-government, boldly originate a high and independent style, based on his native resources? ever cherishing an abiding faith that the time is not far remote when his beloved Art will stand out amid the scenery of his "own green forest land," wearing as fair a coronal as ever graced a brow "in that Old World beyond the deep."

Truly yours,

A. B. DURAND.

LETTER III

IF a truly fine picture could be produced with the same certainty as an ordinary steam-engine, specific directions might be given with a uniform result; and it would appear that thousands of landscapes *are* produced on precisely similar grounds, with even fewer claims to attributes of Fine Art. Although there are certain principles which constantly guide the hand of the true artist, which can be defined, classified, and clearly understood, and, therefore, communicable—yet the whole history of Art from the beginning, does not present a single instance where a thorough and scientific knowledge of these principles has of itself been able to produce a truly great artist, for the simple reason that such knowledge never can create the feeling, which overrules all principles, and gives the impress of true greatness.

I caution you, therefore, against reliance on any theoretical or technical directions which I or any one else may give in the course of your studies, further than as means which you are to employ subject to your own feeling. It has not been my intention in these letters to show you *how* to paint so much as *what* to paint: to point out the distant object, and erect an occasional guide-board on what seems to me the best path leading to it. The means and modes of travel are already to be had at every road-side, and better than I can furnish. All that I might say on the various colors and mediums, tools, or what not, necessary for your purpose, including dissertations on design, composition, effect, color and execution, would only be a repetition of what has been already written and published throughout the land, and which you can readily procure of the color-man and the bookseller. After all, whatever valuable instructions *they* furnish, their practical value must depend on your experience. All that I would advise is this—let materials be few and simple at first; as you advance, you will add what your feeling calls for. Much useful information may be obtained on all the subjects above mentioned, and you may be enlightened in the elements of *picturesqueness*, and other externals, with which alone too many artists, critics and connoisseurs, are contented: but those who can appreciate the higher attributes which make a picture a noble work of Art, will tell you that all the above-named requisites may be very imperfectly employed, and yet the picture may be truly fine, and even great; they will tell you that the difference consists in that which distinguishes the versifier from the poet, and this is all it is essential to know.

That is a fine picture which at once takes possession of you—draws you into it—you traverse it—breathe its atmosphere—feel its sunshine, and you repose in its shade without thinking of its design or execution, effect or color. These are after considerations: there is poetry in such a landscape, however humble. It will be great in proportion as it declares the glory of God, by a representation of his works, and not of the works of man.

I appeal with due respect from the judgment of those who have yielded their noblest energies to the fascinations of the *picturesque*, giving preference to scenes in which man supplants his Creator, whether in the gorgeous city of domes and palaces, or in the mouldering ruins that testify of his "ever fading glory," beautiful indeed, and not without their moral, but do they not belong more to the service of the tourist and historian than to that of the *true* landscape artist?

Without further multiplying words, you will perceive the purport of these observations. There can be no dissent from the maxim, that a knowledge of integral parts is essential for the construction of a whole—that the alphabet must be understood before learning to spell, and the meaning of words before being able to read—not to admit this would be absurd; yet many a young artist goes to work in the face of an equal absurdity—filling a canvas just as an idle boy might fill a sheet of paper with unmeaning scrawls, occasionally hitting the form of a letter, and, perhaps, even a word, so that the whole mass, at a little distance, may have the semblance of writing; and so, after he has wasted sufficient materials to have served, by well-directed study, to effect the attainment of the knowledge he lacks, he feels this deficiency, and goes back, or more correctly speaking, takes the first step forward, and begins with his letters. You have learned these letters, and how to spell, in the practice of drawing, and you have found out the meaning of many words, but there are yet many more, with phrases and whole sentences to learn (and this, I myself, feel, in more than one sense, while writing to you), before you can write and entirely express your thoughts.

Proceed then, choosing the more simple foreground objects—a fragment of rock, or trunk of a tree; choose them when distinctly marked by strong light and shade, and thereby more readily comprehended; do not first attempt foliage or banks of mingled earth and grass; they are more difficult of imitation, which, as far as practicable, should be your purpose. Paint and repaint until you are *sure* the work *represents* the model—not that it merely resembles it. This purpose, that is, the study of foreground objects, is worthy whole years of labor; the process will improve your judgment, and develop your skill—and perception, thought, and ingenuity will be in constant exercise.

Thus you will not merely have observed in the rock, the lines, angles, and texture, and in the tree trunk, the scoring or plainness of surface, which respectively characterizes them, but you will have acquired knowledge and skill applicable alike to every portion of the picture. In producing such an imitation, you will have learned to represent shape with solidity, projection, depression, and relief, nearness and distance, the coöperation of color with form, light and shade, and above all, you will have developed and strengthened your perception of the natural causes of all these results.

In the tree trunk, for example, and also in the rock—though less simple, and not as suitable for the present illustration—you see the application of perspective, and a demonstration of the law which governs the expression of space. When the light strikes on the trunk of an oak, on the side directly at right angles with your vision, the scoring lines nearest the eye and towards the shadowed sides, are strongest and sharpest, graduating in distinctness from the centre outward, and each division of bark diminishes proportionately. Light and color conform to these changes, being most pure or positive in the nearest portions. The lesson on the shape or rotundity of this object is not the only one; you have the principle of that gradation in light and dark, and color, which begins at the foreground, and extends to the horizon. Thus every *truthful* study of near and simple objects will qualify you for the more difficult and complex; it is only thus you can learn to read the great book of Nature, to comprehend it, and eventually transcribe from its pages, and attach to the transcript your own commentaries.

There is the letter and the spirit in the true Scripture of Art, the former being tributary to the latter, but never overruling it. All the technicalities above named are but the language and the rhetoric which expresses and enforces the doctrine—not to be unworthily employed to embellish falsehood, or ascribe meaning to vacuity. As I have not proposed to teach you processes, neither have I aimed at methodical arrangement or direction, further than so much as appears indispensable to a right beginning, I desire you to pursue the road pointed out with all consistent freedom from restraint, adding only such restrictive and experimental advice as shall incidentally appear to me advantageous to you.

If you should have a predilection for color, you will be most likely, in your early stage of practice, to give it undue importance, to an extent that may impede your progress—that is, sacrifice higher qualities to its fascination. I know no better safeguard to this liability, than to remind you that a fine engraving gives us all the greatest essentials of a fine picture, and often a higher suggestiveness than the original it represents, and so often, a mere outline, because the imagination fills in the rest, according to our own ideas of truth in its completeness. But, for the present I would especially direct attention to the light and dark, which make up the effect of the engraving, being far more complete than the outline; in short, it lacks nothing but color, which, though mighty in its power, is nothing more than the eloquence of Nature employed for the fullest enforcement of her Truth—the great ideas are antecedent. Waste not your time, therefore, on *broad sketches* in color; such only can be useful to the mature artist, as suggestive rather than representative. You had better look at all objects more with reference to light and dark than color, but do not infer from this that I would depreciate the value of color, for it is of inestimable value. It is, however, a sort of humorsome sprite or good demon—often whimsical and difficult of control—at times exceedingly mischievous, spoiling many a good picture as if with mere malicious intent—but when experience shall have acquainted you with its tricks and its virtues, you will understand better the worth of its service. Study, then, the light and dark of objects in connection with color, keeping in mind, as far as practicable, the distinction I have indicated; and as I have recommended first the practice of outline with the pencil, so I would also enjoin the study of light and shade with pencil, sepia, or even charcoal—any material you can best manage for this end. I would not debar you, in the meantime, the luxury of painting, but let your time be divided between the two. Nor will this course be lacking in interest and pleasure.

The same may be said in relation to confinement to foreground studies, for a period, as above advised; for in the advanced state of practice in which I find myself, and at an age when early attractions might be supposed to lose some portion of their freshness, I feel no abatement in the interest of these pursuits, and no amount of toil and fatigue can overbalance the benefits, either in consideration of utility or enjoyment.

Yours, truly,

A. B. DURAND.

LETTER IV

"You had better learn to make shoes," said the venerable Colonel Trumbull, one day, to a stripling who was consulting him in reference to his choice of painting as a profession, "better learn to make shoes or dig potatoes than to become a painter in this country." I felt that this was a harsh repulse to the young man, and most unexpected from such an authority. I was not then a painter, but secretly hoping to become one. I felt a strong sympathy for the victim, and thought he was unkindly treated, but I can now imagine that there might have appeared to the mind of the veteran artist sufficient ground for such advice, and that it may have been an act of kindness rather than severity. It is better to make shoes, or dig potatoes, or follow any other honest calling to secure a livelihood, than seek the pursuit of Art for the sake of gain. For whoever presumes to embrace her with the predominant motive of pecuniary reward, or any mere worldly distinction, will assuredly find but a bundle of reeds in his arms. The great law that provides for the sustenance of the soul through the ministry of spiritual things, has fixed an immovable barrier between its own pursuits and those which supply our physical wants. For this reason, we cannot serve God and mammon, however specious our garb of hypocrisy; and I would sooner look for figs on thistles than for the higher attributes of Art from one whose ruling motive in its pursuit is money. This is one of the principal causes operating to the degradation of Art, perverting it to the servility of a mere trade; and next to this, is its prostitution by means of excess in color, strong effects and skillful manipulation, solely for the sensuous gratification of the eye. Through such motives the Art becomes debased, and a picture so painted, be its subject landscape or figure, may well be considered but an empty decoration. But, fortunately for Art, such is not its true purpose, and it is only through the religious integrity of motive by which all real Artists have ever been actuated, that it still preserves its original purity, impressing the mind through the visible forms of material beauty, with a deep sense of the invisible and immaterial, for which end all this world's beauty and significance, beyond the few requirements of our animal nature, seems to be expressly given. And such is the verdict which the best judgment of the world, in all ages, has rendered, by awarding the highest rank to the artist who has kept in due subordination the more sensuous qualities with which material beauty is invested, thereby constituting his representation the clear exponent of that *intention* by which every earnest spirit enjoys the assurance of our spiritual nature, and scorns the subtlety and logic of positive philosophy.

Every experienced artist knows that it is difficult to see nature truly; that for this end long practice is necessary. We see, yet perceive not, and it becomes necessary to cultivate our perception so as to comprehend the essence of the object seen. The poet sees in nature more than mere matter of fact, yet he does not see more than is there, nor what another may not see when *he* points it out. His is only a more perfect exercise of perception, just as the drapery of a fine statue is seen by the common eye, and pronounced beautiful, and the enlightened observer also pronounces it beautiful; but the one ascribes it to the graceful folding, the other to its expression of the figure beneath, but neither sees more nor less in quantity than the other, but with unequal degrees of completeness, in perception. Now, the highest beauty of this drapery consists in the perfection of its disposition, so as to best indicate the beautiful form it clothes, not possessing of itself too much attractiveness, nor lose its value by too strongly defining the figure. And so should we look on external Nature.

Why have the creations of Raphael conferred on him the title of *divine?* Because he saw through the sensuous veil, and embodied the spiritual beauty with which nature is animate, and in whose presence the baser "passions shrink and tremble, and are still." It is a mistake to suppose that Raphael and other earnest minds have added anything of their own to the perfection of their common model. They have only depicted it as they saw it, in its fullness and purity, looking on it with childlike affection and religious reverence, ever watchful that no careless or presumptuous touch should mar its fair proportions. And it is the same with regard to inanimate or animate creation. Childlike affection and religious reverence for the beauty that nature presents before us, form a basis of reliance which the conflicts of opinion can never disturb. Learn first to perceive with truthfulness, and then aim to embody your perceptions; take no thought on the question of genius or of future fame; with these you have nothing to do. Seek not to rival or surpass a brother artist, and above all, let not the love of money overleap the love of Art.

To appreciate Art, cultivation is necessary, but its power may be felt without that, and the feeling will educate itself into the desired appreciation, and derive from it a corresponding degree of pleasure, according to the purity or depravity, the high or low character, of the Art that awakens it. And, as the true and the beautiful are inseparably connected, and the highest beauty with the highest truth, it follows that the most truthful picture must be the most beautiful.

according to the nature of its subject. Where is the portrait-painter, having a just sense of his responsibilities, who has not often thrown down his brush in despair, after many fruitless attempts to express the soul that beams at times through the eye of beauty, and so with the yet more mysterious power of lofty intellect? And there is to be seen a corresponding soul and depth of expression in the beauty of landscape nature, which dignifies the Art that embodies it, and improves and elevates the mind that loves to contemplate its pictorial image.

But, suppose we look on a fine landscape simply as a thing of beauty—a source of innocent enjoyment in our leisure moments—a sensuous gratification with the least expenditure of thought or effort of the intellect, how much better is it than many a more expensive toy for which human skill and industry are tasked, and wealth continually lavished! How many of our men of fortune, whom nature and circumstance have well fitted for such enjoyment, surrender, as it were, their birthright, for a mess of pottage, by resorting to costly and needless luxuries, which consume, without satisfying—while Art invites to her feast of beauty, where indulgence never cloys, and entails no penalty of self-reproach!

To the rich merchant and capitalist, and to those whom even a competency has released from the great world-struggle, so far as to allow a little time to rest and reflect in, Landscape Art especially appeals—nor does it appeal in vain. There are some among "the innumerable caravan" that look to it as an oasis in the desert, and there are more who show signs of lively susceptibility to its refreshing influence—those who trace their first enjoyment of existence, in childhood and youth, with all the associations of their minority, to the country, to some pleasant landscape scenery; to such the instinct of nature thus briefly impressed, is seldom or never overcome. Witness the glad return of many an exile to the place of his nativity, and see the beautiful country-seat suddenly rising among the green trees that were young with himself, and almost regarded as playmates. He returns to end his days where they began, and loves to embellish the consecrated spot with filial tenderness, strewing f[r]esh flowers on the grave of long-departed years. To him who preserves the susceptibility to this instinctive impulse, in spite of the discordant clamor and conflict of the crowded city, the true landscape becomes a thing of more than outward beauty, or piece of furniture.

It becomes companionable, holding silent converse with the feelings, playful or pensive—and, at times, touching a chord that vibrates to the inmost recesses of the heart, yet with no unhealthy excitement, but soothing and strengthening to his best faculties. Suppose such an one, on his return home, after the completion of his daily task of drudgery—his dinner partaken, and himself disposed of in his favorite arm-chair, with one or more faithful landscapes before him, and making no greater effort than to look into the picture instead of on it, so as to perceive what it represents; in proportion as it is true and faithful, many a fair vision of forgotten days will animate the canvas, and lead him through the scene: pleasant reminiscences and grateful emotions will spring up at every step, and care and anxiety will retire far behind him. If he possess aught of imaginative tissue, and few such natures are without it, he becomes absorbed in the picture—a gentle breeze fans his forehead, and he hears a distant rumbling; they come not from the canvas, but through the open window casement. No matter, they fall purified on his sensorium, and *that* is far away in the haunts of his boyhood—and that soft wind is chasing the trout stream down the woody glen, beyond which gleams "the deep and silent lake," where the wild deer seeks a fatal refuge. He shifts the scene, and stretching fields and green meadows meet his eye—in such he followed the plough and tossed the new-mown hay; by the road-side stands the school-house, and merry children scatter from its door—such was the place where he first imbibed the knowledge that the world was large and round, while ambition whispered that the village grounds were too narrow for him,—and with the last rays of the setting sun, the picture fades away.

I need scarcely apologize for the seeming sentimentalism of this letter. In this day the sentiment of Art is so overrun by the *technique*, that it can scarcely be insisted on too strongly. In my next, I shall recur more minutely to the means, rather than the ends, of Art.

Yours truly,

A. B. DURAND.

LETTER V

I HAVE already advised you to aim at direct imitation, as far as possible, in your studies of foreground objects. You will be most successful in the more simple and solid materials, such as rocks and tree trunks, and after these, earth banks and the coarser kinds of grass, with mingling roots and plants, the larger leaves of which can be expressed with even botanical truthfulness; and they should be so rendered, but when you attempt masses of foliage or running water, anything like an equal degree of imitation becomes impracticable.

It should be your endeavor to attain as minute portraiture as possible of these objects, for although it may be impossible to produce an absolute imitation of them, the determined effort to do so will lead you to a knowledge of their subtlest truths and characteristics, and thus knowing thoroughly that which you paint, you are able the more readily to give all the facts essential to their *representation*. So this excessively minute painting is valuable, not so much for itself as for the knowledge and facility it leads to.

There is then a marked distinction between *imitation* and *representation*, and if this distinction be at first difficult to understand, it will become more and more apparent as you advance. Although painting is an imitative Art, its highest attainment is representative, that is, by the production of such resemblance as shall satisfy the mind that the entire meaning of the scene represented is given. Now, if all objects in Nature could be equally well imitated, there would be no need of this distinction; but this is not the case. Take a tree, for instance: with its infinity of leafage, you perceive at once that direct imitation is impossible; that is, such an imitation of its foliage as you produce of its trunk, or of the rock beneath, for to that effect each leaf must be defined as far as seen, or at least a great portion of them, and with the same precision with which you express the scoring of its trunk. You are then to *represent* this foliage in every essential characteristic, without defining the forms of individual leaves. To do this, some analysis of its structure is necessary. In the first place, it presents you with form, and mass, so far like a solid object, which it is not, and herein is your greatest difficulty; it is open and permeable, and in a measure transparent, so that you see its nearer surface, and through that to its central portions and opposite limit. If you attempt to portray it by the usual process for rounded objects—its local color in the great mass of light and natural gradation into the shade of its receding surface—you will only have the effect of a solid object. You must do much more than this; the hue of the background on which it is relieved, must be seen through its apertures in some parts, in others the retiring color and texture of its centre and opposite branches, together with gleams of reflection from the enlightened portions of its interior (for the light strikes through it, as well as on it); then its species must be determined by the form of its clusters, marking the divisions on its surface, and especially their terminations, or contour, which express its distinctive character. In addition to this, you are to observe the kind of texture which its leafage requires; also, reflections from the sky visible on the upper portions of the shaded side. When you shall have done all this, it is only representative, yet it satisfies the eye as fully as an imitation. Similar difficulties occur in painting near water. We see its surface: through that, the bottom, when shallow, and at the same time surrounding objects and the sky above, all distinctly imaged upon this surface; all attempt at imitation must fall far short, and yet water may be as unmistakably represented as trees.

Strictly speaking, beyond a few foreground objects, our Art is entirely representation, and that can be rendered satisfactory only by the utmost effort to produce imitation. When you shall have acquired some proficiency in foreground material, your next step should be the study of the influence of atmosphere—the power which defines and measures space—an intangible agent, visible, yet without that material substance which belongs to imitable objects, in fact, an absolute nothing, yet of mighty influence. It is that which above all other agencies, carries us into the picture, instead of allowing us to be detained in front of it; not the doorkeeper, but the grand usher and master of ceremonies, and conducting us through all the vestibules, chambers and secret recesses of the great mansion, explaining, on the way, the meaning and purposes of all that is visible, and satisfying us that all is in its proper place. This, therefore, is an important personage, and no pains should be spared to make his acquaintance.

Having become familiar with the *light* and *dark* of foreground objects, and their distinctness, fullness of detail, and freshness of color, place yourself so as to include a view of these with a gradually retiring distance. You will perceive that similar objects to those nearest you, at a few hundred yards distant, have undergone considerable change, and that change becoming more and more apparent with every step beyond. An examination into these changes affords us the first lesson in atmospheric space. First direct your attention to the *dark* portions of the scene, the shaded sides of objects, and the shadows cast by them on the ground and on each other. In

the first place you will find these darks have lost something in strength, and not only are they weaker but less distinctly marked with details, and more negative in color, as if by the infusion of a bluish gray, scarcely perceptible at first, but more obvious further on. This invariably takes place at the first remove from the foreground, and must be carefully expressed, whether the eye discerns it or not, for it is a principle, (I have reference to objects seen in a clear day, all under the same conditions). At every remove, then, the darks become weaker and weaker, and their details or markings within them fainter and fainter.

I call your attention first to the darks, because their variations are more palpable and thorough, (especially in color) than those of the lights, but the latter also undergo material changes, gradually losing their details, becoming softer in texture, and weaker, though not so essentially changed, in color; till at length, when individual form is no longer distinguishable, the mingling light and dark are resolved into one mass of comparatively uniform color, as in the far distant mountain. The sum of all this is simply the natural gradation from darker to lighter, stronger to weaker, on a principle as fixed as the chromatic scale in music; and the practiced eye of the artist will detect the slightest discord in the one, as will the sensitive ear in the other. This will serve as a general guide to the effect of a clear atmosphere, bearing in mind that the upper portions of distant mountains are stronger and more defined than their bases, the air being more transparent in proportion to elevation.

You will observe that the open or permeable quality of trees is soon lost as you advance in the distance, and they partake more the appearance of solid objects, with the exceptions of the small openings or interstices which alone determine their looseness of structure. Water, also, presents nothing but surface, and its transparency is only observable by its reflections. Here note especially, that the clearness of distant water does not depend on the use of transparent color, but on the distinctness of reflections on its surface, and so all broad shadows, from whatever causes, owe their transparency to the precise sufficiency of their details, that is the right degree of distinctness with which objects within them are defined. We frequently see in pictures broad masses of transparent color applied to represent shadows, yet utterly void of clearness, in consequence of mere blankness, no objects being seen, or at least distinctly seen, within them.

To conclude these brief hints—atmosphere is, as you know, a veil or medium interposed between the eye and all visible objects—its final influence is to obscure and to equalize. It is *felt* in the foreground, *seen* beyond that, and *palpable* in the distance. It spreads over all objects the color which it receives from the sky in sunlight or cloud-light; and the only rule I can furnish you for the expression of its hue, is, that it partakes more and more the color of the sky. Thus far the expression of atmospheric space, according to the distance of objects from the foreground, is comparatively easy; but when considered under the influence of a variable sky, cloud shadows, and drifting vapor, it becomes more complex, and all the subtleties of light with color subject to the media through which it passes, and the intricacy of reflections from accidental causes, will engage your attention, and call in requisition all your powers of observation.

The degrees of clearness and density, scarcely two successive days the same—local conditions of temperature—dryness and moisture—and many other causes, render anything like specific direction impracticable. I can do little more than urge on you the constant study of its magic power, daily and hourly, in all its changes, at times shortening, at others lengthening, the space before you; now permitting to be defined, in all its ruggedness, the precipice on the mountain side and now transforming it to a fairy palace, and the solid mountain itself to a film of opal.

I must allude to this subject further in other connections—its importance being too great to be passed by with a single consideration.

Yours, truly,

A. B. DURAND.

LETTER VI

IN my last I threw out some hints on atmospheric gradation. It was there stated, as a principle, that this gradation was most apparent and invariable in the darks or shaded portions of the landscape, under a clear sky, such portions partaking more and more the color of the sky as they recede. The natural cause for this effect is the same as that which produces the blue of the sky—the intervention of the great body of atmosphere between the earth, and the utter darkness of surrounding space. A luminous, transparent white, spread over black, becomes blue in proportion to its purity; and, as the atmosphere is less pure near the earth, so the sky is less blue at the horizon, thence gradually increasing to the zenith. The blueness of the distant mountain and the intermediate gradation, are subject to this law.

It was also stated, in my last letter, that this regular gradation was interrupted, and the effect of atmosphere complicated, by the intervention of clouds and other vapors; but, previous to an examination of such phenomena, let us take into consideration the influence of sunlight.

Sunshine is the joyous expression of Nature, the lovely smile that lights up all her beauty, so changing and adorning all it rests upon, as to seem itself creative. Mingling with the fitful humors of the atmosphere, it develops the full power of color, and evolves the interminable variety of light and shade which constitutes the magic of chiaroscuro—that controlling element of effect which theorists have in vain endeavored to portion and systemize. Who does not feel that existence is a blessing and the world beautiful, when, after tedious days of sullen cloud and storm, and worse monotonous drizzle, suddenly the sun breaks forth in noon-day splendor? So gladdening is his presence, that we forget at once the long gloom of his absence. And who, so well as the landscape artist, can appreciate such a change? And, having so often enjoyed its blessing, he would be most ungrateful and unworthy not to bear witness by his works to its surpassing loveliness. I have more respect for the devout heathen who worships the sun as the visible Divinity, than for the artist whose pictures betray insensibility to the charm of sunlight.

It is first declared by light and shade, but its full expression depends on color. Simple light may be represented without color, but sunshine never. Preparatory, therefore, to the few hints I shall give towards the representation of sunlight, I will call your attention to the general classification of the colors into the three divisions of warm, cold, and neutral. Reds and yellows form the basis of all warm color, and blue that of the cold—an equal admixture of the three forms the neutral. This division will serve our present purpose. And we learn from it that the color of sunlight is either red or yellow, or compounded of both, being warm, and that its absence or shade must present a predominance of blue, expressive of its coldness. And, however, little of positiveness may appear in these elements, either in the light or shade, there will always exist the marked distinction of warmth and coolness when compared. This is an invariable principle, or, if there be any exceptions, it is traceable to adventitious causes, such as those of strong reflections, which will be considered as we proceed.

All warm colors are enhanced or become more positive in sunlight, and all cold color loses something of its identity by the infusion of warmth; in other words, it has affinity for the warm, and antipathy for cold; it is, therefore, important to keep in view the quality of the color on which it falls.

The best time to observe the ordinary effect of sunshine on the landscape, is to watch the gradual clearing up of a cloudy day, when its presence is first announced by occasional patches of light. The first sensation conveyed is, of course, that of light—the next, that of color; the entire mass of such light being warm compared with the surrounding shade. Study the effect, first, in the middle distance, when a cloudy sky just begins to open and lets its first burst of sunlight in. You will find that around the light the shadow appears cooler, owing to the suddenness of contrast; but, as the openings overhead widen, the cold light from the clear blue sky is reflected into the shadow, and the entire mass of it becomes colder even to a greater degree than the unpracticed eye readily admits. So, if you should paint the scene with the utmost truth during a cloudy day, and afterwards introduce these patches of sunlight, the picture would be entirely false.

Your shadows would not only be too warm and positive in local color, but all forms within them too defined, inasmuch as sunlight always obscures the details of the adjoining shadows according to their magnitude—those of the broader masses remaining most distinct. The amount of warm color in sunshine is regulated by the hour of the day, and condition of the atmosphere, ordinarily the least at noon. Generally it contains more of yellow than red, but at times assuming every grade of golden orange and crimson, so that all attempts at any specific prescription must ever remain inadequate, whether artistic or scientific, and only useful so far as to direct the student, or even force him to entire reliance on his own powers of observation "under the open sky." For which end, I have assumed the task of advising you.

You will further observe, that all shadows cast from objects in direct sunlight have their edges sharply defined and strongest at their starting point (when no reflection is present). This is the first distinguishing difference between sunshine and ordinary daylight, under a cloudy sky. Any softening or blending of such shadow with the light must impair, if not destroy, its reality. Be careful to note the direction, length and breadth of shadows, according to the rules of perspective, and their adaptation to the surface on which they rest. And that all broad masses from clouds or other large bodies, are weaker than those of smaller dimensions, embracing, as they do, a greater amount of reflections from the sky and surrounding objects.

I have referred you to middle grounds and distance the better to discern the influence of sunlight, in reference to the color of shadows; but the same principles operate in foreground, though less palpable in this particular. You have here the contrasts of light and dark, warmth and coolness of color, the same sharpness of edges* and reflections from the sky, less influenced by the atmosphere, but still perceptible, and a proportionate indistinctness of detail, regulated by the magnitude of the shadow. In addition to these you find another agency employed of great value, that is, the force of strong reflections from contiguous objects at times materially affecting the quality of the color of the shadow. Whenever the sun's rays strike an object within the margin of a shadow, according as that object is elevated above the plane of the shadow, it will reflect those rays modified by its own color and peculiar surface, into the ground of the shadow, often giving positive warmth to its coolness, thus becoming the exception above mentioned to the principle I have laid down; so that when such shadow is very circumscribed, it becomes warm throughout, and even hot where the reflecting cause is very warm and glowing in color. The same action takes place to a limited extent, in more distant localities, though less conspicuous, as in the ravine of the middle ground, with its sunny and shaded sides, and the steep slopes of more distant elevations. In the midst of sunlight and its shadows, look out then for the sly agents of reflection, for ever meddling with the sports of sunshine, whether among the pebbles by the brook-side, or the precipices of the mountain.

We are not liable to over-estimate the value of sunshine to the landscape. By it all beauty is rendered more beautiful, and the ungainly made attractive. Color, as we have seen, is dependent on it for its highest development, and chiaroscuro for its greatest charm. But, independent of its pictorial efficacy, it imparts a cheerful sentiment to the picture that all observers feel and enjoy; even the fearful darkness of storm and tempest is palliated and becomes agreeable, if but a gleam of sunshine enliven some corner of the scene; and, as it glides through the woven arches of the solemn forest, touching here and there some mossy trunk and pendant bough, and chequering the rich mould beneath with variegated gems, it cheers the silent gloom, and surprises us with the sudden presence of unlooked-for beauty.

The common prejudice against green landscapes seems to me to arise from the neglect of studying the effect of sunlight in varying the green, and as this is a prejudice as general among artists as injurious to our true perception of nature, I will give some space to the consideration of this part of our subject.

In consequence of the prevalence of green in our summer landscape, the presence of sunlight becomes indispensable as the best means to counteract monotony. For Nature, indeed, abhors monotony as she does a vacuum, and perhaps it is to this feature above all others that we may ascribe the unpleasantness of a dull, cloudy day. I am inclined to believe that sleep would ensue from the contemplation of a surrounding mass of unvaried color, as soon as from the most somnorific monotony of sound or motion. In form, light and dark, and especially in color it is repulsive, and only admissible in the picture when necessary to the expression of a particular sentiment. But Nature, in this, as in all other cases, provides for the emergency. She is not only, generally, sparing in the employment of all strong positive color, but never permits a large unvaried mass of any single color. The local green of foliage, grass and plants, varies perpetually according to species and locality—tints of every shade, with mosses and lichens, diversify the surface of rocks—mineral and vegetable dyes mottle the bare earth, while water, in its transparency, mobility and mimic reflections, appropriating to itself the diversity of all; where, then, shall we look for monotony? Surely not in the sky, whose vault of graduated blue is for ever changing, and in whose realm of clouds not even its semblance is permitted to enter.

I am free to confess, that my perception of Nature's beauty is not sufficiently sensitive to be wounded by the sunny green of summer—I cannot persuade myself that it is not beautiful, being, as it is, the first witness of organic life in the creation, the universal sign of unimpeded and healthy action; and, above all, the chosen color of creative Love for the earth's chief decoration. But I can well understand why it has been denounced by the Artist—it is the difficulty of its truthful representation—for it appears to me that no other color is attended with equal embarrassments. I am persuaded, therefore, that the prejudice against green pictures, or rather the supposed impracticability of all efforts to render them pleasing, arises more from failure to represent their greenness truly, than from any inherent objection. Who will assert that the fresh green of summer is not beautiful? ever grateful to the sight, and soothing to the mind—the poet delights to

revel in it, and the dusty eyes of the tired citizen regards it as a Godsend whenever permitted to enjoy it! Then why should the picture which represents it, be looked on as offensive? Alas, for the conventionalisms of Art!

If you paint a vast forest or extensive plains with one unvaried shade of green, it will indeed be repulsive, for Nature never does that: if you add to this the natural diversity of form and texture, with even truth of sunlight, you will still fall short of the mark; for, besides this, Nature has so varied her greens with an infinity of different shades, almost every tree even of the same kind differing from each other, that strictly speaking there is no monotony in *her* forests, and the same variety exists in the surface of her green fields—in the hues of the various grasses, and the tinting of numerous flowers.

But, notwithstanding this variety, large masses of green forests or extensive plains may be thought objectionable, from the requirement of a preponderance of green in your picture, thereby tending to dullness, but let the golden sunshine fall on given portions, and the sea of emerald will at once become redolent with life and beauty, and in proportion to the true expression of the light, especially in relation to the variety of local tints within it, and accompanied by a suitable use of cloud-shadows, all objectionable monotony and undue preponderance of positive green, will at once disappear—still more will this be the result when occurring under the condition of a soft atmosphere, neutralizing more sensibly the greenness of the receding part.

The chief difficulty in the management of green is found in the painting of trees, and on this point I desire to make a few more remarks. We find no green thing in Nature of sufficient magnitude to be conspicuous that has not inequality of surface, or that is not so fashioned as to prevent anything like an equal distribution of light at the same time over its entire surface. The leaves of all large plants are waving or undulating, or multiform in structure. And the tree, the largest and most abundant of all objects that bear the color, is most varied by irregularities of all shapes and dimensions; loosely composed in all its parts, and textured in every degree of depression and projection, the entire surface is a labyrinth of inequalities, so that it would appear a special provision of Nature to guard against the remotest liability to sameness or monotony of color on its surface, either singly observed, or when grouped in the mighty forest.

For this inequality and looseness of surface, with its irregularly rounded form, precludes the possibility of exposure to the same angle, and more especially to the reception of an equal quantity of light at the same time, on any considerable portion, and every variation in this respect presents a difference of color or varying shade of its green; so that on close examination you will find that the green proper, or actual color of the tree, is confined to the central portion of the light side where the sunshine falls, and all the rest is more or less negatived, the shaded side, as a mass, scarcely green at all. This results from the looseness of structure, for it would be much more green were it a solid object, because the sun's rays penetrate its substance, and some portions of them pass to the opposite extremity, as I have previously reminded you. This neutrality of the shade is explained by the law which governs the color of light in its passage through semi-transparent bodies, becoming warmer and warmer, at first more orange, and as the medium becomes denser, finally red; for example, if you look at a leaf in sunlight you will find the upper, or side on which the light falls, a cool green, while the under side will be a warm green inclining to orange. This transmitted light, falling in its turn as direct light on still other leaves, is still further warmed by the same influence, and thus partially neutralizes the actual color of the foliage by mingling its opposing color with it.** Thus the shadows of a tree are more nearly neutral than those of a solid substance of the same color, and if represented as green will be at once false and consequently offensive.

Yours truly,

A. B. DURAND.

* Sharpness of the edges, or terminations of all foreground shadows, is, of course, dependent on the solidity or openness of the extremities of the object casting it. And all cloud shadows approaching the foreground, have soft terminations, so far differing from those of the distance; so the edges will be soft and the mass weak, in proportion to the remoteness of the object which cast it from the ground on which it falls, as those of hills or mountains, when such shadows cross the near middle ground

** You may illustrate this further by letting a single ray of light into a close apartment, and then holding a thin sheet of some semi-transparent substance over the aperture. The light will receive a warm tinge, increasing in warmth with each layer of the substance added, until it finally becomes a deep red.—*See Goethe on Color.*

LETTER VII

DEAR SIR:—We have seen that of the three primary colors, two are warm and one cold. Whatever connection may be traced between this fact and the attractiveness of their respective qualities, it appears that the general predilection is in favor of the warm in a direct ratio, and justly so, yet I am persuaded that the prevailing fondness for warm color is often indulged to a morbid degree, and the artist too often disposed to gratify it at the expense of truth.

This is especially the case in pictures representing summer (except in sunsets), the prevailing hue at that season being cool, and there is wisdom in the provision—the sensation of coolness conveyed through the eye seems to allay the fervor of the feeling, and render the heat more endurable, so that it would appear a sacrilege to pollute its freshness by an undue proportion of warm color.

I hope that what has already been said in relation to the effect of sunshine and atmosphere, in connection with greenness of color, is sufficient to show that there are effectual means for avoiding all unpleasant coldness, as well as monotony, without sacrificing the sentiment that belongs to, and is inseparable from, the freshness of summer verdure. Green, it is true, is a cool color, but in sunshine it becomes warm green, by a marked addition of yellow. If this be still cool in comparison with other warm colors, it is not cold nor chilly, but of an agreeable temperature, between the two extremes. I have said that light develops color, so the weaker the light the less apparent the color; at the same time the brightest light is most destructive of all color, as seen in its climax on rounded or curvilinear surfaces—on glossy or shining objects becoming white. The true color, then, is in the medium or great mass of light, and the just negation of this high light or climax, and the gradual transition of the great mass into the shadow, conduce more than all else to the prevention of what is understood by the term paintiness.

Truth of color and general harmony, whether of warmth or coolness, will satisfy every eye; if the picture fail in these it is false somewhere, and if the artist devotes himself with overweening fondness to a preconceived notion of any particular *quality* of color, without a primary regard to truth in its adaptation to his subject, he can scarcely fail to produce an incongruity, and fix the attention of the observer on the nice mixture of pigments rather than on the sentiment of his work. Nothing is more common among pretentious critics, as well as artists, than commendations of this and that picture for certain *fine qualities* of color; it is a favorite theme with the conventionalist, and when these peculiar qualities evince extraordinary skill, all other considerations are thrown aside, and the painter becomes distinguished for that alone. Thus many a young artist is sadly misled to seek for something that he does not see nor feel, and blindly fall into servile imitation of some prominent leader in the display of these much lauded qualities.

Among the most attractive of these peculiarities, perhaps, some of the various shades of grey will be found most prominent. This is likely to be the case from its real importance and value as found in Nature. In some degree grey is almost always present; at times so delicately seen as scarcely to be perceptible, at others more visible, yet liable to be overlooked unless sought for, and at all times so quiet and unobtrusive, it seems to admonish the artist that if he would secure the benefit of its presence, he must never give it undue prominence—it is the summer breeze that chastens the heat of all warm colors, and tempers the cold ones into an harmonious union with them; it is accordingly a department of specific color that well deserves our attention.

Simple grey is perfectly neutral; it becomes warm or cool as it inclines to either of those departments. But we will, for present convenience, divide it into two others, viz. local and circumstantial. It is local when it constitutes the actual color of objects, as in rocks and trunks of trees, and circumstantial when produced by atmosphere and light, as in the shadows of receding objects. It is indeed the principal ingredient in atmospheric tone. The great difficulty in its management (being the most subtle of all tints), is felt in this and other cases of its circumstantial application, as will appear.

Its great value, and the principal test of its admirable quality, consists, first, in its adaptation, that is, to modify the local color of objects according to distance, without supplanting it; or, in other words, to represent local color under the influence of atmosphere; and it insinuates itself thus among all other colors, not only in the broad expanse of distance, but throughout every successive plane up to the foreground of the picture, in foliage, earth and water, being the basis of that beautiful neutrality which conceals or discloses the positive character of all colors, without impairing their beauty.

Its judicious management, therefore, more than all else, perhaps, distinguishes the fine landscape colorist, being neither more nor less than strict conformity to the process, by which Nature reveals and sets off to the greatest advantage her more positive and attractive brilliancy. Not that the tone of his picture is felt to be grey—on the contrary, he so conceals its specific quality, that we only receive the impression of local

or natural color. For instance, when the forest texture of the mountain is caused to maintain its native verdure, in spite of the grey veil with which distance has enveloped it, we feel it to be green, but do not see it so, and the same with other objects and colors in like circumstances.

When any palpable form of grey pervades the picture, by usurping the rights of other colors, and staring at you as positive personal grey, instead of being confined to its natural localities or circumstantial functions, its assumption renders it not only objectionable, but next to worthless.

I have particularized the grey tint, as being, from its frequent abuse, one of the by-paths that may embarrass your progress; but I would equally caution you against the allurements of any other peculiar technicality, which may divert your attention from the general aim and meaning of the picture.

All the best artists have shown that the greatest achievement in the producing of fine color, is the concealment of pigments, and not the parade of them; and we may say the same of execution. The less apparent the means and manner of the artist, the more directly will his work appeal to the understanding and the feelings. I shall never forget the reply of Allston to some friends who were praising a very young student in Art, for great cleverness, especially in the *freedom* of his execution. "Ah," said he, "that is what we are trying all our lives to get rid of." With that he opened a closet, and brought out a study of a head that he had painted from life, when a young man, at one sitting, and placed it beside a finished work on his easel, at which we had been looking: "There," said he, "that is freely painted." No other comment was required; in the one, paint and the brush attracted attention, in the other, neither was visible, nothing but the glow of light and color which told its truth to Nature—and thus it is with the works of all the greatest colorists. Their skill is perceived in the concealment of the means by which the desired effect is attained consequently their productions defy the utmost sagacity of the critical examiner to detect any specific mixture or compound by which their characteristic excellence has been attained. It is neither warmth nor coolness that elicits admiration; force nor delicacy; high key nor low key; but always harmony and entire subordination of means. Now, we are not to suppose that this subordination has been especially aimed at by the artist, but that it is the consequence of the process by which higher aims have been reached.

Execution is simply the mode of applying paint to the canvas. It is praiseworthy when it gives assurance of correctness in drawing, and of the knowledge and feeling that have guided the hand. By far too much importance is often attached to it, and the young artist is apt to regard it as one of the first objects of his pursuit, instead of the natural consequence of his practice. Your execution will be good in proportion to your knowledge and skill in drawing; when it becomes conspicuous as a principal feature of the picture, it is presumptive evidence, at least, of deficiency in some higher qualities. So, your coloring will more likely be good, or even excellent, when it does not arrest the attention by any strong peculiarity, and thus divert the eye and mind from the superior considerations of design, composition and character.

I have maintained throughout these letters, the distinction between the mere pleasing picture and that of the true representation of Nature. And I am aware that there is, and always has been, a certain class of critics and commentators on Art, who deny the fact, or contend that something more is required to constitute high Art. What that something is, remains unsettled: but so far as I have had occasion to examine the celebrated works in which such critics have supposed this something to exist, I have never been able to discern its presence, unless the studied artificiality or imbecile attempts to supply imaginary deficiencies in the pictorial imagery of Nature be so construed. If such be the point at issue, we have yet to discover a single instance wherein Art has gained anything by the subterfuge, or the artist not lost by his egotism and vain glory. All that has made Claude pre-eminent, is truthfulness of representation in his light and atmosphere, and moving waters—if other portions of his works were equally *true*, he would be still greater. And why have the nobler compositions of Gaspar Poussin only given him an inferior rank, but because they lack in corresponding truthfulness. I might instance hundreds of others, ancient and modern, who owe their reputation to the degree of representative and imitative truth which distinguishes their works. Closing the list with the name of Turner, who has gathered from the previously unexplored sky alone, transcripts of Nature, whose mingled beauty of form and chiaroscuro have immortalized him, for the sole reason that he has therein approached nearer to the representation of the infinity of Nature than all that have gone before him.

I do not say that simple naturalness necessarily makes a picture great, but that none can be great without it; for Nature herself is unequal, in the eye of Art. It is the province of Art, then, and all the license that the artist can claim or desire, is to choose the time and place where she displays her chief perfections, whether of beauty or majesty, repose or action. Let her sittings be thus controlled, and the artist will have no occasion to idealize the portrait, no need to shape her features on his classic model—or eke out an expression that he does not see—no need to modify the light and shade that develop the fullness of her graceful form and match-less color; and every accessory from the vast folding of her cloud-curtain to the embroidered foorstool beneath, will be fur-

nished of such cast and fitness, as to require no change at his hands. There is not a tint of color, nor phase of light and dark, force or delicacy, gradation or contrast, or any charm that the most inventive imagination ever employed or conceived worthy to be regarded as beautiful or for any other quality, fitting to the aim of Art, that is not to be seen in Nature, more beautiful and more fitting than Art has ever realized or ever can; and there is no acknowledged excellence in any picture extant, which justly commands our admiration, which has not been transcribed, more or less faithfully, from her glorious volume.

Then, why should we resort to pictures, or the study of Art, independent of, or embracing any other mode than that which has direct reference to the original source whence Art has sprung? For no other purpose surely than to aid, perchance, the growth of our perceptions, and advance our knowledge of the province and capacity of Art. In this respect much may be gained to the saving of time and labor, but it has its evils and its dangers—if indiscriminately relied on, it may do more harm than good.

If the absence of naturalness, or what we term truth, could be compensated for by any other artistic excellence, even that of the most brilliant imaginative power, we might commend the student to the study of pictures, instead of Nature, to a greater extent even than is now in vogue, for he will find in the works of great masters all that could be desired of executive and constructive merit, and occasionally, perhaps, examples of as great a degree of representative and imitative truth as Art can ever attain, and with adequate perception and enlightened judgment to discern and appreciate these qualities, he may, indeed, profit by the study; but without experimental knowledge of, and overruling reliance on, the great principles which he perceives and feels as existing in Nature, and keeping them constantly present in his mind, such study will be of little avail, and may be detrimental. For it is the manner or style of the picture, unfortunately, which first engages the attention of the inexperienced student; and, as every true artist has his *own* manner, *i.e.*, certain peculiarities of execution, &c., the result of his organization, a picture is not available as a subject for study, with the view to the formation of your style, or for any other practical benefit. It is not the manner that you are to study, but to confine your examination of pictures to the discovery of the less obvious means employed, and the capacity of the materials of Art toward the representation of Nature, especially in all that indicates the treatment or disposition of the respective parts, so as to give the greatest prominence to the most essential characteristics.

Pictures abound which display the complete mastery of all the technicalities of Art, fascinating by the most dextrous execution and brilliancy of color, yet false to Nature and destitute of all that awakens thought or interests the feelings; yet they attract the eye, satisfy the superficial observer, and deceive the unguarded Art student, especially when sustained by the loud commendations of the spurious critic, who, rejecting the standard of Nature, erects in its place his unmeaning ideal, and fancies he finds it realized in every skillful novelty which artistic egotism displays. This is a condition incidental to, and inseparable from, the very Nature of Art, and only removable by the force of that discriminating perception which the study of Nature alone can impart.

Yours, truly,

A. B. DURAND.

LETTER VIII

DEAR SIR:—A Landscape with figures, introduced merely for pictorial effect, without enhancing the meaning, may render the picture more beautiful and more artistic, and yet amount to little more than a sort of human cattle piece; and whenever the human figure becomes paramount, and gives to the picture a significance independent of, and superseding the sentiment of the landscape, it is no longer legitimate landscape, and falls under some of the departments of figure subjects. But when the human form exerts an influence in unison with the sentiment of inanimate nature, increasing its significance without supplanting it, the representative character of the landscape is not affected; and whatever imaginative force may attach to the figure itself, the value of representative truth is not lessened. When I asserted, then, in my last letter, that the great landscape is always representative of nature, and that it owes its greatness primarily to this fact, it was on the ground previously assumed, that the true province of Landscape Art is the representation of the work of God in the visible creation, independent of man, or not dependent on human action, further than as an accessory or an auxiliary. From this point of view let us briefly examine the conventional distinctions of Idealism and Realism, together with the action of the imagination in connection with them, and which seems to have given rise to these distinctions.

What then is Idealism? According to the interpretation commonly received, that picture is ideal whose component parts are representative of the utmost perfection of Nature, whether with respect to beauty or other considerations of fitness in the objects represented, according to their respective kinds, and also the most perfect arrangement or composition of these parts so as to form an equally perfect whole. The extreme of this ideal asserts that this required perfection is not to be found or rarely found in single examples of natural objects, nor in any existing combination of them. In order to compose the ideal picture, then, the artist must know what constitutes the perfection of every object employed, according to its kind, and its circumstances, so as to be able to gather from individuals the collective idea. This view of Idealism does not propose any deviation from the truth, but on the contrary, demands the most rigid adherence to the law of its highest development.

Realism, therefore, if any way distinguishable from Idealism, must consist in the acceptance of ordinary forms and combinations as found. If strictly confined to this, it is, indeed, an inferior grade of Art; but as no one contends that the representation of ordinary or common-place nature is an ultimatum in Art, the term Realism signifies little else than a disciplinary stage of Idealism, according to the interpretation given, and is misapplied when used in opposition to it, for the ideal is, in fact, nothing more than the perfection of the real.

Every step of progress towards truthful representation of Nature will be so much gained of the knowledge indispensable to the attainment of the ideal, for all the generic elements of natural objects, by which one kind is distinguished from another, are the same in the imperfect as in the perfect specimen. The difference lies in the disposition of them; so when you shall have learned all that characterizes the oak as oak, you will be prepared to apply those characteristics according to the requirements of ideal beauty, to the production of the ideal oak. And this process continued through all forms and combinations, defines the creative power of Art, not in producing new things for its special purpose, but in supplying from Nature's general fullness, all particular deficiencies in whatsoever things she has furnished for its use. Thus far the meaning of Idealism is limited to the perfection of beauty with generic character and fitness in combinations. But the ideal of Landscape Art does not end here; it embraces, and with even higher meaning, the application of these perfections to the expression of a particular sentiment in the subject of the picture,—whether it be the representation of the repose and serenity of Nature in quiet and familiar scenes, or of her sterner majesty in the untrodden wilderness, as well as of her passional action in the whirlwind and storm—each has its own distinctive ideality. In this direction we come to the action of the imaginative faculty, which perfects the high Ideal.

In so far as we have arrived at any understanding of the term Idealism and Realism, there does not appear any definite line of distinction between them, or at best, these terms are inexpressive, if intended to describe separate departments of Art power; nor can I discern wherein the imaginative faculty exercises an influence independent of the perfect ideal of representative truth, but only in extending its meaning to the utmost limit, spiritualizing, as it were, the images of inanimate objects, and appealing through them to the inmost susceptibility of the mind and heart, thus becoming the highest attribute of the great Artist in developing the true ideal. Hence its legitimate action is not seen as creating an imaginary world, as some suppose; but in revealing the deep meaning of the real creation around and within us.

The imagination, like every other element of genius, can only be comprehended

in its visible impress on whatsoever things it touches, always identical, but with comparative degrees of power, at times dimly shadowed, at others glowing with impassioned feeling. The faint blush of morning light that calls up the sleeping mists of the valley, may declare its presence as surely as the lurid flash that

"sets on fire
The heavens with falling thunderbolts."

It is not my purpose, however, to discuss the nature of the imaginative faculty, nor the subtle abstractions of idealism. It is sufficient if we have arrived safely at the conclusion, that all the elements with which the imagination deals, and on which idealism is based, exist visibly in Nature, and are, therefore, not separate creations of Art, my chief object being to guard against the false notion that High Landscape Art disregards all restrictions imposed by the law of truthful representation of nature.

One important inference, at least, is derived from what has been said—that is, if a student who is capable of perceiving and appreciating the beautiful, seldom finds in any given subject selected for study that completeness of individual parts or general arrangement which gives entire satisfaction, and takes on himself the responsibility of changing or omitting objectionable features, with the view to idealize without reference to the principle of ideal beauty, which preserves all characteristic forms inviolate, the chance is, that what is gained in grace will not compensate for the loss of the vigorous expression which it displaces, and that it is better to accept the model as nature has disposed it, without thought of change, until such time as increase of knowledge and mature judgment shall enable him to supply deficiencies without loss of character: for example, to prune the tree, if required, or add an additional branch, as by natural growth, instead of engrafting on it for the sake of beauty in form, offshoots that falsify its particular species.

And further: with motives similar to those which induce the student prematurely to attempt improvements in the model before him, he is often mistakenly impelled to make long journeys in search of the picturesque, in order to gain attention and win applause, when, by the common roadside, and on the banks of familiar streams near home, provident Nature has furnished elements of ideal beauty easily approached, and more than sufficient for the wants of all the incipient stages of study, and when faithfully transcribed, more essentially beautiful, and more certain to win admiration from those whose approbation is desirable, than any abortive display of the grand and striking features of Nature can ever produce. Extensive scenes—of wild or other impressive character, as well as rare and extraordinary effects, are not subjects for the young artist, and why should he seek them when the simple and familiar passages above indicated, like the domestic virtues—not only estimable for their intrinsic loveliness but also for the total absence of ostentation—and being appreciable by all, will be more certain of just and ample reward.

Much has been said by writers on Art as well as artists, in disparagement of what they call *servile imitation* of Nature, as unworthy of genius and degrading to Art, cramping invention, and fettering the imagination, in short, productive only of mere matter-of-fact works. What is meant by servile imitation, so called, is difficult to understand. If its meaning is limited to that view of realism which accepts commonplace forms and appearances, without searching for the ideal of natural beauty, the objections are valid; but if it comprehends the faithful representation of all that is most beautiful and best fitted for the entire purposes of Art, really existing and accessible, and ever waiting to be gathered up by earnest love und untiring labor, then is it an utter fallacy, born of indolence and conceit. With the faculty to perceive and select from the infinite beauty and significance of Nature broadcast throughout her wide domain, surely no artist can reasonably complain for lack of unbounded liberty. Let him take the pains to store his memory with the unlimited *material* thus furnished, and the inventive and imaginative faculties will have enough to do in developing every conceivable result, and in ample measure for the supply of the most insatiate desires of Art.

It appears to me sheer folly to talk about too close imitation of Nature, in any object or appearance eligible and worthy for the highest or humblest purposes of Art, or of too servile reliance on the continuous practical study of them. Nor can we dispense with such study, unless something more worthy can be found to supply its place, and render the study unnecessary. This the free-thinking Art-advocate does not pretend to furnish, but merely demands permission to deviate at pleasure from, or not to be tied down to, literal transcripts. If such transcripts were practicable, which is not the case, the injurious effect of the alleged servility is after all dependent on the capacity of the student, for where the faculties exist to make a right use of all study of Nature, there can be no possible danger, no restriction to the freest exercise; on the other hand, where they do not exist, the fetter, if any be found, will be well applied, and fortunate for Art, if applied to arrest the multiplication of inane compositions and unmeaning details which make up the great majority of landscape pictures everywhere abounding. The supposed evil, then, of this *servile imitation,* is a mere bugbear, and so far as it concerns the unimaginative artist, such a course is his surest safeguard against the repetition and sameness, of whatsoever description, to which he is constantly exposed.

Who has ever seen the glowing sunlight or transparent silvery atmosphere too servilely imitated? The playful surface or

thoughtful depth of lucid waters—their rage when swollen by the outpourings of heaven, or lashed into foam by the mighty winds—who has imitated these too servilely? And the like beauty and sublimity of the glorious sky—when shall we see an imitation too servile of its eternal changefulness? The long processions of the quiet cirri, in their robes of purity skirting the gorgeous thrones of majestic cumuli, and the dark rain-clouds, agitated and convulsed with awful threatenings, like a revolutionary tumult,

> "—— with fear of change
> Perplexing monarchs!"

And then, before the agile hand can have traced some record of their brief existence, fading away in filmy light, or losing form in broad mysterious shadows, and again reviving in different forms and combinations, now dim with foreboding gloom, now rivaling the sun in dazzling splendor, with every intermediate gradation and contrast within the range of human perception—can this be imitated at all, much less too servilely!

And in many other constituents of the great picture—according to their purport and consequence—the most beautiful tree of its species—the rock, for its picturesqueness with generic character—wherein is there danger on the score of truthful servility? And finally, why is every distinguished Landscapist noted for constant out-door studiousness,—Claude, according to Vasari, from morning till nightfall at work in the open fields or on the quays, from whence he drew his far-famed sea-ports—Turner, at all hours under the open sky, *washing in* his memoranda of the flitting effects which display his imaginative power and versatile invention! and other diligent students of Nature of like habits. Why should such men be for ever toiling at the great fountain, if the artificial cisterns of the studio were not inadequate to quench their thirst?

Let us away, then, with these false alarms, and be thankful in the assurance that it is by reverent attention to the realized forms of Nature alone, that Art is enabled by its delegated power to reproduce some measure of the profound and elevated emotions which the contemplation of the visible works of God awaken. Could the picture do more by means of whatsoever Art-license or departure from the truth?

Imitation of Nature is indeed servile, and every way unworthy, when it discards the necessity of selection, and indiscriminately accepts all things as of equal value, not only bestowing the same care on the wild thistle of the field as on the rose and on the passion-flower, but without discerning the two-fold commendations of superior beauty and significance, as indicated in the perfume and in the symbolism which invest the latter with higher claims to a place in the Art-conservatory.

Yours truly,

A. B. DURAND.

Entered according to Act of Congress.

LETTER IX

DEAR SIR:—If you have ever ascended a high mountain, even by a well-defined path, you must have encountered many difficulties, in crag and chasm, and other unforeseen obstacles, and have, at least, practically learned, that a short sentence of directions involved miles of toilsome labor, and it is thus with the precepts and practice of Art; especially in the direction I have endeavored to point out. But believing it to be the direct path to the main summit, I could not commend an easier way to a secondary elevation. As far as my experience and observation extend, I have uniformly found that coldness and opacity of color, stiffness and hardness of contour, with a general repulsiveness in effect, characterize, for the most part, the early efforts of the conscientious student of Nature; He often becomes disheartened, and almost persuaded, on comparing his own with the productions of the mature artist, that the beauty of the latter is the result of deviation from, rather than adherence to the truth. In such an inference he may be greatly mistaken, as will appear, on close examination, and instead of being regarded as discouraging, it should be construed in the opposite direction. In the first place, much practice and observation are indispensable to the acquirement of the mechanical skill necessary to express the precision with the *delicacy* of Nature's outlines; so that the first endeavors will invariably result in hardness, if not ungracefulness, just in proportion to the conscientiousness of the effort; and then, if the student be peculiarly sensitive to the attraction of form, color is sure to be overlooked, and even so far as observed, his representation of it will more likely be too cold than otherwise, for the great mass of local color, out of sunlight, is, at least, neutral, inclining to coolness, and even the additional warmth imparted by sunlight is attributable to its glow as much as to its actual warmth in color. And this glow, be it remembered, is the great charm and secret of light, most difficult to realize.

Now, I have already stated that imitation, if ever desirable, is unattainable except to a very limited extent, and above all, most limited in reference to the glow of sunlight. If, then, we attempt to express it by matching its local color, the inherent lack of the glowing quality in our pigments, defeats the aim, and as warmth is the local distinctive quality of the light, we find, by increasing its apparent warmth, a nearer approach to the glowing is attained. This may be called one of the licenses of Art, or rather one of its modes for attaining a more perfect representation of that which is inimitable in Nature. As a general rule, then, we must express the real by increasing the apparent warmth of light, or, at least, keep on the warm side rather than the cold. And, further, in regard to hardness of outline; the forms of objects—the lines of separation or relief from each other—are easily misconceived, or not truly estimated by the eye. We perceive objects in juxtaposition to be decidedly detached from each other, and so they are, but rarely by any uniform line of separation, either dark or light, though occasionally sharp and cutting in these respects; but more frequently they are blended or assimilated with each other, so that the real cause of separation is found in a few points of sharp light or dark, aided as may be by color. The principle of relief or separation of parts is one of the most subtle and capricious in Nature, and accordingly, most likely to perplex the young student, since it never ceases to be a puzzle to the practised artist. If we cannot follow all the modes by which Nature carries out this principle, we must adopt such as are found to be most sure and practicable, and, at the same time, most beautiful. Among them is that of *variety*, that is, unequal hardness and softness of contour, contrast of color, and abruptness and gradation in light and dark; for example, any prominent object uniformly relieved by the same strength of outline, however beautiful in itself, may thereby become offensive, yet Nature often thus presents herself: on the other hand, she as often varies that relief as above stated, and we feel its superior beauty. The trunk of a tall tree, or a long line of horizon, objectionable because of their monotony, become agreeable by inequality of relief, losing their contour in one place, and sharply defining it in another. This may suffice for the present to indicate somewhat of the process by which Art transcribes Nature, not only selecting her most beautiful and expressive forms, but choosing with equal care among the various influences by which they are affected in relation to each other, and it may be also taken as a hint in reference to what are termed licences of Art.

If you find, that in order to obtain the glow of light, you must increase its warmth of color, you are licensed to do it; if continued sharpness of outline is offensive, you are licensed to vary it, because Nature herself is variable on these points, and because one condition is more beautiful than the other. But when it is simply a question of choice, there is no license, *that* signifying the liberty to deviate from law, and since Art is inadequate to represent *all* Nature's beauty with equal truthfulness, there is no law to interfere with whatsoever license that shall be found to increase its representative power.

The extent of such license must for ever remain a disputable question. But I believe that none are desirable which oppose any of the great truths of Nature, and that it is rather permission to exaggerate certain points in order to represent their real importance, as if by increasing the warmth of light to express its glow, or to give more than natural intensity to a dark, in order to express the force of surrounding light, and, if needs be, to keep subordinate objects from impertinent obtrusiveness, by subduing their natural attractiveness, whether of details, color, or magnitude. To express the apparent height of a mountain, it is found necessary to exaggerate the real elevation in the representation: this is a license not opposed to truth, but essential to its realization. Whatever, then, may be the extent of Art-license, one thing is certain, it can never be profitably exercised but for the more complete expression of the sentiment of Nature, material and spiritual, wherein we discern the true mission of Art.

Perhaps we may pursue the subject of license still further to advantage. In requiring adherence to truthful representation, I wish not to be understood as insisting on literal portraiture, even in cases of actual view painting, that is, with regard to the entire details of any given scene. There can be no scene worthy of being painted that does not possess certain characteristic features, which constitute its interest. These features are obvious at a glance, and must be preserved inviolate: there are others more or less subordinate,—such should receive attention according to their relative importance; and there are still others of no importance at all, and may be disposed of at the pleasure of the artist, so long as they are not rendered obtrusive. Now, the artist is not only licensed, but enjoined to modify, or entirely omit all these subordinate details, whenever they detract from the beauty, or other interest of predominant features; when he has acquired the knowledge necessary to do it with certainty. He may displace a tree, for instance, if disagreeable, or render it a more perfect one of its kind if retained, but the elevations and depressions of the earth's surface composing the middle ground and distance, the magnitude of objects, and extent of space presented in the view, characteristic outline, undulating or angular, of all the great divisions, may not be changed in the least perceptible degree, most especially the mountain and hill forms. On these God has set his signet, and Art may not remove it when the picture professes to represent the scene. Nor is it to be desired; for the ever-changing sky sends down the winged messengers of cloud and sunshine that overrule the refractory contours, unfolding to the utmost the beauty of the beautiful, and veiling with discriminating care the unlovely portions.

View painting is ranked as the inferior department of landscape Art, and, generally speaking, it is so, inasmuch as it precludes the exercise of the creative power in invention and composition. But it does not preclude the action of the imagination in all that relates to effect and color, and although it is not permitted to violate the integrity of portraiture, it may invest its portraits with the same profound expression that the imagination impresses on the ideal picture. And while it affords the only safe ground for the unimaginative, it is one for the most signal achievements of the imaginative artist, in demonstration of his superiority. For his loftier stature enables him to overlook, without trespass, the enclosure which bounds the view of humbler minds—he comprehends the capabilities of the material presented in all its relations to human sympathy (whether already combined in the actual view, or noted on the tablet of memory), and he reads the historic record which time has written on all things for our instruction, through all the stages of their silent transition, since the period when this verdant earth was a lifeless, molten chaos, "void and without form."

However subordinate the department of view-painting may be considered in its general sense, it rises at times to the level of the highest creations of Art, so far as the *expression* of its elements is concerned. Many an actual picture of this description may be found amongst the primitive wilds of Nature, where

> "Upon her bosom yet
> After the lapse of untold centuries,
> The freshness of her far-beginning lies."

The reverent imagination ceases to exult in its own conscious power to change and recreate, while it contemplates the great miracle of God's creation, "which still goes on in silence"—where all deficiency in picturesqueness is more than supplied by that "freshness of the far-beginning" of things which connects us with the past, and symbolizes our immortality.

I would not limit the creative power of Art, nor undervalue its importance; it may not be possible to define or know its limit, but we do know that it is worthily employed, when it reproduces by actual transcript, or otherwise, a sensible demonstration of

> "The perpetual work of thy creation,
> Finished, yet removed for ever,"

and unfolds by the "eloquence of beauty," and signs of "healing sympathy," perpetual sources of enlightened and pure enjoyment.

Yours truly,

A. B. Durand.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1855, by STILLMAN & DURAND, In the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Southern District of New York.