

ART FOR ART WORKERS

EDITED BY MAUDE HAYWOOD

MISS MAUDE HAYWOOD will be glad through this Department to answer any questions of an Art nature which her readers may send to her. She cannot, however, undertake to reply by mail; please, therefore, do not ask her to do so. Address all letters to MISS MAUDE HAYWOOD, care of THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL, Philadelphia, Pa.

SOME ADVICE TO ART STUDENTS



DURING this month a great number of girls will be gathering from all parts of the States to various art schools in the great cities, all with the view of studying in the different branches, but in many cases with widely different aims and objects. Some are now coming for the first time, perhaps having obtained their present opportunities through their own personal exertions, and are full of hope and enthusiasm, but without a very definite idea of what is before them, and of the path which must be trodden to reach their goal. Others are well advanced in their work and settling down—to continue our metaphor—into a good, steady, swinging gait, which means success in the end. Out of the vast army of so-called “students,” these words are addressed to those earnest workers who are beginning or persevering with a true love of their art and the legitimate ambition of one day “doing something,” whether their aim be already a definite one, or at present unsettled in detail.

TO those who are beginning, or about to make a start, it may be said and reiterated in any number of ways and with endless good reasoning, but always coming down to the same simple piece of advice: learn to draw before attempting to paint; learn to draw well; learn to draw thoroughly. Begin at the beginning, and do not expect to start in the life class. Work steadily upward, but be content with slow progress at first. The early steps in acquiring any knowledge are always more or less difficult because of the drudgery entailed. A girl coming from some little country place, where knowledge of art was scanty and her own efforts and struggles onward almost the only experience in actual work that she has known, will learn much in the first few weeks by observation and by contact with her fellow-workers, both as to her present capabilities and future prospects. Much will be a revelation, and she will be fortunate if sufficiently quick to realize from the first how probably mistaken, or at least incomplete, her own previous notions of the character and requisite period of a thorough art education have been. Whatever the ultimate ambition, or the definite aim in view, the beginning will be invariably the same, and in joining any art school it is wisest to follow out exactly the course suggested by the directors of the classes and to take their advice, after having stated to them clearly one's requirements and object in studying. In the early stages of education in any pursuit, it is best for the student to rely on the judgment of experienced persons rather than to persist unreasonably in her own views, which in rare cases may be justifiable, but are usually only obstinately held to in the face of contrary advice, as the result of ignorance, not of wisdom. It is, perhaps, a little disappointing after having done really very pretty work at home to have only a rather uninteresting set of free-hand, or cast drawings to show as the result of one's first term at the long-talked-of art school, but the knowledge that the right road has been found and entered upon, ought to brace the student against the decidedly irritating comments of her friends and acquaintances, who realize as little as she herself did once, the methods of an art training.

APIECE of practical advice which girl students away, perhaps, from home care for the first time, will do well to heed, is the counsel to be prudent and regular as to meals and exercise. Much has been written from time to time about the importance of having a proper mid-day repast, and the folly of women who habitually perform a long day's work on insufficient nourishment, and it is to be hoped that few are unwise enough to deliberately risk the undermining of their constitution by disregarding medical advice and authority on this point. The other requisite to good health, namely, adequate exercise and recreation, is no less important. The close application and the mental exertion entailed in art work demands daily relaxation and, if possible, out-door sports, or at least plenty of walking, but preferably with some object in view and with a companion, for a solitary constitutional is with most of us a poor antidote to nervous fatigue. Some kind of recreation which takes the thoughts entirely away from one's work, giving change of occupation to the mind as well as to the body, is recommended by all doctors in giving advice for a healthy rule of life. Driving, riding on horseback, playing tennis, or going in for gymnastic training are all good tonics, while riding a bicycle, when not indulged in to excess, is most healthful and of growing popularity among the brain-workers of to-day, who are sensible enough to recognize the necessity of caring for their physical well-being.

FOLLOWING the first period of enthusiastic beginnings and ardent hopes, comes almost invariably a time of great depression and discouragement, which is by no means an indication of failure or incapability, but quite the contrary. A self-satisfied pupil is always the most disheartening to a teacher. But to the student the periodical recurrence of these fits of discouragement are very trying, and unless met in a philosophical spirit, may prove a hindrance to progress. Perhaps after some successful attempt, which actually had seemed a promise of real advance in the work undertaken, a day follows full of failures, owing to some unrecognized cause, which results in a fresh access of disgust at one's own slowness, and doubts of ever making headway. More experienced hands will unite in advocating the student to take fresh courage, and to make renewed efforts in the face of even the stupidest blunders. Encouragement ought to come with the realization that the best lessons are not only learned, but much more deeply impressed, through the painful experience of our own failures. We may have a principle expounded to us, and may have even at the time appreciated it to some extent, but the truth of it is never so forcibly brought home to us until after we have by heedlessness or inability failed through its disregard. Everyone must learn their own lessons by separate and individual experience, a master can only guide, admonish, or correct. This is true of education of any kind, most clearly expressed by the oft-heard exclamation: “I have been frequently told so-and-so, but now I see it for myself,” and every fresh lesson learned in thus coming to see for one's self is an added revelation, giving a new sense of power to the pupil. Some temperaments are more prone to alternate fits of elation and depression than others, although this characteristic is more or less common to all artistic natures. Certainly depression and discouragement should be bravely fought against, because indulged they simply increase and paralyze all the powers and energies, more often causing failure than being actually the result of it. The very nature of art work being, if earnestly undertaken, really very exhausting, increases any previous tendency to nervous depression, and it is safe to advise students never to try to judge for themselves of their progress at the end of a long and trying day. So much has been said on this subject because this liability to unwarranted discouragement is a very real evil among some of our students, and is apt to affect both health and spirits, so greatly do the physical and the mental react one upon the other in our complex being.

SOONER or later, if a student perseveres steadily, there will come a day when, with a glad sense of power and a humble realization of the vast amount yet to be learned, the feeling will be experienced that the first principles of one's art have been truly mastered, and that one has gotten beyond the early groping, tentative efforts, and is beginning, even while still often falling short in actual results, yet to see and to understand more clearly the requirements and possibilities of the work, with an increasing facility in its execution. From this date a new era should commence, with a redoubling of efforts and a yet braver facing of difficulties, with the encouraging recollection of past success. A fuller use of one's time becomes possible with increased ability. At this point the cultivation of a habit of constant sketching, more particularly with a regard to the future specialty in view, which by now has in all probability been determined on, will prove of untold value. The drawing afterward from memory all the careful studies and sketches made in class from still life or from living models is recommended as the most excellent possible practice by experienced artists. It trains the faculty of observation and makes the student more and more quick to see and to remember, giving a habit of thoroughness and attention to detail which it is most advantageous to acquire and which, carried into the higher branches of art and employed in conjunction with a certain refinement and sensitiveness of artistic feeling, together with the power of giving vivid and adequate expression to that which is so inwardly perceived, goes far to make up the sum of great genius.

WITH advanced students, the principal danger to be feared in the training received in an art school is that of falling into conventional habits of thought and expression. This must be earnestly combated by the persistent effort to think and see for one's self and the giving the fullest possible scope to one's own individuality and imagination, and particularly avoiding the fatal weakness of copying, consciously or unconsciously, the tricks or methods of any favorite or admired master or fellow student. To do so simply fetters the freedom of a proper and full development of the powers, and stifles the originality which each human being surely does possess, unless it has been put to death through overmuch or mistaken training.