

THE
ATLANTIC MONTHLY.

A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics.

VOL. XV. — FEBRUARY, 1865. — NO. LXXXVIII.

OUR FIRST GREAT PAINTER, AND HIS WORKS.

ON the 8th of July, 1843, Washington Allston died. Twenty-one years have since gone by; and already his name has a fine flavor of the past added to its own proper aroma.

In twenty-one years Art has made large advances, but not in the direction of imagination. In that rare and precious quality the works of Allston remain preëminent as before.

It is now so long ago as 1827 that the first exhibition of pictures at the Boston Athenæum took place; and then and there did Allston first become known to his American public. Returned from Europe after a long absence, he had for some years been living a retired, even a recluse life, was personally known to a few friends, and by name only to the public. The exhibition of some of his pictures on this occasion made known his genius to his fellow-citizens; and who, having once felt the strange charm of that genius, but recalls with joyful interest the happy hour when he was first brought under its influence? I well remember, even at this distance in time, the mystic, charmed presence that hung about the "Jeremiah dictating his Prophecy to Baruch the Scribe," "Beatrice,"

"The Flight of Florimel," "The Triumphal Song of Miriam on the Destruction of Pharaoh and his Host in the Red Sea," and "The Valentine." I was then young, and had yet to learn that the quality that so attracted me in these pictures is, indeed, the rarest virtue in any work of Art, — that, although pictures without imagination are without savor, yet that the larger number of those that are painted are destitute of that grace, — and that, when, in later years, I should visit the principal galleries of Europe, and see the masterpieces of each master, I still should return to the memory of Allston's works as to something most precious and unique in Art. I have also, since that time, come to believe, that, while every sensitive beholder must feel the charm of Allston's style, its intellectual ripeness can be fully appreciated only by the aid of a foreign culture.

Passing through Europe with this impression of Allston's genius, in the Venetians I first recognized his kindred; in Venice I found the school in which he had studied, and in which Nature had fitted him to study: for his eye for color was like his management of it, — Venetian. His treatment of heads

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1865, by TICKNOR AND FIELDS, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

VOL. XV. — NO. 88.

9

has a round, ripe, sweet fullness which reminds one of the heads in the "Paradiso" of Tintoretto, — that work which deserves a place in the foremost rank of the world's masterpieces. The great praise implied in this comparison is justly due to Allston. The texture and handling of his work are inimitable. Without any appearance of labor, all crudeness is absorbed; the outlines of objects are not so much softened as emptied of their color and substance, so that the light appears to pass them. The finishing is so judicious that the spectator believes he could see more on approaching nearer. The eye searches the shade, and sees and defines the objects at first concealed by it. The eye is not satiated, but by the most artful means excited to greater appetite. The coloring is not so much harmonious as harmony itself, out of which melodies of color play through the picture in a way that is found in no other master but Paul Veronese. As Allston himself expressed it, he liked to echo his colors; and as an echo is best heard where all else is silence, so the pure repose of these compositions gives extraordinary value to such delicate repetitions of color. The effect is, one might say, more musical than pictorial. This peculiar and musical effect is most noticeable in the landscapes. They are like odes, anthems, and symphonies. They run up the scale, beginning with the low-toned "Moonlight," through the great twilight piece called "After Sunset," the "Forest Scene," where it seems always afternoon, the gray "Mountain Landscape," a world composed of stern materials, the cool "Sunrise on the Mediterranean," up to the broad, pure, Elysian daylight of the "Italian Landscape," with atmosphere full of music, color, and perfume, cooled and shaded by the breezy pines, open far away to the sea, and the sky peopled with opalescent clouds, trooping wide on their celestial errands.

Of this last landscape the poetic merit is as great as the artistic excellence is unrivalled. Whoever has made pictures and handled colors knows well

that a subject pitched on a high key of light is vastly more difficult to manage than one of which the highest light is not above the middle tint. To keep on that high key which belongs to broad daylight, and yet preserve harmony, repose, and atmosphere, is in the highest degree difficult; but here it is successfully done, and again reminds us of the Paul Veronese treatment. Though a quiet picture, it is full of brilliancy. It represents a broad and partly shaded expanse, full, also, of light and sweet sunshine, through which the eye travels till it rests on the distant mountain, rising majestically in grand volcanic forms from the horizon plains. The sky is filled with cloudy veils, floating, prismatic; some quiet water, crossed by a bridge which rests on round arches, is in the middle distance; and a few trees near the foreground form the group from which rises the stone-pine, which is the principal feature in the picture, and gives it its character. As I write this, I fear that any reader who has not seen the picture to which I refer will immediately think of Turner's Italian landscapes, so familiar to all the world through engravings, where a stone-pine is lifted against the sky as a mass of dark to contrast with the mass of light necessarily in the same region of the picture. But such effects, however legitimate and powerful in the hands of Turner, were not in Allston's manner; they would ruin and break the still harmony which was the law of his mind and of his compositions. Under this tree, on the path, fall flickering spots of sunshine, in which sit or stand two or three figures. The scarlet and white of their dresses, catching the sunshine, make the few high notes that cause the whole piece to throb like music.

There is also a large Swiss landscape, possessing in an extraordinary degree the pure, keen atmosphere, as well as the grand mountain forms, of the Alpine spaces. To look on this piece exhilarates as does the sight of the Alps themselves; and it strikes the

eye as a shrill trumpet sound the ear. This landscape, a grand antithesis to the last described, marks a great range of power in the mind that produced them both.

But Allston was not a landscape-painter. His landscapes are few in number, though great in excellence. They are poetic in the truest sense; they are laden with thought and life, and are of "imagination all compact." They transport the beholder to a fairer world, where, through and behind the lovely superficialities of things, he sees the hidden ideal of each member,—of rock, sea, sky, earth, and forest,—and feels by a clear magnetism that he is in presence of the very truth of things.

We now come to a class of Allston's pictures which are known chiefly, perhaps only, in Boston. They are justly prized by their owners as possessions of inestimable value; they are the works that more than others display his peculiar genius. I allude to certain ideal heads and figures called by these names: "Beatrice," "Rosalie," "The Bride," "The Spanish Girl," "The Evening Hymn," "The Tuscan Girl," "Miriam," "The Valentine," "Lorenzo and Jessica," "The Flight of Florimel," "The Roman Lady," and others; and I shall give a short description of the most important of these, sometimes in my own words, and sometimes in those of one who is the only writer I can find who has said anything distinctive about the works of Allston. I refer to William Ware, who died in the act of preparing a course of lectures on the Genius of Allston,—a task for which he was well qualified by his artistic organization, his long study of Art, and his clear appreciation of Allston's power.

In these smaller ideal pieces Allston seems to have found his own genius, so peculiar are they, so different from the works of all other masters, and so divine in their expressive repose. I say divine in their repose with full intention; for this is a repose, not idle and voluptuous, not poetic and dreamy, but a repose full of life, a repose which

commands and controls the beholder, and stirs within him that idealism that lies deep hidden in every mind. These pieces consist of heads and figures, mostly single, distinct as individuals, and each a heaven of beauty in itself.

The method of this artist was to suppress all the coarser beauties which make up the substance of common pictures. He was the least *ad captandum* of workers. He avoided bright eyes, curls, and contours, glancing lights, strong contrasts, and colors too crude for harmony. He reduced his beauty to her elements, so that an inner beauty might play through her features. Like the Catholic discipline which pales the face of the novice with vigils, seclusion, and fasting, and thus makes room and clears the way for the movements of the spirit, so in these figures every vulgar grace is suppressed. No classic contours, no languishing attitudes, no asking for admiration,—but a severe and chaste restraint, a modest sweetness, a slumbering intellectual atmosphere, a graceful self-possession, eyes so sincere and pure that heaven's light shines through them, and, beyond all, a hovering spiritual life that makes each form a presence.

Perhaps the two most remarkable and original of the pieces I have named above are the "Beatrice" and the "Rosalie." Of the "Beatrice" there has been much discussion whether she could have been intended to represent the Beatrice of Dante. To me it appears that there is nothing like that world- and heaven-renowned lady in this our Beatrice. She sits alone: one sees that in the expression of her eyes. Her dress is of almost conventual simplicity; the colors rich, but sober; the style flowing and mediæval. She has soft brown hair; soft, velvet-soft, brown eyes; features not salient, but rounded into the contours of the head; her whole expression receptive, yet radiant with sentiment. The complexion of a tender rose, equally diffused, gives an indescribable air of healthful delicacy to the face. The expression of the whole

figure is that of one in a very dream of sentiment. Her twilight eyes see without effort into the very soul of things, as other eyes look at their surfaces. The sentiment of this figure is so powerful that by its gentle charm it fastens the beholder, who gazes and cannot withdraw his eyes, wondering what is the spell that can so hold him to that face, which is hardly beautiful, surely without surface beauty. I once heard a person who was unaccustomed to the use of critical terms say of these creations of Allston, "Here is beauty, but not the beauty that glares on you"; and this phrase, so odd, but so original, well describes the beauty of this Beatrice, who, though now transfigured by sentiment and capable of being a home-goddess, does not seem intended to shine in starry circles.

But for the beauty of execution in this picture, it is unsurpassed. It is in this respect like the most beautiful things ever painted by Raphael, — like the *Madonna del Cardellino*, whose face has light within, "*luce di dentro*," as is the expressive Italian phrase, — and is also like another picture that I have seen, attributed to Raphael, in the collection of the late Baron Kestner at Rome.

Visiting the extremely curious and valuable gallery of this gentleman, the Hanoverian Minister at Rome, after making us begin at the beginning, among the very early masters, he led us on with courteous determination through his specimens of all the schools, and made us observe the characteristics of each school and each master, till at last we rested in the last room, where hung a single picture covered with a silken curtain. This at last, with sacred and reverent ceremony, was drawn aside, and revealed a portrait by Raphael, — the portrait of a lady, young and beautiful, and glowing with a tender sentiment which recalled to my remembrance these heads by Allston, not alone in the sentiment, but in the masterly beauty of the painting. M. Kestner told us he supposed the picture to be the portrait of that niece of Cardinal Bibbiena to whom Raphael was betrothed. The picture

had come into his possession by one of those wonderful chances which have preserved so many valuable works from destruction. At a sale of pictures at Bologna, he told us he noticed a very ordinary head, badly enough painted, but with very beautiful hands, — hands which betrayed the work of a master; and he conjectured this to be some valuable picture, hastily covered with coarse work to deceive the emissaries of a conqueror when they came to select and carry off the most valuable pictures from the galleries of the conquered city. He gave his agent orders to purchase it, and when in his possession a little careful work removed the upper colors and discovered one of the most beautiful heads ever painted even by Raphael. Though it may and will seem extravagant, I am satisfied that there are several heads by Allston that would lose nothing by comparison with this admirable work. Indeed, though M. Kestner's picture is a portrait, it is a work so entirely in the same class with the "Beatrice," the "Rosalie," the "Valentine," and some other works of Allston, in sentiment and execution, that the comparison is fairly challenged.

"Rosalie" is different from "Beatrice." She seems listening to music; and so the little poem written by the author, and recited by him when showing the picture newly finished to his friends, describes her. The face indicates, not a dream of sentiment, like that of "Beatrice," but rather a rapture. She is "caught on a higher strain." She is a creature as passionate as tender; more like Juliet than like Miranda; fit to be the love of a poet, and to reward his song with the overflowing cup of love. In this figure also beauty melts into feeling. The composition of color is masterly; in the draperies it is inlaid in opposing fields, by which means the key of the whole is raised, and the rising rapture of expression powerfully seconded. Did I not fear to insist too much on what may be only a private fancy, I should say that these colors reverberate like some rich orchestral strain of music.

“The Roman Lady reading.” This Roman lady might be the mother of the Gracchi, so stately and of so grand a style is she. But she is a modern, for she reads from a book. She might be Vittoria Colonna, the loved of Michel Angelo, so grave, so dignified is her aspect. The whole figure is reading. A vital intelligence seems to pass from the eyes to the book. Nothing tender in this woman, who, if a Roman, takes life after the “high Roman fashion.” The beauty and perfect representation of the hands should be noticed here, as well as in the “Rosalie” and “Beatrice.”

“Triumphal Song of Miriam on the Destruction of Pharaoh and his Hosts in the Red Sea.” This is a three-quarter length figure. She stands singing, with one hand holding the timbrel, the other thrown aloft, the whole form upborne by the swelling triumphal song. I hardly know what it is in this picture which takes one back so far into the world’s early days. The figure is neither antique nor modern; the face is not entirely of the Hebrew type, but the tossing exultation seems so truly to carry off the wild thrill of joy when a people is released from bondage, that it is almost unnecessary to put the words into her mouth, — “Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.” This figure is dramatically imaginative. In looking at it, one feels called on to sing triumphal songs with Miriam, and not to stand idly looking. The magnetism of the artist at the moment of conception powerfully seizes on the beholder.

“The Valentine” is described by William Ware* as follows.

“For the ‘Valentine’ I may say, though to some it may seem an extravagance, I have never been able to invent the terms that would sufficiently express my admiration of that picture, — I mean, of its color; though as a whole it is admirable for its composition, for the fewness of the objects admitted,

* *Lectures on the Works and Genius of Washington Allston.* Boston: Phillips, Sampson, & Co. 1852.

for the simplicity and naturalness of the arrangement. But the charm is in the color of the flesh, of the head, of the two hands. The subject is a young woman reading a letter, holding the open letter with both the hands. The art can go no further, nor as I believe has it ever gone any further. Some pigments or artifices were unfortunately used, which have caused the surface to crack, and which require the picture now to be looked at at a further remove than the work on its own account needs or requires; it even demands a nearer approach, in order to be well seen, than these cracks will permit. But these accidental blemishes do not materially interfere with the appreciation and enjoyment of the picture. It has what I conceive to be that most rare merit, — it has the same universal hue of nature and truth in both the shadows and the lights which Nature has, but *Art* almost never, and which is the great cross to the artist. The great defect and the great difficulty, in imitating the hues of flesh, lies in the shadows and the half-shadows. You will often observe in otherwise excellent works of the most admirable masters, that, the moment their pencil passes to the shadows of the flesh, especially the half-shadows, truth, though not always a certain beauty, forsakes them. The shadows are true in their degree of dark, but false in tone and hue. They are true shadows, but not true flesh. You see the form of a face, neck, arm, hand in shadow, but not flesh in shade; and were that portion of the form sundered from its connection with the body, it could never be told, by its color alone, what it was designed to be. Allston’s wonderful merit is, (and it was Titian’s,) that the hue of life and flesh is the same in the shadow as in the light. It is not only shadow or dark, but it is flesh in shadow. The shadows of most artists, even very distinguished ones, are green, or brown, or black, or lead color, and have some strong and decided tint other than that of flesh. The difficulty with most seems to have been so insuperable, that they cut the knot at a single

blow, and surrendered the shadows of the flesh, as an impossibility, to green or brown or black. And in the general imitation of the flesh tints the greatest artists have apparently abandoned the task in despair, and contented themselves with a correct utterance of form and expression, with well-harmonized darks and lights, with little attention to the hues of Nature. Such was Caravaggio always, and Guercino often, and all their respective followers. Such was Michel Angelo, and often Raffaëlle, — though at other times the color of Raffaëlle is not inferior in truth and glory to Titian, greatest of the Venetian colorists: as in his portraits of Leo X., Julius, and some parts of his frescos. But for the most part, though he had the genius for everything, for color as well as form, yet one may conjecture he found color in its greatest excellence too laborious for the careful elaboration which can alone produce great results, too costly of time and toil, the sacrifice *too great of the greater to the less.* Allston was apparently never weary of the labor which would add one more tint of truth to the color of a head or a hand, or even of any object of still life, that entered into any of his compositions. Any eye that looks can see that it was a most laborious and difficult process by which he secured his results, — by no superficial wash of glaring pigments, as in the color of Rubens, whose carnations look as if he had finished the forms at once, the lights and the darks in solid opaque colors, and then with a free, broad brush or sponge washed in the carmine, lake, and vermilion, to confer the requisite amount of red, — but, on the contrary, wrought out in solid color from beginning to end, by a painful and sagacious formation, on the palette, of the very tint by which the effect, the lights, shadows, and half-shadows, and the thousand almost imperceptible gradations of hue which bind together the principal masses of light and shade, was to be produced.”

Here Mr. Ware undoubtedly errs in attributing the success of Allston's flesh

tints to the use of solid color alone. Such effects are not possible without the aid of transparent colors in glazing; but it is the judicious combination of solid with transparent pigments, combined not bodily on the palette, but in their use on the canvas, that gives to oil-painting all its unrivalled power in the hands of a master. Allston was accustomed to inlay his pictures in solid crude color with a medium that hardened like stone, and to leave them months and even years to dry before finishing them with the glazing colors, which worked in his hands like magic over such a well-hardened surface. By this method of working he was able to secure solidity of appearance, richness of color, unity of effect, and atmospheric repose and tenderness enveloping all objects in the picture. Many of his unfinished works are left in the first stage of this process, showing precisely how far he relied on the use of solid color; and by comparing the works left in this state with his finished pictures, one may see how much he was indebted to the use of transparent glazes for the beauty, tenderness, and variety of color in the last stages of his work.

In 1839 there was an exhibition in Boston of such of the works of Allston as could be borrowed for the occasion. This was managed by the friends of the artist for his benefit. The exhibition was held in Harding's Gallery, a square, well-lighted room, but too small for the larger pictures. It was, however, the best room that could be procured for the purpose. Here were shown forty-five pictures, including one or two drawings. There was something peculiarly happy in this exhibition of works by a single mind. On entering, the presence of the artist seemed to fill the room. The door-keeper held the door, but Allston held the room; for his spirit flowed from all the walls, and helped the spectator to see his work aright. This accompaniment of the artist's presence, which hangs about all truly artistic works, is disturbed in a miscellaneous collection, where jarring influences contend, and the worst pictures outshine

and outglare the best, and for a time triumph over them. But in this exhibition no such disturbance met one, but rather one was received into an atmosphere of peace and harmony, and in such a temper beheld the pictures.

The largest picture on the walls was "The Dead Man restored to Life by touching the Bones of the Prophet Elisha." This is a great subject, greatly treated, full of power and expression.

The next in size was "Jeremiah dictating his Prophecy to Baruch, the Scribe." This picture contains two figures, both seated. It is a picture the scale of which demands that it be seen from a distance, though its perfect execution makes a nearer view desirable also. If it were seen at the end of some church aisle, through arches, and with a good light upon it, the effect would be much enforced. It is a picture of extraordinary expression. The Prophet, the grandest figure among the sons of men, with those strange eyes that Allston loved to paint, — eyes which see verities, not objects, — is looking not upward, but forward, not into space, but into spirit; with one hand raised, as if listening, he receives the heavenly communication, which the beautiful youth at his feet is writing in a book. The force and beauty of this work are unsurpassed. It is a perfect picture: grand in design, perfect in composition, splendid in color, successful in execution, and the figures full of expression, — for the inspiration of the Prophet seems to overflow into the Scribe, whose attitude indicates enthusiastic receptiveness; it is, indeed, in every pictorial quality that can be named, admirable.

The other pictures in this collection, with the exception of the large Swiss landscape, were of cabinet size. Some of them have been already described in this paper. I will give Mr. Ware's description of "Lorenzo and Jessica," and of "The Spanish Girl." Mr. Ware says: —

"But perhaps the most exquisite examples of repose are the 'Lorenzo and Jessica,' and 'The Spanish Girl.' These

are works also to which no perfection could be added, — from which, without loss, neither touch nor tint could be subtracted. We might search through all galleries, the Louvre or any other, for their equals or rivals in either conception or execution. I speak of these familiarly, because I suppose you all to be familiar with them. The first named, the 'Lorenzo and Jessica,' is a very small picture, one of the smallest of Allston's best ones; but no increase of size could have enlarged its beauty or in any sense have added to its value. The lovers sit side by side, their hands clasped, at the dim hour of twilight, all the world hushed into silence, not a cloud visible to speck the clear expanse of the darkening sky, as if themselves were the only creatures breathing in life, and they absorbed into each other, while their eyes, turned in the same direction, are turned upon the fading light of the gentle, but brilliant planet, as it sinks below the horizon: the gentle brilliancy, not the setting, the emblem of their mutual loves. As you dwell upon the scene, your only thought is, May this quiet beauty, this delicious calm, never be disturbed, but may

'The peace of the scene pass into the heart!'

In the background, breaking the line of the horizon, but in fine unison with the figures and the character of the atmosphere, are the faint outlines of a villa of Italian architecture, but to whose luxurious halls you can hardly wish the lovers should ever return, so long as they can remain sitting upon that bank. It is all painted in that deep, subdued, but rich tone, in which, except by the strongest light, the forms are scarcely to be made out, but to which, to the mind in some moods, a charm is lent, surpassing all the glory of the sun.

"The Spanish Girl' is another example to the same point. It is one of the most beautiful and perfect of all of Mr. Allston's works. The Spanish girl gives her name to the picture, but it is one of those misnomers of which there are many among his works. One who looks at the picture scarcely ever looks

at, certainly cares nothing for, the Spanish girl, and regards her as merely giving her name to the picture; and when the mind recurs to it afterwards, however many years may have elapsed, while he can recall nothing of the beauty, the grace, or the charms of the Spanish maiden, the landscape, of which her presence is a mere inferior incident, is never forgotten, but remains forever as a part of the furniture of the mind. In this part of the picture, the landscape, it must be considered as one of the most felicitous works of genius, where, by a few significant tints and touches, there is unveiled a world of beauty. You see the roots of a single hill only, and a remote mountain-summit, but you think of Alps and Andes, and the eye presses onwards till it at last rests on a low cloud at the horizon. It is a mere snatch of Nature, but, though only that, every square inch of the surface has its meaning. It carries you back to what your mind imagines of the warm, reddish tints of the Brown Mountains of Cervantes, where the shepherds and shepherdesses of that pastoral scene passed their happy, sunny hours. The same deep feeling of repose is shown in all the half-developed objects of the hill-side, in the dull, sleepy tint of the summer air, and in the warm, motionless haze that wraps sky, land, tree, water, and cloud. It is quite wonderful by how few tints and touches, by what almost shadowy and indistinct forms, a whole world of poetry can be breathed into the soul, and the mind sent rambling off into pastures, fields, boundless deserts of imaginary pleasures, where only is warmth and sunshine and rest, where only poets dwell, and beauty wanders abroad with her sweeping train, and the realities of the working-day world are for a few moments happily forgotten."

"The Flight of Florimel" is an upright landscape. Florimel, on a white horse, is rushing with long leaps through the forest. The horse and rider are so near the front of the picture as to occupy an important space in the foreground. The lady, in her dress of beaten

gold, with fair hair, and pale, frightened face, clings with both hands to her bridle, and half looks back towards her pursuer. The color of this picture is of exquisite beauty. The tender white and pale yellows of the horse and rider show like fairy colors in a fairy forest. The whole is wonderfully light and airy, flickering between light and shade. The forest has no heavy glooms. The light breaks through everywhere. The forms of the trees are light and piny; the red soil is seen, the roots of the trees, the broken turf, the sandy ground. All the colors are delightfully broken up in the mysterious half-light which confuses the outlines of every object, without making them shadowy. Such a picture one might see with half-shut eyes in a sunny wood, if one had more poetry than prose in one's head, and were well read in the "Faërie Queen."

"A Mother Watching her Sleeping Child." This is a very small picture, remarkable only for its tender sentiment and delightful coloring. The child is nude; the flesh tints of a tender rose, painted with that luminous effect which leaves no memory of paint or pencil-touch behind it.

"American Scenery." This is a small landscape, with something of the Indian Summer haze; and a solitary horseman trotting across the foreground with an indifferent manner, as if he would soon be out of sight, wonderfully enhances the quietness of the scene.

"Isaac of York." This head of a Jew is powerfully painted, warm and rich; as also are two heads called "Sketches of Polish Jews," which were painted at one sitting.

"A Portrait of Benjamin West, late President of the Royal Academy," has all the most admirable qualities that a simple portrait can have.

"A Portrait of the Artist, painted in Rome," is very interesting, from the youthful sweetness of the face.

"Head of St. Peter" is a study for the head of St. Peter in a large picture of the Angel delivering Peter from Prison. In this large picture, lately brought from England to Boston, the

head of the angel is of surpassing beauty, and makes a powerful contrast with that of the Apostle, whose strong Hebrew features are flooded with the light which surrounds his heavenly deliverer.

"The Sisters." This picture represents two young girls of three-quarter size, the back of one turned toward the spectator. In the Catalogue is a note by the artist, who says,—"The air and color of the head with golden hair was imitated from a picture by Titian, called the Portrait of his Daughter,—but not the character or the disposition of the hair, which in the portrait is a crop; the action of the portrait is also different, holding up a casket with both hands. The rest of the picture, with the exception of the curtain in the background, is original." Now this is a very modest as well as honest statement of the artist; for both the figures seem perfectly original, and do not recall Titian's Daughter to the memory, except as an example of a successful study of Titian's color, which I believe all are permitted, nay, recommended, to imitate, if they can. It is, however, quite true, that this picture is less Allstonian than the rest, which makes his explanation welcome. It was undoubtedly painted as a study, and was not an original suggestion of his own mind, as almost everything he has left evidently was,—if internal evidence is evidence enough. Allston himself said, that he never painted anything that did not cost him his whole mind; and those who read his genius in his works can easily believe this statement.

"The Tuscan Girl." This is a very lovely little picture. It is not a study of costume, but a picture of dreamy girlhood musing in a wood. The sentiment of this charming little picture is best described in a little poem with which its first appearance was accompanied, and which opens thus:—

"How pleasant and how sad the turning tide
Of human life, when side by side
The child and youth begin to glide
Along the vale of years:
The pure twin-being for a little space,
With lightsome heart, and yet a graver face,
Too young for woe, but not for tears!"

I will not occupy any more space with describing the pictures in this unique collection. All were not brought together that might have been. One very remarkable small picture, called "Spalatro, or the Bloody Hand," was not with these. Its distance from Boston probably prevented its being risked on the dangers of a long journey.

There are several pictures by Allston in England. Of these I cannot speak, as I have not seen them. Of one, however, "Elijah in the Desert," Mr. Ware gives so striking a description, that I will quote nearly the whole of it.

"I turn with more pleasure to another work of Mr. Allston, even though but few can ever have seen it, but which made upon my own mind, when I saw it immediately after it was completed, an impression of grandeur and beauty never to be effaced, and never recalled without new sentiments of enthusiastic admiration. I refer to his grand landscape of 'Elijah in the Desert,'—a large picture of perhaps six feet by four. It might have been more appropriately named an Asian or Arabian Desert. That is to say, it is a very unfortunate error to give to either a picture or a book a name which raises false expectations; especially is this the case when the name of the picture is a great or imposing one which greatly excites the imagination. What could be more so than this, 'Elijah in the Desert, fed by Ravens'? Extreme and fatal was the disappointment to many, on entering the room, when, looking on the picture, no Elijah was to be seen; at least you had to search for him among the subordinate objects, hidden away among the grotesque roots of an enormous banyan-tree; and the Prophet, when found at last, was hardly worth the pains of the search. But as soon as the intelligent visitor had recovered from his first disappointment, the objects which then immediately filled the eye taught him, that, though he had not found what he had been promised, a Prophet, he had found more than a Prophet, a landscape which in its sublimity excited the

imagination as powerfully as any gigantic form of the Elijah could have done, even though Michel Angelo had drawn it. It is meant to represent, and does perfectly represent, an illimitable desert, a boundless surface of barrenness and desolation, where Nature can bring forth nothing but seeds of death, and the only tree there is dead and withered, not a leaf to be seen nor possible. The only other objects, beside the level of the desert, either smooth with sand or rough with ragged rock, are a range of dark mountains on the right, heavy lowering clouds which overspread and overshadow the whole scene, the roots and wide-spread branches of an enormous banyan-tree, through the tortuous and leafless branches of which the distant landscape, the hills, rocks, clouds, and remote plains are seen. The roots of this huge tree of the desert, in all directions from the main trunk, rise upward, descend, and root themselves again in the earth, then again rise, again descend into the ground and root themselves, and so on, growing smaller and smaller as the process is repeated, till they disappear in the general level of the plain, or lose themselves among the rocks, like the knots and convolutions of a huge family of boa-constrictors. The branches, which almost completely fill the upper part of the picture, are done with such truth to general Nature, are so admirable in color, so wonderful in the treatment of their perspective, that the eye is soon happily withdrawn from any attention to the roots, among which the Prophet sits, receiving the food with which the ravens, as they float towards him, miraculously supply him. . . . You forgot the Prophet, the ravens, the roots, and almost the branches, though these were too vast and multitudinous to be overlooked, and were, moreover, truly characteristic, and dwelt only upon the heavy rolling clouds, the lifeless desert, the sublime masses of the distant mountains, and the indeterminate misty outline of the horizon, where earth and heaven became one. The picture was, therefore, a landscape of a most sublime,

impressive character, and not a mere representation of a passage of Scripture history. It would have been a great gain to the work, if the Scripture passage could have been painted out, and the desert only left. But, as it is, it serves as one further illustration of the characteristic of Mr. Allston's art, of which I have already given several examples. For, melancholy, dark, and terrific almost, as are all the features of the scene, a strange calm broods over it all, as of an ocean, now overhung by black threatening clouds, dead and motionless, but the sure precursors of change and storm; and over the desert hang the clouds which were soon to break and deluge the parched earth and cover it again with verdure. But at present the only motion and life is in the little brook Cherith, as it winds along among the roots of the great tree. The sublime, after all, is better expressed in the calmness, repose, and silence of the 'Elijah,' than in the tempests of Poussin or Vernet, Wilson or Salvator Rosa."

"Belshazzar's Feast." Any criticism of Allston's works would be very imperfect which did not speak of his "Belshazzar's Feast,"—because, though the picture was never finished, it occupied so large a part of the life and thoughts of Allston, that it demands some mention. It had been an object of great interest among Allston's friends before it had been seen by one of them. It was intended by him to fulfil a commission from certain gentlemen of Boston for a large picture, the subject of which was to be chosen by himself. A sum of money was also placed at his disposal with the commission, in order to secure to him leisure and freedom from care, that he might work at his ease, and do justice to his thought. This commission was the result of the confidence in him and his genius which was felt by those friends who knew him best.

The picture was begun, went forward, and was nearly completed, when an important change in the structure of the work was determined on, and un-

dertaken with great courage. As often unfortunately happens in such cases, the interruption to the flow of thought was fatal to the success of the picture. It was laid aside for many years, but was the work actually in hand at the time of Allston's death. When, after that event, his studio was entered by his nearest friends, and the picture so long guarded with jealous reserve was first seen, it was found to be in a disorganized, almost chaotic state. But though fragmentary, the fragments were full of interest. Many passages were perfectly painted, and the whole intention was full of grandeur and beauty. But a picture left in that state should never have been publicly shown. Deeply interesting to artists, and to those familiar with the genius of Allston, it could be only a puzzling wonder to those who go to an exhibition to see finished pictures, and who do not understand those which are not finished. With this work such persons could have no concern. Yet, by what appears a great error of judgment, this worse than unfinished picture was made the subject of a public exhibition, though in a state of incompleteness which the artist during life would not permit his nearest friend to behold. And as if this violation of his wishes were not enough, a stolen and travestied copy soon appeared, and was heralded by placards, on which the words "Great Picture by Washington Allston" were seen in letters large enough to be read across the street, and on which the words "Copy of" were in such very small type that they were unnoticed, except by those who looked for them. This copy went to other cities, and gave of course a most erroneous impression of the great painter's genius.

Among the half-finished pictures found in the studio of Allston after his death were several designs on canvas in chalk or umber. These seemed so valuable, and their condition so perishable, that it was thought best to have them engraved. This was undertaken by a friend and admirer of the artist, Mr. S. H. Perkins, who arranged the

designs and superintended the engraving, and published the work with the aid of a partial subscription and at his own risk. The brothers Cheney engraved the outlines, and with peculiar skill and feeling imitated the broadly expressive chalk lines by combining several delicately traced lines into one. These outlines and sketches were published in 1850.

There are, first, six plates of outlines from heads and figures in a picture of "Michael setting the Watch." This picture must have been painted in England, and is unknown here except by these outlines. From these alone great strength of design might be inferred. There are, besides, "A Sibyl," sitting in a cave-like, rocky place, the eyes dilated with thought, the mouth tenderly fixed; the cave is open to the sea. This design would have proved one of the most characteristic works of Allston, had it been painted. "Dido and Æneas." Then four plates from figures of angels in "Jacob's Dream." This is a picture painted in England for Lord Egremont, and is mentioned in Leslie's Recollections, by the editor of that work, in a minor key of praise. Then comes the outline of a single figure, "Uriel sitting in the Sun." This picture was also painted in England. As Allston was fond of referring to it, and describing the methods he used to represent the light of the sun behind the angel, as if he felt satisfied with the result, it may be inferred that the effort to do so difficult a thing was successful. The sun was painted over a white ground with transparent glazings of the primary colors laid and dried separately, thus combining the colors prismatically to produce white light. The figure of the sitting angel is grandly original, — of the most noble proportions, and full of watchful life, as of one conscious of a great trust.

Then come three compositions, with many figures, — "Heliodorus," "Fairies on the Seashore," and "Titania's Court." These show as much power in composition as the single figures do in design.

The "Fairies on the Seashore" is an exquisitely graceful design, both in the

figures and the landscape. It is a perfect poem, even as it stands in the outline. A strip of sea, a breaking wave, a rocky island, and on the beach begins a stream of fairies, diminishing as it curves up into the sky. The last one on the shore seems lingering, and the next one to her draws her upwards. The design when painted would have had the lower part of the picture in the shadow of night, and the coming morn in the sky, the light of which should be caught on the distant figures up among the clouds.

"Titania's Court" is in a moonlighted space in the forest. Six fairies are dancing in a ring. More are coming out of the depths of the wood and off its rocky heights, hand in hand,—a flow of graceful figures. On the right side of the picture sits Titania, served by her Indian page, who kneels before her, holding an acorn-cup. This page is delicately differenced from the fairies by his straight hair, his features, Asiatic, though handsome, his girdle and bracelets of pearls, and a short striped skirt about his loins. The fairies all have flowing drapery or none, and features regular as Greeks. Two little figures in the air above Titania's head are fanning her with butterflies' wings; others are bringing water in shells and flower-cups; others playing on musical instruments. This is better than most pictures of this often-painted subject, because in it fancy does not override imagination, but helps and serves it.

Another design was in chalk, on a dark canvas, of a ship at sea in a

squall. This is wonderfully imitated in the engraving,—even all the blotches and erasures are there. The curves of the waves in a rolling sea were never better caught in all their subtle force. The clouds have great suggestions.

There is a figure of "The Prodigal Son," from a pencil drawing; and a "Prometheus," also from a pencil sketch.

Allston seemed equally at home in drawing powerful figures in action, or delicate dreamy figures in repose. He had the true imaginative power which realizes and understands all natural forms.

We have thus given a few words of description to some of these remarkable pictures. We do not hope to convey any idea of them to those who have not seen them, for a picture is by its very nature incapable of being described in words. That which makes it a picture takes it out of the sphere of words. Neither do we attempt to analyze the genius of this great painter. We can enumerate some of his artistic qualities: his power in color, so creative; the still, reposeful spirit of his creations, reminding one of Beato Angelico; his grandly expressive forms; his powerful color compositions; and above all, that greatest crowning merit, that his works are, almost without exception, vitalized by an imaginative force which makes them living presences. Such effects are not produced by talent, however great, by culture, however perfect, but by a mind which is a law to itself,—in other words, a genius. Such, and nothing less, was Washington Allston.

DOCTOR JOHNS.

I.

IN the summer of 1812, when the good people of Connecticut were feeling uncommonly bitter about the declaration of war against England, and were abusing Mr. Madison in the roundest terms, there lived in the town of Canterbury a fiery old gentleman, of near sixty years, and a sterling Democrat, who took up the cudgels bravely for the Administration, and stoutly belabored Governor Roger Griswold for his tardy obedience to the President in calling out the militia, and for what he called his absurd pretensions in regard to State sovereignty. He was a man, too, who meant all that he said, and gave the best proof of it by offering his military services, — first to the Governor, and then to the United States General commanding the Department.

Nor was he wholly unfitted: he was erect, stanch, well knit together, and had served with immense credit in the local militia, in which he wore the title of Major. It does not appear that his offer was immediately accepted; but the following season he was invested with the command of a company, and was ordered back and forth to various threatened points along the seaboard. His home affairs, meantime, were left in charge of his son, a quiet young man of four-and-twenty, who for three years had been stumbling with a very reluctant spirit through the law-books in the Major's office, and who shared neither his father's ardor of temperament nor his political opinions. Eliza, a daughter of twenty summers, acted as mistress of the house, and stood in place of mother to a black-eyed little girl of thirteen, — the Major's daughter by a second wife, who had died only a few years before.

Notwithstanding the lack of political sympathy, there was yet a strong attachment between father and son. The latter admired immensely the energy and full-souled ardor of the old gentleman; and

the father, in turn, was proud of the calm, meditative habit of mind which the son had inherited from his mother. "There is metal in the boy to make a judge of," the Major used to say. And when Benjamin, shortly after his graduation at one of the lesser New England colleges, had given a hint of his possible study of theology, the Major answered with a "Pooh! pooh!" which disturbed the son, — possibly weighed with him, — more than the longest opposing argument could have done. The manner of the father had conveyed, unwittingly enough, a notion of absurdity as attaching to the lad's engaging in such sacred studies, which overwhelmed him with a sense of his own unworthiness.

The Major, like all sound Democrats, had always been an ardent admirer of Mr. Jefferson and of the French political school. Benjamin had a wholesome horror of both, — not so much from any intimate knowledge of their theories, as by reason of a strong religious instinct, which had been developed under his mother's counsels into a rigid and exacting Puritanism.

The first wife of the Major had left behind her the reputation of "a saint." It was not undeserved: her quiet, constant charities, — her kindness of look and manner, which were in themselves the best of charities, — a gentle, Christian way she had of dealing with all the vagrant humors of her husband, — and the constancy of her devotion to all duties, whether religious or domestic, gave her better claim to the saintly title than most who wear it. The Major knew this, and was very proud of it. "If," he was accustomed to say, "I am the most godless man in the parish, my wife is the most godly woman." Yet his godlessness was, after all, rather outside than real: it was a kind of effrontery, provoked into noisy display by the extravagant bigotries of those about him. He did not believe in monopolies