

brush, which had secured already a corner in my affections, and I commenced reading the law for a profession under the direction of Reeve and Gould, of Connecticut. I attended the lectures of these learned judges for two years—was admitted to the bar—and practiced the law as a sort of *Nimrodical* lawyer, in my native land, for the term of two or three years; when I very deliberately sold my law library and all (save my rifle and fishing tackle), and converting their proceeds into brushes and paint pots, I commenced the art of painting in Philadelphia, without teacher or adviser.

"I there closely applied my hand to the labors of the art for several years; during which time my mind was continually reaching for some branch or enterprise of the art on which to devote a whole lifetime of enthusiasm; when a delegation of some ten or fifteen noble and dignified-looking Indians, from the wilds of the "Far West," suddenly arrived in the city, arrayed and equipped in all their classic beauty,—with shield and helmet,—with tunic and manteau,—tinted and tasseled off, exactly for the painter's palette!

"In silent and stolid dignity these lords of the forest strutted about the city for a few days, wrapped in their pictured robes, with their brows plumed with the quills of the war eagle, attracting the gaze and the admiration of all who beheld them. After this, they took their leave for Washington City, and I was left to reflect and regret, which I did long and deeply, until I came to the following deductions and conclusions:

"Black and bino cloth and civilization are destined, not only to veil, but to obliterate the grace and beauty of Nature. Man, in the simplicity and loftiness of his nature, unrestrained and unfettered by disguises of art, is surely the most beautiful model for the painter,—and the country from which he hails is unquestionably the best study or school of the arts in the world: such, I am sure, from the models I have seen, is the wilderness of North America. And the history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy the lifetime of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country, and of becoming their historian.

"There was something inexpressibly delightful in the above resolve, which was to bring me amidst living models for my brush: and at the same time to place in my hands again, for my living and protection, the objects of my heart, above named: which had long been laid by to rust and decay in the city, without the remotest prospect of again contributing to my amusement.

"I had fully resolved—I had opened my views to my friends and relations, but got not one advocate or abettor. I tried fairly and faithfully, but it was in vain to reason with those whose anxieties were ready to fabricate every difficulty and danger that could be imagined, without being able to understand or appreciate the extent or importance of my designs, and I broke from them all,—from my wife and my aged parents,—myself my only adviser and protector."

Such is Catlin's own rather flowery account of how he formed his resolution; but the language in which he expresses it is only an evidence of the reality of his enthusiasm.

These paintings as works of art I now often hear unfavorably criticised; but criticism is an easy task for those who do not appreciate the difficulties under which Catlin labored. To-day our land is filled with artists of both sexes, of all ages, and of every degree of fitness and unfitness. The number of amateur aspirants in art has increased an hundred fold in the last half century.

To accommodate this growth of artistic demand, the conveniences and appliances of art have improved and increased. The well equipped sketcher in oil of to-day can not appreciate the difficulties of the traveling artist in America fifty or sixty years ago. There were then no patent

sketching boxes, with their complication of conveniences. The compressible metallic tube had not been invented, or at least not introduced into the armamentarium of art. Not one-fourth of the present tints of Winsor and Newton's catalogue were then known. Rapidly drying vehicles were not in vogue. The artist ground his own paints—coarse, crude paints—and carried them around mixed in pots or dry in paper. I do not think that a careful analysis of Catlin's paintings will reveal more than a dozen pigments; I have reference to the paintings which were taken, so to speak, on the wing. He had not accommodations for more. While collecting a large number of these views, he was traveling with two other men in a small canoe, which, in addition to his paints and canvas, held their clothing, bedding, ammunition and provisions; in fact, everything necessary for life and comfort in a land inhabited only by savages. Ethnographic travelers of to-day, with pocket camera and instantaneous dry-plates, have a vast advantage over Catlin with his red lead—which he used liberally—his boiled oil and his rolled canvas; but their results are not correspondingly more accurate. Many of his sketches, too, were necessarily taken in great haste. Yet he never failed to catch the spirit of the scene before him and to transfer it faithfully to his canvas. But, while making all just excuses for Catlin, it must be acknowledged that he was not acquainted with all the resources of his art as it existed even in his day. He was a self-taught man.

From my own experience, following, as I have done for years, in the very trail of Catlin, I can not speak too highly of his general truthfulness; yet he suffered from certain limitations of his time and surroundings which have impaired the usefulness of his literary work. Without telling any direct falsehood, he succeeds sometimes in deceiving the reader. His books must be read critically; they are not of equal use to all students. In this year of our Lord there are so many workers in all specialties, and the facilities for publication in each are so great, that one may write on the driest and most technical subjects, in the least interesting manner, and yet be reasonably certain of finding a publisher and a coterie of readers. It was not thus in America fifty years ago, and Catlin, who was a poor man, in order to make his enterprise pay, had to write for a general public, whom he felt obliged to interest as well as instruct. He sometimes painted also with this intent, as will be shown later. Indeed, he thus candidly criticises himself in one of his letters:

"It would be impossible at the same time, in a book of these dimensions, to explain all the manners and customs of these people; but as far as they are narrated, they have been described by my pen, upon the spot, as I have seen them transacted; and if some few of my narrations should seem a little too highly colored, I trust the world will be ready to extend to me that pardon which it is customary to yield to all artists whose main faults exist in the vividness of their coloring rather than in the drawing of their pictures; but there is nothing else in them, I think, that I should ask pardon for, even though some of them should stagger credulity and incur for me the censure of critics."