Sir Joshua Reynolds
Sixth Discourse

Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy on the Distribution of the Prizes, December 10, 1774, by the President.

Gentlemen,--When I have taken the liberty of addressing you on the course and order of your studies, I never proposed to enter into a minute detail of the art. This I have always left to the several professors, who pursue the end of our institution with the highest honour to themselves, and with the greatest advantage to the students.

My purpose in the discourses I have held in the Academy is to lay down certain general ideas, which seem to me proper for the formation of a sound taste; principles necessary to guard the pupils against those errors into which the sanguine temper common at their time of life, has a tendency to lead them, and which have rendered abortive the hopes of so many successions of promising young men in all parts of Europe.

I wish, also, to intercept and suppress those prejudices which particularly prevail when the mechanism of painting is come to its perfection, and which when they do prevail are certain to prevail to the utter destruction of the higher and more valuable parts of this literate and liberal profession.

These two have been my principal purposes; they are still as much my concern as ever; and if I repeat my own ideas on the subject, you who know how fast mistake and prejudice, when neglected, gain ground upon truth and reason, will easily excuse me. I only attempt to set the same thing in the greatest variety of lights.

The subject of this discourse will be imitation, as far as a

painter is concerned in it. By imitation I do not mean imitation in its largest sense, but simply the following of other masters, and the advantage to be drawn from the study of their works.

Those who have undertaken to write on our art, and have represented it as a kind of inspiration, as a gift bestowed upon peculiar favourites at their birth, seem to ensure a much more favourable disposition from their readers, and have a much more captivating and liberal air, than he who goes about to examine, coldly, whether there are any means by which this art may be acquired; how our mind may be strengthened and expanded, and what guides will show the way to eminence.

It is very natural for those who are unacquainted with the cause of anything extraordinary to be astonished at the effect, and to consider it as a kind of magic. They, who have never observed the gradation by which art is acquired, who see only what is the full result of long labour and application of an infinite number, and infinite variety of acts, are apt to conclude from their entire inability to do the same at once, that it is not only inaccessible to themselves, but can be done by those only who have some gift of the nature of inspiration bestowed upon them.

The travellers into the East tell us that when the ignorant inhabitants of these countries are asked concerning the ruins of stately edifices yet remaining amongst them, the melancholy monuments of their former grandeur and long-lost science, they always answer that they were built by magicians. The untaught mind finds a vast gulf between its own powers and these works of complicated art which it is utterly unable to fathom. And it supposes that such a void can be passed only by supernatural powers.

And, as for artists themselves, it is by no means their interest to

undeceive such judges, however conscious they may be of the very natural means by which the extraordinary powers were acquired; our art being intrinsically imitative, rejects this idea of inspiration more, perhaps, than any other.

It is to avoid this plain confession of truth, as it should seem, that this imitation of masters--indeed, almost all imitation which implies a more regular and progressive method of attaining the ends of painting--has ever been particularly inveighed against with great keenness, both by ancient and modern writers.

To derive all from native power, to owe nothing to another, is the praise which men, who do not much think what they are saying, bestow sometimes upon others, and sometimes on themselves; and their imaginary dignity is naturally heightened by a supercilious censure of the low, the barren, the grovelling, the servile imitator. It would be no wonder if a student, frightened by these terrors and disgraceful epithets, with which the poor imitators are so often loaded, should let fall his pencil in mere despair, conscious how much he has been indebted to the labours of others, how little, how very little of his art was born with him; and, considering it as hopeless, to set about acquiring by the imitation of any human master what he is taught to suppose is matter of inspiration from heaven.

Some allowance must be made for what is said in the gaiety or ambition of rhetoric. We cannot suppose that any one can really mean to exclude all imitation of others. A position so wild would scarce deserve a serious answer, for it is apparent, if we were forbid to make use of the advantages which our predecessors afford us, the art would be always to begin, and consequently remain always in its infant state; and it is a common observation that no art was ever invented and carried to perfection at the same time.

But to bring us entirely to reason and sobriety, let it be observed, that a painter must not only be of necessity an imitator of the works of nature, which alone is sufficient to dispel this phantom of inspiration, but he must be as necessarily an imitator of the works of other painters. This appears more humiliating, but it is equally true; and no man can be an artist, whatever he may suppose, upon any other terms.

However, those who appear more moderate and reasonable allow that study is to begin by imitation, but that we should no longer use the thoughts of our predecessors when we are become able to think for ourselves. They hold that imitation is as hurtful to the more advanced student as it was advantageous to the beginner.

For my own part, I confess I am not only very much disposed to lay down the absolute necessity of imitation in the first stages of the art, but am of opinion that the study of other masters, which I here call imitation, may be extended throughout our whole life without any danger of the inconveniences with which it is charged, of enfeebling the mind, or preventing us from giving that original air which every work undoubtedly ought always to have.

I am, on the contrary, persuaded that by imitation only, variety, and even originality of invention is produced.

I will go further; even genius, at least what generally is so called, is the child of imitation. But as this appears to be contrary to the general opinion, I must explain my position before I enforce it.

Genius is supposed to be a power of producing excellences which are out of the reach of the rules of art--a power which no precepts can teach, and which no industry can acquire.

This opinion of the impossibility of acquiring those beauties which stamp the work with the character of genius, supposes that it is something more fixed than in reality it is, and that we always do, and ever did agree, about what should be considered as a characteristic of genius.

But the truth is that the degree of excellence which proclaims genius is different in different times and different places; and what shows it to be so is that mankind have often changed their opinion upon this matter.

When the arts were in their infancy, the power of merely drawing the likeness of any object was considered as one of its greatest efforts.

The common people, ignorant of the principles of art, talk the same language even to this day. But when it was found that every man could be taught to do this, and a great deal more, merely by the observance of certain precepts, the name of genius then shifted its application, and was given only to those who added the peculiar character of the object they represented; to those who had invention, expression, grace, or dignity; or, in short, such qualities or excellences the producing of which could not then be taught by any known and promulgated rules.

We are very sure that the beauty of form, the expression of the passions, the art of composition, even the power of giving a general air of grandeur to your work, is at present very much under the dominion of rules. These excellences were, heretofore, considered merely as the effects of genius; and justly, if genius is not taken for inspiration, but as the effect of close observation and experience.

He who first made any of these observations and digested them, so

as to form an invariable principle for himself to work by, had that merit; but probably no one went very far at once; and generally the first who gave the hint did not know how to pursue it steadily and methodically, at least not in the beginning. He himself worked on it, and improved it; others worked more, and improved farther, until the secret was discovered, and the practice made as general as refined practice can be made. How many more principles may be fixed and ascertained we cannot tell; but as criticism is likely to go hand in hand with the art which is its subject, we may venture to say that as that art shall advance, its powers will be still more and more fixed by rules.

But by whatever strides criticism may gain ground, we need be under no apprehension that invention will ever be annihilated or subdued, or intellectual energy be brought entirely within the restraint of written law. Genius will still have room enough to expatiate, and keep always the same distance from narrow comprehension and mechanical performance.

What we now call genius begins, not where rules, abstractedly taken, end, but where known vulgar and trite rules have no longer any place. It must of necessity be that even works of genius, as well as every other effect, as it must have its cause, must likewise have its rules; it cannot be by chance that excellences are produced with any constancy, or any certainty, for this is not the nature of chance, but the rules by which men of extraordinary parts, and such as are called men of genius work, are either such as they discover by their own peculiar observation, or of such a nice texture as not easily to admit handling or expressing in words, especially as artists are not very frequently skilful in that mode of communicating ideas.

Unsubstantial, however, as these rules may seem, and difficult as it may be to convey them in writing, they are still seen and felt

in the mind of the artist, and he works from them with as much certainty as if they were embodied, as I may say, upon paper. It is true these refined principles cannot be always made palpable, like the more gross rules of art; yet it does not follow but that the mind may be put in such a train that it shall perceive, by a kind of scientific sense, that propriety which words, particularly words of unpractised writers such as we are, can but very feebly suggest.

Invention is one of the great marks of genius, but if we consult experience, we shall find that it is by being conversant with the inventions of others that we learn to invent, as by reading the thoughts of others we learn to think.

Whoever has so far formed his taste as to be able to relish and feel the beauties of the great masters has gone a great way in his study; for, merely from a consciousness of this relish of the right, the mind swells with an inward pride, and is almost as powerfully affected as if it had itself produced what it admires. Our hearts frequently warmed in this manner by the contact of those whom we wish to resemble, will undoubtedly catch something of their way of thinking, and we shall receive in our own bosoms some radiation at least of their fire and splendour. That disposition, which is so strong in children, still continues with us, of catching involuntarily the general air and manner of those with whom we are most conversant; with this difference only, that a young mind is naturally pliable and imitative, but in a more advanced state it grows rigid, and must be warmed and softened before it will receive a deep impression.

From these considerations, which a little of your reflection will carry a great way further, it appears of what great consequence it is that our minds should be habituated to the contemplation of excellence, and that, far from being contented to make such habits

the discipline of our youth only, we should, to the last moment of our lives, continue a settled intercourse with all the true examples of grandeur. Their inventions are not only the food of our infancy, but the substance which supplies the fullest maturity of our vigour.

The mind is but a barren soil; is a soil soon exhausted, and will produce no crop, or only one, unless it be continually fertilised and enriched with foreign matter.

When we have had continually before us the great works of art to impregnate our minds with kindred ideas, we are then, and not till then, fit to produce something, of the same species. We behold all about us with the eyes of these penetrating observers, and our minds, accustomed to think the thoughts of the noblest and brightest intellects, are prepared for the discovery and selection of all that is great and noble in nature. The greatest natural genius cannot subsist on its own stock: he who resolves never to ransack any mind but his own will be soon reduced, from mere barrenness, to the poorest of all imitations; he will be obliged to imitate himself, and to repeat what he has before often repeated. When we know the subject designed by such men, it will never be difficult to guess what kind of work is to be produced.

It is vain for painters or poets to endeavour to invent without materials on which the mind may work, and from which invention must originate. Nothing can come of nothing.

Homer is supposed to be possessed of all the learning of his time. And we are certain that Michael Angelo and Raffaelle were equally possessed of all knowledge in the art which was discoverable in the works of their predecessors.

A mind enriched by an assemblage of all the treasures of ancient

and modern art will be more elevated and fruitful in resources in proportion to the number of ideas which have been carefully collected and thoroughly digested. There can be no doubt that he who has the most materials has the greatest means of invention; and if he has not the power of using them, it must proceed from a feebleness of intellect or from the confused manner in which those collections have been laid up in his mind.

The addition of other men's judgment is so far from weakening, as is the opinion of many, our own, that it will fashion and consolidate those ideas of excellence which lay in their birth feeble, ill-shaped, and confused, but which are finished and put in order by the authority and practice of those whose works may be said to have been consecrated by having stood the test of ages.

The mind, or genius, has been compared to a spark of fire which is smothered by a heap of fuel and prevented from blazing into a flame. This simile, which is made use of by the younger Pliny, may be easily mistaken for argument or proof.

There is no danger of the mind's being over-burdened with knowledge, or the genius extinguished by any addition of images; on the contrary, these acquisitions may as well, perhaps better, be compared, if comparisons signified anything in reasoning, to the supply of living embers, which will contribute to strengthen the spark that without the association of more would have died away.

The truth is, he whose feebleness is such as to make other men's thoughts an incumbrance to him can have no very great strength of mind or genius of his own to be destroyed, so that not much harm will be done at worst.

We may oppose to Pliny the greater authority of Cicero, who is continually enforcing the necessity of this method of study. In

his dialogue on Oratory he makes Crassus say, that one of the first and most important precepts is to choose a proper model for our imitation. Hoc fit primum in preceptis meis ut demonstremus quem imitemur.

When I speak of the habitual imitation and continued study of masters, it is not to be understood that I advise any endeavour to copy the exact peculiar colour and complexion of another man's mind; the success of such an attempt must always be like his who imitates exactly the air, manner, and gestures of him whom he admires. His model may be excellent, but the copy will be ridiculous; this ridicule does not arise from his having imitated, but from his not having chosen the right mode of imitation.

It is a necessary and warrantable pride to disdain to walk servilely behind any individual, however elevated his rank. The true and liberal ground of imitation is an open field, where, though he who precedes has had the advantage of starting before you, yet it is enough to pursue his course; you need not tread in his footsteps, and you certainly have a right to outstrip him if you can.

Nor, whilst I recommend studying the art from artists, can I be supposed to mean that nature is to be neglected? I take this study in aid and not in exclusion of the other. Nature is, and must be, the fountain which alone is inexhaustible; and from which all excellences must originally flow.

The great use of studying our predecessors is to open the mind, to shorten our labour, and to give us the result of the selection made by those great minds of what is grand or beautiful in nature: her rich stores are all spread out before us; but it is an art, and no easy art, to know how or what to choose, and how to attain and secure the object of our choice.

Thus the highest beauty of form must be taken from nature; but it is an art of long deduction and great experience to know how to find it.

We must not content ourselves with merely admiring and relishing; we must enter into the principles on which the work is wrought; these do not swim on the superficies, and consequently are not open to superficial observers.

Art in its perfection is not ostentatious; it lies hid, and works its effect itself unseen. It is the proper study and labour of an artist to uncover and find out the latent cause of conspicuous beauties, and from thence form principles for his own conduct; such an examination is a continual exertion of the mind, as great, perhaps, as that of the artist whose works he is thus studying.

The sagacious imitator not only remarks what distinguishes the different manner or genius of each master; he enters into the contrivance in the composition, how the masses of lights are disposed, the means by which the effect is produced, how artfully some parts are lost in the ground, others boldly relieved, and how all these are mutually altered and interchanged according to the reason and scheme of the work. He admires not the harmony of colouring alone, but he examines by what artifice one colour is a foil to its neighbour. He looks close into the tints, of what colours they are composed, till he has formed clear and distinct ideas, and has learnt to see in what harmony and good colouring consists. What is learnt in this manner from the works of others becomes really our own, sinks deep, and is never forgotten; nay, it is by seizing on this clue that we proceed forward, and get further and further in enlarging the principle and improving the practice.

There can be no doubt but the art is better learnt from the works

themselves than from the precepts which are formed upon these works; but if it is difficult to choose proper models for imitation, it requires no less circumspection to separate and distinguish what in those models we ought to imitate.

I cannot avoid mentioning here, though it is not my intention at present to enter into the art and method of study, an error which students are too apt to fall into.

He that is forming himself must look with great caution and wariness on those peculiarities, or prominent parts, which at first force themselves upon view, and are the marks, or what is commonly called the manner, by which that individual artist is distinguished.

Peculiar marks I hold to be generally, if not always, defects, however difficult it may be, wholly to escape them.

Peculiarities in the works of art are like those in the human figure; it is by them that we are cognisable and distinguished one from another, but they are always so many blemishes, which, however, both in the one case and in the other, cease to appear deformities to those who have them continually before their eyes. In the works of art, even the most enlightened mind, when warmed by beauties of the highest kind, will by degrees find a repugnance within him to acknowledge any defects; nay, his enthusiasm will carry him so far as to transform them into beauties and objects of imitation.

It must be acknowledged that a peculiarity of style, either from its novelty, or by seeming to proceed from a peculiar turn of mind, often escapes blame; on the contrary, it is sometimes striking and pleasing; but this it is vain labour to endeavour to imitate, because novelty and peculiarity being its only merit, when it

ceases to be new, it ceases to have value.

A manner, therefore, being a defect, and every painter, however excellent, having a manner, it seems to follow that all kinds of faults, as well as beauties, may be learned under the sanction of the greatest authorities.

Even the great name of Michael Angelo may be used to keep in countenance a deficiency, or rather neglect of colouring, and every other ornamental part of the art.

If the young student is dry and hard, Poussin is the same. If his work has a careless and unfinished air, he has most of the Venetian School to support him. If he makes no selection of objects, but takes individual nature just as he finds it, he is like Rembrandt. If he is incorrect in the proportions of his figures, Correggio was likewise incorrect. If his colours are not blended and united, Rubens was equally crude.

In short, there is no defect but may be excused, if it is a sufficient excuse that it can be imputed to considerable artists; but it must be remembered that it was not by these defects they acquired their reputation: they have a right to our pardon, but not to our admiration.

However, to imitate peculiarities or mistake defects for beauties that man will be most liable who confines his imitation to one favourite master; and, even though he chooses the best, and is capable of distinguishing the real excellences of his model, it is not by such narrow practice that a genius or mastery in the art is acquired. A man is as little likely to form a true idea of the perfection of the art by studying a single artist as he would be of producing a perfectly beautiful figure by an exact imitation of any individual living model.

And as the painter, by bringing together in one piece those beauties which are dispersed amongst a great variety of individuals, produces a figure more beautiful than can be found in nature, so that artist who can unite in himself the excellences of the various painters, will approach nearer to perfection than any one of his masters.

He who confines himself to the imitation of an individual, as he never proposes to surpass, so he is not likely to equal, the object of imitation. He professes only to follow, and he that follows must necessarily be behind.

We should imitate the conduct of the great artists in the course of their studies, as well as the works which they produced, when they were perfectly formed. Raffaelle began by imitating implicitly the manner of Pietro Perugino, under whom he studied; so his first works are scarce to be distinguished from his master's; but soon forming higher and more extensive views, he imitated the grand outline of Michael Angelo. He learnt the manner of using colours from the works of Leonardo da Vinci and Fratre Bartolomeo: to all this he added the contemplation of all the remains of antiquity that were within his reach, and employed others to draw for him what was in Greece and distant places. And it is from his having taken so many models that he became himself a model for all succeeding painters, always imitating, and always original.

If your ambition therefore be to equal Raffaelle, you must do as Raffaelle did; take many models, and not take even him for your guide alone to the exclusion of others. And yet the number is infinite of those who seem, if one may judge by their style, to have seen no other works but those of their master, or of some favourite whose manner is their first wish and their last.

I will mention a few that occur to me of this narrow, confined, illiberal, unscientific, and servile kind of imitators. Guido was thus meanly copied by Elizabetta Sirani, and Simone Cantarini; Poussin, by Verdier and Cheron; Parmigiano, by Jeronimo Mazzuoli; Paolo Veronese and Iacomo Bassan had for their imitators their brothers and sons; Pietro de Cortona was followed by Ciro Ferri and Romanelli; Rubens, by Jacques Jordans and Diepenbeck; Guercino, by his own family, the Gennari; Carlo Marratti was imitated by Giuseppe Chiari and Pietro da Pietri; and Rembrandt, by Bramer, Eckhout, and Flink. All these, to whom may be added a much longer list of painters, whose works among the ignorant pass for those of their masters, are justly to be censured for barrenness and servility.

To oppose to this list a few that have adopted a more liberal style of imitation: Pelegrino Tibaldi, Rosso, and Primaticio did not coldly imitate, but caught something of the fire that animates the works of Michael Angelo. The Carraches formed their style from Pelegrino Tibaldi, Correggio, and the Venetian School. Domenichino, Guido, Lanfranco, Albano, Guercino, Cavidone, Schidone, Tiarini, though it is sufficiently apparent that they came from the School of the Carraches, have yet the appearance of men who extended their views beyond the model that lay before them, and have shown that they had opinions of their own, and thought for themselves, after they had made themselves masters of the general principles of their schools.

Le Seure's first manner resembles very much that of his master Vovet: but as he soon excelled him, so he differed from him in every part of the art. Carlo Marratti succeeded better than those I have first named, and I think owes his superiority to the extension of his views; besides his master Andrea Sacchi, he imitated Raffaelle, Guido, and the Carraches. It is true, there is nothing very captivating in Carlo Marratti; but this proceeded from

wants which cannot be completely supplied; that is, want of strength of parts. In this, certainly men are not equal, and a man can bring home wares only in proportion to the capital with which he goes to market. Carlo, by diligence, made the most of what he had; but there was undoubtedly a heaviness about him, which extended itself, uniformly to his invention, expression, his drawing, colouring, and the general effect of his pictures. The truth is, he never equalled any of his patterns in any one thing, and he added little of his own.

But we must not rest contented, even in this general study of the moderns; we must trace back the art to its fountain head, to that source from whence they drew their principal excellences, the monuments of pure antiquity.

All the inventions and thoughts of the ancients, whether conveyed to us in statues, bas-reliefs, intaglios, cameos, or coins, are to be sought after and carefully studied: The genius that hovers over these venerable relics may be called the father of modern art.

From the remains of the works of the ancients the modern arts were revived, and it is by their means that they must be restored a second time. However it may mortify our vanity, we must be forced to allow them our masters; and we may venture to prophecy, that when they shall cease to be studied, arts will no longer flourish, and we shall again relapse into barbarism.

The fire of the artist's own genius operating upon these materials which have been thus diligently collected, will enable him to make new combinations, perhaps, superior to what had ever before been in the possession of the art. As in the mixture of the variety of metals, which are said to have been melted and run together at the burning of Corinth, a new and till then unknown metal was produced equal in value to any of those that had contributed to its

composition. And though a curious refiner may come with his crucibles, analyse and separate its various component parts, yet Corinthian brass would still hold its rank amongst the most beautiful and valuable of metals.

We have hitherto considered the advantages of imitation as it tends to form the taste, and as a practice by which a spark of that genius may be caught which illumines these noble works, that ought always to be present to our thoughts.

We come now to speak of another kind of imitation; the borrowing a particular thought, an action, attitude, or figure, and transplanting it into your own work: this will either come under the charge of plagiarism, or be warrantable, and deserve commendation, according to the address with which it is performed. There is some difference likewise whether it is upon the ancients or the moderns that these depredations are made. It is generally allowed that no man need be ashamed of copying the ancients: their works are considered as a magazine of common property, always open to the public, whence every man has a right to what materials he pleases; and if he has the art of using them, they are supposed to become to all intents and purposes his own property.

The collection which Raffaelle made of the thoughts of the ancients with so much trouble, is a proof of his opinion on this subject. Such collections may be made with much more ease, by means of an art scarce known in his time; I mean that of engraving, by which, at an easy rate, every man may now avail himself of the inventions of antiquity.

It must be acknowledged that the works of the moderns are more the property of their authors; he who borrows an idea from an artist, or perhaps from a modern, not his contemporary, and so accommodates it to his own work that it makes a part of it, with no seam or

joining appearing, can hardly be charged with plagiarism; poets practise this kind of borrowing without reserve. But an artist should not be contented with this only; he should enter into a competition with his original, and endeavour to improve what he is appropriating to his own work. Such imitation is so far from having anything in it of the servility of plagiarism, that it is a perpetual exercise of the mind, a continual invention.

Borrowing or stealing with such art and caution will have a right to the same lenity as was used by the Lacedemonians; who did not punish theft, but the want of artifice to conceal it.

In order to encourage you to imitation, to the utmost extent, let me add, that very finished artists in the inferior branches of the art will contribute to furnish the mind and give hints of which a skilful painter, who is sensible of what he wants, and is in no danger of being infected by the contact of vicious models, will know how to avail himself. He will pick up from dunghills what by a nice chemistry, passing through his own mind, shall be converted into pure gold; and, under the rudeness of Gothic essays, he will find original, rational, and even sublime inventions.

In the luxuriant style of Paul Veronese, in the capricious compositions of Tintoret, he will find something that will assist his invention, and give points, from which his own imagination shall rise and take flight, when the subject which he treats will, with propriety, admit of splendid effects.

In every school, whether Venetian, French, or Dutch, he will find either ingenious compositions, extraordinary effects, some peculiar expressions, or some mechanical excellence, well worthy his attention and, in some measure, of his imitation; even in the lower class of the French painters, great beauties are often found united with great defects.

Though Coypel wanted a simplicity of taste, and mistook a presumptuous and assuming air for what is grand and majestic; yet he frequently has good sense and judgment in his manner of telling his stories, great skill in his compositions, and is not without a considerable power of expressing the passions, The modern affectation of grace in his works, as well as in those of Bouche and Watteau, may be said to be separated by a very thin partition from the more simple and pure grace of Correggio and Parmigiano.

Amongst the Dutch painters, the correct, firm, and determined pencil, which was employed by Bamboccio and Jan Miel on vulgar and mean subjects, might without any change be employed on the highest, to which, indeed, it seems more properly to belong. The greatest style, if that style is confined to small figures such as Poussin generally painted, would receive an additional grace by the elegance and precision of pencil so admirable in the works of Teniers.

Though this school more particularly excelled in the mechanism of painting, yet there are many who have shown great abilities in expressing what must be ranked above mechanical excellences.

In the works of Frank Hals the portrait painter may observe the composition of a face, the features well put together as the painters express it, from whence proceeds that strong marked character of individual nature which is so remarkable in his portraits, and is not to be found in an equal degree in any other painter. If he had joined to this most difficult part of the art a patience in finishing what he had so correctly planned, he might justly have claimed the place which Vandyke, all things considered, so justly holds as the first of portrait painters.

Others of the same school have shown great power in expressing the

character and passions of those vulgar people which are the subjects of their study and attention. Amongst those, Jean Stein seems to be one of the most diligent and accurate observers of what passed in those scenes which he frequented, and which were to him an academy. I can easily imagine that if this extraordinary man had had the good fortune to have been born in Italy instead of Holland, had he lived in Rome instead of Leyden, and had been blessed with Michael Angelo and Raffaelle for his masters instead of Brower and Van Gowen, that the same sagacity and penetration which distinguished so accurately the different characters and expression in his vulgar figures, would, when exerted in the selection and imitation of what was great and elevated in nature, have been equally successful, and his name would have been now ranged with the great pillars and supporters of our art.

Men who, although thus bound down by the almost invincible powers of early habits, have still exerted extraordinary abilities within their narrow and confined circle, and have, from the natural vigour of their mind, given such an interesting expression, such force and energy to their works, though they cannot be recommended to be exactly imitated, may yet invite an artist to endeavour to transfer, by a kind of parody, those excellences to his own works. Whoever has acquired the power of making this use of the Flemish, Venetian, and French schools is a real genius, and has sources of knowledge open to him which were wanting to the great artists who lived in the great age of painting.

To find excellences however dispersed, to discover beauties however concealed by the multitude of defects with which they are surrounded, can be the work only of him who, having a mind always alive to his art, has extended his views to all ages and to all schools, and has acquired from that comprehensive mass which he has thus gathered to himself, a well digested and perfect idea of his art, to which everything is referred. Like a sovereign judge and

arbiter of art, he is possessed of that presiding power which separates and attracts every excellence from every school, selects both from what is great and what is little, brings home knowledge from the east and from the west, making the universe tributary towards furnishing his mind and enriching his works with originality and variety of inventions.

Thus I have ventured to give my opinion of what appears to me the true and only method by which an artist makes himself master of his profession, which I hold ought to be one continued course of imitation, that is not to cease but with our lives.

Those who, either from their own engagements and hurry of business, or from indolence, or from conceit and vanity, have neglected looking out of themselves, as far as my experience and observation reaches, have from that time not only ceased to advance and improve in their performance, but have gone backward. They may be compared to men who have lived upon their principal till they are reduced to beggary and left without resources.

I can recommend nothing better, therefore, than that you endeavour to infuse into your works what you learn from the contemplation of the works of others. To recommend this has the appearance of needless and superfluous advice, but it has fallen within my own knowledge that artists, though they are not wanting in a sincere love for their art, though they have great pleasure in seeing good pictures, and are well skilled to distinguish what is excellent or defective in them, yet go on in their own manner, without any endeavour to give a little of those beauties which they admire in others, to their own works. It is difficult to conceive how the present Italian painters, who live in the midst of the treasures of art, should be contented with their own style. They proceed in their common-place inventions, and never think it worth while to visit the works of those great artists with which they are

surrounded.

I remember several years ago to have conversed at Rome with an artist of great fame throughout Europe; he was not without a considerable degree of abilities, but those abilities were by no means equal to his own opinion of them. From the reputation he had acquired he too fondly concluded that he stood in the same rank, when compared to his predecessors, as he held with regard to his miserable contemporary rivals.

In conversation about some particulars of the works of Raffaelle, he seemed to have, or to affect to have, a very obscure memory of them. He told me that he had not set his foot in the Vatican for fifteen years together; that indeed he had been in treaty to copy a capital picture of Raffaelle, but that the business had gone off; however, if the agreement had held, his copy would have greatly exceeded the original. The merit of this artist, however great we may suppose it, I am sure would have been far greater, and his presumption would have been far less if he had visited the Vatican, as in reason he ought to have done, once at least every month of his life.

I address myself, gentlemen, to you who have made some progress in the art, and are to be for the future under the guidance of your own judgment and discretion

I consider you as arrived to that period when you have a right to think for yourselves, and to presume that every man is fallible; to study the masters with a suspicion that great men are not always exempt from great faults; to criticise, compare, and rank their works in your own estimation, as they approach to or recede from that standard of perfection which you have formed in your own mind, but which those masters themselves, it must be remembered, have taught you to make, and which you will cease to make with

correctness when you cease to study them. It is their excellences which have taught you their defects.

I would wish you to forget where you are, and who it is that speaks to you. I only direct you to higher models and better advisers. We can teach you here but very little; you are henceforth to be your own teachers. Do this justice, however, to the English Academy, to bear in mind, that in this place you contracted no narrow habits, no false ideas, nothing that could lead you to the imitation of any living master, who may be the fashionable darling of the day. As you have not been taught to flatter us, do not learn to flatter yourselves. We have endeavoured to lead you to the admiration of nothing but what is truly admirable. If you choose inferior patterns, or if you make your own FORMER works, your patterns for your LATTER, it is your own fault.

The purpose of this discourse, and, indeed, of most of my others, is to caution you against that false opinion, but too prevalent amongst artists, of the imaginary power of native genius, and its sufficiency in great works. This opinion, according to the temper of mind it meets with, almost always produces, either a vain confidence, or a sluggish despair, both equally fatal to all proficiency.

Study, therefore, the great works of the great masters for ever. Study as nearly as you can, in the order, in the manner, on the principles, on which they studied. Study nature attentively, but always with those masters in your company; consider them as models which you are to imitate, and at the same time as rivals which you are to combat.