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Thorstein
Apr 4" 1889

My dear daughter:

Mamma wrote me
your troubles about the
Pattens' Sun Breakfast
Don't have any dear, such
sketches as you make of
costumes at the theater
are entirely sufficient and
mere sketches of position at the
table. Don't think your Papa ex-
pects you to produce an artis-
tic Miracle every day or
wants to impose impossible
tasks upon you. A few
and ink sketch of about
half the merit of your blind
man — who is blind from
heel to crown — is all

that is necessary in these
cases. Such details you
do when you are at play,
almost unconsciously;
and that is all I want.
Remember it is not to be
criticised as failed to
please, and is not expected to
be a work of art — only an
artistic suggestion — a
study. Don't be troubled.

You have heard of the poet
whose ambition was so great
that he determined not to
write a poem until he
could write one as good
as the Iliad. It was a
noble ambition but un-
fortunately —

Ultimately, it was so noble a
decision that he never regrets
any poems at all.

The hardest lesson for one
who feels the capacity for
great things to learn, is that
we must business the foot-
hills before we top the
mountains. I am proud
of your ambition and de-
light in the promise of
excellence in your art
which your efforts give,
but I wish you will avoid
the desire to do the best at
any which has been the
torment of your paper's life.

I would have been a much
better writer and far greater
novelist if I had been con-
tent to do less pretentious
work. I have thought very
often that I am the poet who
carried his masterpieces to the
grave for fear they would
not be masterpieces when
they were sung.

Do not be afraid of falling
below the highest excellence
desiring, and do not be, in any
sense, always striving for it.

Do the best your powers and
knowledge of technique fits you
to do each time, but do not
hope or strive to do the best

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the subject will admit, each time. Try to do better than yesterday but do not be disturbed if you do not. Sea and sky and earth and air are elements of all artistic success, and body and brain are unstable elements.

"My hand feels skilful and the shadows lift
From my worked spirit airy
and swift,"

describes the climacteric mood of artistic success. It is not all labor in any artistic work: much consists in knowing when to labor.

At the same time one must learn to compell the unwilling mood to yield fruits — not the best fruits but fruits which show the trained artistic brain, as well as ^{the} technically skilled hand.

Both these are lessons which I learned very late - perhaps I can hardly be said to have fully learned them yet.

Remember we are both artists, differing in ^{the} ~~our~~ conditions of our work, chiefly in the materials we use. The work of the artist - the true artist - whether with pen, pencil or palette, is to produce sensations - impressions. You do it with forms and colors, I must do it with words. You have tangible light and shadow - and can study over and over again effects. The author - the creator ^{that is -} ~~one~~ ^{there}, paints a panorama on a moving canvas with no known edge - or only one imperfect one of the lights and conditions under which it will be viewed.

You have to produce a certain specific condition. For instance, in

your blind man - which is your best work, (that is, it presents most clearly the most difficult thing to tell with such means) you have presented not perhaps a portrait of that particular man, but the far more important fact of blindness. One cannot tell how - or I cannot tell how - you have done it; but one sees at a glance that the man is blind. The poet, the experienced every thing says, "as plain as whisper in the ear", "I'm blind". As Hood says of some Eolian speaking - "one needed no hint from D. E. F."

Bah saw in a moment the creature was deaf!"

This is the province of art - its highest, truest aim. To produce external facts is nothing - to create impressions is everything. Whether it is by words or lines, the effort and the aim is always the same - the creation of impressions in the reader or

beholder. Artistic aptitude is a natural power depending chiefly on sympathetic power to distinguish the sensation, the impression desired and the effect of specific means on reader or beholder. Artistic skill is trained readiness and certainty in the use of materials. Technique in your art is a mastery of light and shade, color, faces and methods in producing effects. Art is skill in the use of effects to produce impressions.

As an artist, I am of necessity, quite in harmony with the aspirations and trials of one I love so dearly. Though I am quite ignorant of how your effects are produced, you can see at once, how damn well & well an expert in determining whether or not you produce the desired impressions. Don't be misled by any false doctrine about "realism" and "impressionism". A true impressionist is always

the very highest "realist" ^{and} the mere realist can never be the greatest artist. He is always a slave — a slave of mere form and inert fact. He may depict a perfect face but he can never portray a man — a hero — a god. What the corpse is to the live body — such is the best work of the mere reproducer ^{the "Realist" as called} to that of the true artist, who makes the beholder see, not merely the perfect body but the soul by which it is informed.

The body of the most beautiful woman in the world after death has

touched it, has little of the charm it had when lips and eyes and bosom were full of throbbing sentient life. Then she was a woman and produced upon the beholder the distinct sensation - impression - which we know by the term a beautiful woman. When she is dead she is still a beautiful piece of clay. The curves are as fine the proportions as perfect but we call it then by another name - a beautiful corpse. The province of art is to simulate in

the beholder these impressions at will. And the perfection of art is measured by the perfection of the impressions produced.

As art must follow nature because nature produces the ideal by which it works it is the ~~ideal~~ ideal, so the true im-
pressionist "must first be a 'realist' and the 'realist' who stops with 'realism' can never be a great artist, whether painter, sculptor or novelist.

Sometimes impressions are produced by organs near or by indirect stimulation of the beholder's fancy - just as we see faces in wood shaper. The

instinct of the so-called "impressionists" consists in failing to distinguish between the exceptional ~~ones~~ and the universal effects which nature produces by forms. True art, the highest art, while never forgetting to consider the imagination of the beholder, will strictly all the methods by which impressions are produced — the most universal of which is plastic and is the accurate simulation of natural forms. That artist, therefore, is not the best who by rule and measure, ~~produce~~ more most accurately reproduces forms but of he who ~~produce~~ the same portrayals which produce on the mind, the same impression as the natural forms.

Pardon my long lecture. I think you will see something of it, with and more as you realize it in your work. With loving sympathy your aff. father & son