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Our American Artists. IV. William M. Chase

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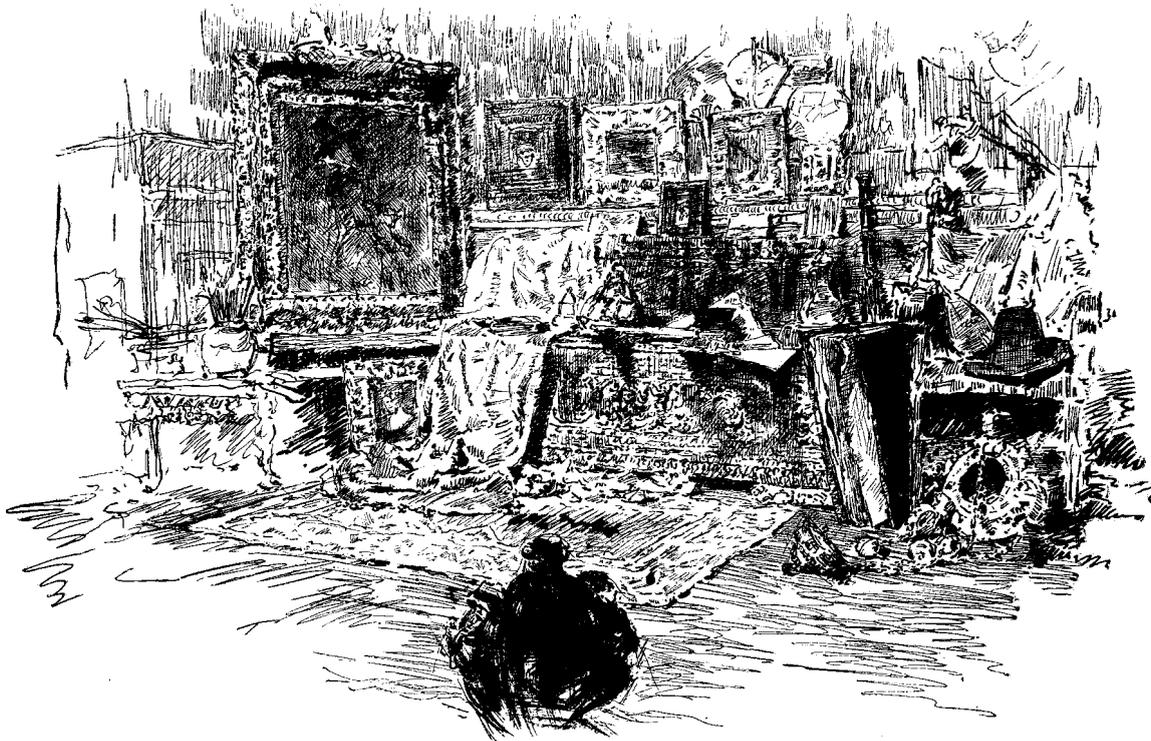


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MR. CHASE'S STUDIO. (*Drawn by himself.*)

OUR AMERICAN ARTISTS.

BY S. G. W. BENJAMIN.

IV.—WILLIAM M. CHASE.

THE artist whose name is at the head of this article was born in the state of Indiana, and is still comparatively a young man. He early showed a very decided turn for art, manifesting a disposition to draw almost as soon as he could handle a slate and pencil. But, although his parents were in excellent circumstances, he met with some opposition when he first spoke of becoming a painter.

It is the most common thing in the world for boys who show an inclination to follow painting to be opposed in their wishes; but if they have a real genius for such a life no opposition can prevent them from succeeding, but will rather strengthen their character, and the opportunity comes sooner or later which they desire. And so it proved in the case of the

young Hoosier lad. His father finally permitted him to take lessons in painting, and placed him with an artist in his native place, who soon declared that William was destined to succeed in the pursuit he so ardently loved.

But, after a year with his first master, young Chase was seized by the war fever which inspired so many with a love of arms at the breaking out of our great civil war, and partly, also, from a love of adventure and an idea that he should like the sea, he entered the school-ship at the Naval Academy of Annapolis. There he had rather a severe experience, which took away whatever ambition he may have had at one time for a sea life. One of the petty officers, under whose charge he was, seemed to employ every way

he could think of to worry and abuse the boys of the school-ship, and took an especial spite to young Chase because he appeared above the position in which he was placed. It was therefore a matter of sober exultation among the young sailors when this tyrant lost his foothold one day while they were cutting or getting the anchor on board and, falling into the sea, was drowned. To the boys whom he had so cruelly treated this dreadful fate seemed only a just retribution.

This rough experience soon took away from William whatever fancy he might have had for a sea life; and his desire to return to his palette and brushes again was greatly increased by seeing one of the officers, who was something of an artist, employing his leisure moments in painting on deck. The boy-artist would steal up behind the long-boat and snatch a glimpse of the artist at his easel.

After being three months under the discipline of the school-ship, William Chase gave up all idea of becoming a sailor and went back to his brush with more enthusiasm than ever.

After a year in Indianapolis he came to New York and studied awhile, and then resided two years in St. Louis, where he chiefly painted still life, that is, fruit pieces and game.

Returning again to New York, and after painting and teaching there until 1872, he decided in that year to gratify his yearning for larger opportunities for study and improvement than seemed to offer in his native land, and embarked for Europe, whose galleries,

teeming with the works of old masters, and whose studios, thronged with the students of all lands, are a perpetual fascination to the enthusiastic art-student.

It was in the old city of Munich, in the heart of Germany, that William Chase decided to settle and study art for several years. Munich is the capital of Bavaria. The name means the "City of the Little Monk." It lies by the river Iser, of which you may have read in Campbell's ode on the "Battle of Hohenlinden." The river there divides into many channels, and rushes with great speed through one of the most beautiful parks in the world, called the English Garden; it was laid out by an American scientist named Thompson, who became prime minister to the King of Bavaria, and was ennobled by him under the title of Count Rumford.

Munich is a beautiful city, laid out in broad streets and adorned with many splendid buildings—palaces, picture-galleries, triumphal arches, and churches which are very hand-



Wm. M. Chase

(Drawn by himself.)

some and often highly artistic.

The late King of Bavaria was an eccentric man; but he had a great love of art and did all in his power to encourage artists to settle in Munich. It became, therefore, more a city of artists than any other place, in proportion to its population. Fine art-schools were established, and the best painters and sculptors in Germany were invited to become professors in the Royal Academy of Art.

When the young American artist arrived in Munich he found quite a colony of his fellow-countrymen already studying art there; and the number increased from year to year while he remained at the

art progress. Meetings were held weekly, at which papers were read on art subjects and afterwards discussed in a friendly but earnest manner.

There is no question about which there is room for greater difference of opinion than art, or more opportunity for individual expression and improvement. For what art undertakes to do is to reproduce nature with such material substances as paints, crayon or marble. But as these means for doing so are at best very imperfect, the most that can often be done is to suggest nature, and in this way, also, to suggest what is called the ideal; that is, to represent scenes as they appear to the fancy or imagination.

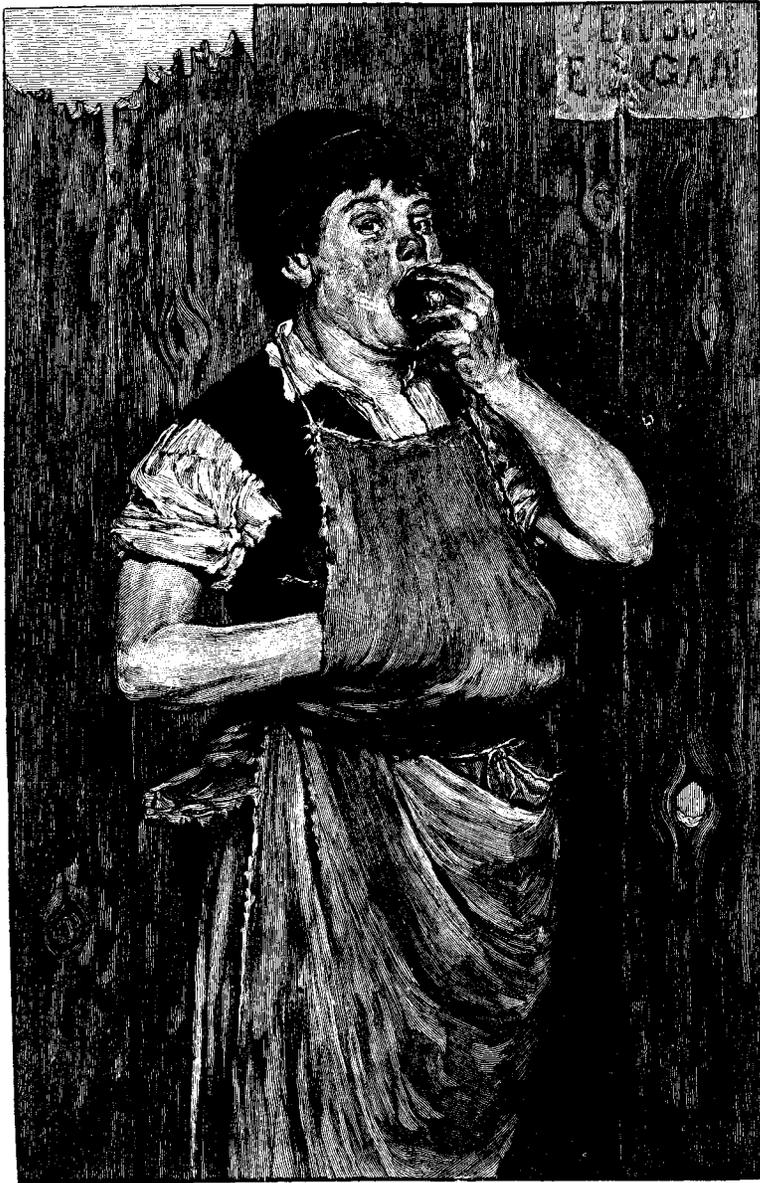
But there are many things in nature. It would be impossible to give in any one work of art everything that may be actually seen in any particular scene, or any imaginary composition if it resembled nature. Therefore some artists, either deliberately or because their talents lie in one direction, undertake to represent one or two of the objects in nature which most interest and impress them; while others attempt to reproduce another class of objects or impressions.

Thus one artist is most interested in light and shade, and gives more attention to that than to color. Another painter, like Titian or Rubens, may be more moved by color than anything else in nature; while a third artist may care most for form, and devotes his attention to sculpture or to very careful drawing. Each artist of original ability also tries to express his thoughts in a style of his own; and as there are many truths in nature and many artists to express them, there must be many different styles.

Every age and every country also

Bavarian capital. Soon these American art-students became sufficiently numerous to establish among themselves an association for the encouragement of

has a class of subjects or methods distinct from others. Some are better, others inferior; while others, which may be equal in value may not be equally liked by all.



THE APPRENTICE-BOY. (From painting by Wm. M. Chase.)

This diversity naturally causes great variety of opinions and often very earnest talk among artists and art-lovers, each being anxious to find the best style, or thinking that the style he follows or prefers is, by far, the best.

It is by talking of a thing that we often learn how to understand it. But every one should try to be modest about his own opinions and tolerant of the opinions of others, and not be too sure that he is the only one who knows the question thoroughly. While this is true about everything, it is especially so regarding art matters.

Mr. Chase entered the government Art School at Munich, and became a pupil of Piloty, who is one of the great German historical painters of this century.

Many art-students have studied with him, some of them men of genius who have in turn worked in styles more fresh and original than that of their master. Among these able artists are Leibl, Diez, Defregger and Lembach. While studying with Piloty these painters also carefully examined the time-mellowed paintings of Rembrandt, Franz Hals, Velasquez, and other great Flemish and Spanish artists, which were hung in the royal galleries at Munich—artists who, in strength, boldness and beauty of style, were among the first painters of modern times.

While studying with Piloty and having a great respect for him, Mr. Chase found his inclination leading him rather to follow the guidance of the later painters of Munich, and to prefer simple subjects, carefully and harmoniously composed, with a strong method of laying on color. He had his studio in the upper story of the royal Art School, which is a vast, ancient building that was in olden time a convent, and stands next to a church. The monks have left it and now the artists fill its cells and halls, and with the brilliant tints of their canvasses give life to the gloom of the mouldering pile. Duvneck, who is one of the most talented American artists now in Europe, had a studio in the same corridor.

Besides gaining decided success in painting some vigorous and interesting pictures, before leaving Munich, Mr. Chase also won the approval not only of his countrymen but also of the German artists themselves. His master, Piloty, paid a very high compliment to his abilities by asking him to paint the portraits of his family, which the young American artist did with much credit.

Among the later works Mr. Chase executed during his residence at Munich were two or three of marked excellence which have attracted much attention. One of them is called the "Court Jester." It represents a humpbacked clown with cap and bells, such a character as used to entertain kings and nobles in old time with comical wit. He is clad in scarlet coat and hose, and is pouring out a glass of wine. The general effect of color is superb.

Another picture called "Waiting for the Ride," is a most complete contrast to the "Jester." It is extremely simple but none the less effective. A young lady of a delicate complexion and a refined style of beauty appears before us dressed in a black riding-habit, and wearing a picturesque, broad-brimmed, bell-crowned hat. She holds a whip in her hand and is in the act of drawing on her glove.

Mr. Chase uses color with freshness and vigor. He has given very careful study to the many tints of flesh, and is equally successful in giving the soft complexion of a young girl or the rough, highly-colored features of a veteran or an apprentice-boy. His handling or style is what would be called broad; because everything is sacrificed or made to contribute in his paintings to the general effect. The danger of such a style lies in the unfinished appearance to which a painting is liable if left off too soon.

In the summer of 1878 Mr. Chase accepted a position as a professor in the new art school of New York, called the Art Students' League. His studio is in that city, in the Tenth Street Studio Building. It is one of the most artistic in the country; for the artist brought home with him a great variety of curious and interesting objects which he picked up abroad, especially during a visit which he made to Venice. There he collected wonderful bits of old bronze and beautifully carved oaken chests, like the one in which Genevra hid herself on her bridal day when the lock sprung and the falling lid closed her in forever.

Faded tapestries that might tell strange stories, quaint decorated stools, damaskeened blades and grotesque flint-locks, and elaborately carved mugs and salvers, are picturesquely arranged around the studio with a studied carelessness, together with choice specimens of the works of several of the leading German artists of the day. It is altogether a nook rich in attractions which carry the fancy back to other climes and the romance of bygone ages.