

Advice on Painting

*Frank W. Benson (taken after criticism by his daughter Eleanor Bedford *)*

THE CHALLENGE

"The only fun in life is trying hard to do something you can't quite accomplish. There is no real fun in accomplishing some definite fixed thing.

"It is not easy. It is never easy. There is no magic about it. It is just as much a science as the science of a doctor. It has to be studied and worked at, and even then you never really learn it. No one has any magic way of doing it. No one has anything to start with except an over-mastering desire to do it, and the more you have the desire, the more you will work at it and the more you will learn. I am still working at it and learning, and that is all I care about. I don't care about the pictures I have painted. I may become fond of one and say "that's a good one", but all I really care about is working at this thing, and it is still so far ahead of me that I shall never reach it, and have only just begun to know anything about it.

SELF EDUCATION

"There is no such thing as teaching a person anything. You may be helped toward learning by a hint someone has given you, but anything you really learn has got to be learned by experience and only by working and solving the problem your self can anything become a part of your real knowledge. Most people don't believe this, and want you to show them. Showing them is like giving candy to a child. It doesn't help them at all. They couldn't do it themselves and the next time they met the problem they would not even recognize it. Most people think painting is a God-given talent. It isn't. It is a product of hard work and intense mental effort and only those can succeed who have the capacity for work and the necessary intelligence. (Said long before.)

"When I was working in the studio in Paris the French Maitre who previously had never been known to say anything to a student more complimentary than "Pas mal", and that very seldom, said to me one day: "Vous avez le metier dans le main; si vous jugerez mieux le caractere personelle de votre models, vous deviendrez tres fort." There it is — Le metier dans la main — your career is in your hand, to work out for yourself. No one else can help you. But people will not believe this. There was dead silence in the room. It caused so much excitement that there were crowds of students around my drawing all the rest of the morning." (This was in the studio of M. Gustave

Boulanger. The picture referred to was the study of the head of an old bearded man. This picture was given to Emerson Benson, cousin of F. W. B., and later inherited by E. B. L. and later given to her son, Ralph Lawson).

Me: "Thanks for the lecture"

FWB.: "All right. It won't do you a bit of good. You've got go dig these things out for yourself."

"The only way to learn to paint is to paint, No matter how dissatisfied you are with what you have done, you learn something. No one can tell you things which you must learn from experience."

"My belief lies in this direction—that you should learn absolutely to see the thing truly as it exists, and then use that knowledge as you like. A man should use his knowledge of this and express himself according to his inclination, but beneath everything should be the solid foundation of reality.

LIGHT AND SHADE

"The important thing in painting is to keep everything as *flat* as possible. Your tendency is to model surfaces too much, because you are looking for effects of light and shade. Especially keep *flat* the less important parts of a picture. Don't blend and soften too much. Where an edge cuts sharply, make it sharp, with a *flat* value against the contrasting background."

"You can't paint reality by just describing things. You must pay attention to light and shade and values.

"Look continuously at the whole picture, not at parts, and roam from place to place making adjustments. That's what painting is — Making adjustments. Don't look at one part too long or you will paint it too much in detail. The unimportant parts of a picture should not be minutely described so that they will attract notice. Do the values and let it go. Everyone - all of us — tries to get an effect by carefully describing an object. That's not the way it's done. Go back again and again — I can't say it often enough — to the effect of things when you are looking at the whole picture. Anything is important which increases the effect of light and shade. That light streak on the tablecloth for instance emphasizes the shadow which the instrument casts across the table.

"Always keep in mind the direction from which the light is coming, and the fact that objects are casting their shadows across the table, even if barely perceptible. That will help you to select the

things that are of significance.

"You are still thinking of things in terms of objects rather than in terms of areas of light."

"If you find a thing is going badly, go back and make more strongly the effects of light and shadow."

(Still-life). "Describe the lights and shadows of the drapery in masses. Pay special attention to the direction of folds in relation to the design. Invent if necessary. Draw carefully and don't make fuzzy places. Where the edge of the table disappears into shadow, don't make it plain. The light on the edge of the table is important because it describes the kind of material that covers the table. Yours might be a blanket."

Me: "Why do my watercolors lack a certain spontaneity and directness."

F.W.B.: Because you don't look at things with their large aspects of light and shade. As a design, not as objects. If you do this, you will get the objects afterwards. No one who was not born with the ability to do this can achieve it without a constant effort of will. If a landscape is not worth painting purely as a design in light and shade it is not worth painting at all, unless by the addition of a wave or a rock or an interesting form of some sort. Those pretty colors mean nothing without good drawing and an interesting design.

"I simply follow the light, where it comes from, where it goes to. In the beginning make an artificially simple division of light and shade. Of course, light has very subtle variations - it wouldn't be interesting if it hadn't - but do not make them in the beginning. Get the large forms right by the simple light and simple shadows. Don't fuzz it up and soften the edges and lose the characteristic forms of ???, etc. In the clothes you aren't sure just what you see in the large forms, so you say, well, here is a wrinkle, anyway, I know where that is, and you put it in and spoil all the large effect of the mass of light as distinguished from the mass of shadow. You haven't made the shadows on the white collar a part of the whole shadow, you are too anxious to keep it looking white."

"You must be entirely absorbed by the light and shade. You must turn right away from what has been most important up to now - drawing - and put down merely what the eye can see. Look for the places where the outline is lost and paint those most carefully. Because that is very difficult to do, don't yield to the temptation to draw a line around things. That (Mother's silver pitcher - this was at 14 Chestnut) is very beautiful, lovely to paint. But it is beautiful because wherever

you put it there are places you can't see, that lose themselves against the background. In arranging a still-life you are carried away by the beauty of the things themselves, instead of arranging them so that light is beautiful. Don't paint anything but the effect of light. DON'T PAINT THINGS."

"You still won't believe me when I tell you that the light on the whole figure is far more important than anything else you can do (any details) in giving the reality of the thing."

(Landscape). "Look at the shapes of the lights and shadows, put them down *flat*, make them exactly the shapes they are, without detail, and leave them. Don't puddle around with leaves and branches. Make the shadows right in relation to each other- near in value - and only when you have that done right, put in details. As much or as little as you like. That is not important.

(About a still-life with a vase of oak leaves). "I see very clearly the simplicity of the way the light falls, and yet the drawing is terribly complicated. As long as you try to make it better by improving the imitation of things, you will get into trouble; paint the light only. The drawing of the drapery gives the texture.

DESIGN

"There never was a great portrait which was not great because of its design, its arrangement or the whole figure and canvas, rather than just the face. The face is important too, but much less so than the whole. Few understand this, and because there is a face, think that is why they like a portrait. [So and so] paints only the face and so will never be successful in making a good portrait - paints the mask only and disregards the design. No one can be told what design means, but must feel the need of it and learn through experience. I never realized its importance until I was in my 30's— had an intuitive feeling for it before. When I realized it I enthusiastically organized a class in design at the school and tried to teach the students something that I never had had taught to me. They didn't know what I was talking about.

"A picture is merely an experiment in design. If the design is pleasing the picture is good, no matter whether composed of objects, still life, figures or birds. Few appreciate that what makes them admire a picture is the design made by the painter.

"The important part of a still-life is the design. Just so long as you are working on it to improve

the design the picture is going ahead."

(Apropos of some photographs of places, I asked why it is that things dim - seen in a mist for instance - seem much handsomer than those seen in detail.) "Simply because it allows you to see the design and does not distract your attention with unimportant small things."

"You will always get into trouble unless you design all the time you are painting. Stop designing and you are in trouble. You are so fascinated with painting, with making the things to look like reality that you forget to design. The things themselves should be made only at the very end - till then concentrate only on the values, and relations of color and space.

"You should look at a landscape - here's a way to get yourself into the right frame of mind - as if you were going to decorate a plate; to make a pattern that would successfully decorate that plate, and use the landscape before you to do it."

(I said I did not like the way my paint looked when it was on) "That has nothing whatever to do with it. Any more than what kind of ink I use in etching. The only way to achieve the kind of effect you are trying for is to get the right point of view toward the whole thing. Then you could put on paint with your finger and do better than you do now. You will never get what you are after until you arrive at the purpose that is behind it. You have a certain sense of design, but you don't use it when you sit down before a landscape. You try to paint what you have seen other people do and to make it look like rocks and trees instead of using it as a design. The great value of simplification in design is something you don't yet understand.

"Design makes the picture. Good painting can never save the picture if the composition is bad. Good painting - representation of objects - is utterly useless unless there is a good design. That is the whole object of painting, and unless you can think in those terms, you will never be a good painter. That is why painting is bad for you, except as practice in representation. You will not learn to be a good painter by doing portraits. You are too much interested in an eye or a nose, in the likeness.

"People who write about painting rarely know what a painter is trying to do. It doesn't matter whether you use landscapes, or birds, or people. Try to fill your space with the best possible pattern. Only intuition will tell you what is right. Men have tried to do it by mathematics. The

Greeks had a feeling for it like no other people since.

"A picture is good or bad only as its composition is good or bad. You can't make a good still-life simply by grouping a lot of objects, handsome in themselves. You must make a handsome arrangement, no matter what the objects are. Remember the clipping of a still-life of a disorderly table desk with papers, a hat, etc."

(We were talking of how the same principles of composition seemed to apply in all the arts, and FWB told me of a conversation with his friend Charles Martin Loeffler, the composer.) "We were sitting in front of the fire and talking of pictures, which he enjoyed and appreciated very much. Loeffler asked me to describe to him what went on in my mind when I was In the process of composing a picture. I tried to tell him as best I could, and went on talking I suppose for half an hour. At the end of that time I said: "I don't know why I am going on like this, for it can't mean much to you." He leaned forward and put his hand on my knee and said, "My dear Frank, I am greatly moved by what you have told me. By changing a few nouns, that might be a description of exactly what goes on in my mind when I am composing a symphony or an opera."

This was to emphasize, again, the fact that it is the composition, the design, the creation of the artist's mind, which is important, not the representation of objects with paint. "I grew up with a generation of art students who believed that it was actually immoral to depart in any way from nature when you were painting. It was not till after I was thirty and had been working seriously for more than ten years that it came to me, the idea that the design was what mattered. It seemed like an inspiration from heaven. I gave up the stupid canvas I was working on and sent the model home. Some men never discover this. And it is to this that I lay the fact of such success as I have had. For people in general have a sense of beauty, and know when things are right. They don't know that they have but they recognize great painting. And design is the ONLY thing that matters."

THE WHOLE

"Paint in a tentative way - not as though you had to paint a picture of the fabric to sell it to someone. The reason for the effectiveness of such a way of painting is that you are painting a light, a value, in relation to the whole picture - not just by looking at that exact spot and painting what you see, which is what you do. That fold is not interesting in itself. But it is interesting to paint

because of what it does to the whole picture. You are still interested in too small things - an ear, an eye, a likeness, that is the worst thing, a likeness. It takes your attention from the whole picture. But you have to have it, of course.

"Look at the picture as a whole all the time you are painting it.

"Look at a head (or a landscape) always as a whole, as a head and not as a collection of features. If you look at one feature alone you will not make it in proper relation to the whole. Don't draw lines around things—make them by rendering the light and shadow.

(About a still-life.) "It is perfectly possible, with all those handsome things to paint to go on making each thing better and better and at the same time to have the picture grow worse and worse. The reason it looked well at the beginning was because in order to get the thing laid out quickly you had to make everything *flat* and simple. Don't paint each object for itself, separately, but as a part of the whole. Paint the Biosphere, in which all the objects are, and in which they have their relations to each other. Don't fuzz things up, and mess the paint around. If it isn't right, pushing it around and blending it in won't make it so. Scrape it off and put in something that is right, drawing the shapes carefully. But at all times observe minutely the delicate variations of value between one thing and another or between the light and shadow. Do not paint the figure, the rabbit, the Instrument — paint the light and shade and interrelating values of the whole thing."

"A picture is always a synthesis, never forget that. Made up, it is true, of analysis—it must be. But the synthesis is what is important. Choice is what matters. It may not be conscious choice, but what seems natural and inevitable to the painter. This makes a distinguished sketch, or picture. Distinction cannot be achieved by "spelling words" — by doing each half-inch meticulously and perfectly. Never do anything without regard to expressing the whole, the spirit. Your drawing must be better than pretty good. It must be distinctively done.

"Do not look at one spot and paint that exactly. Look at the whole thing. Look at the head, and see at the same time what value and color the landscape is, and upright of the screen.

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"Paint a shadow where it comes, don't fuzz it up. Then when it is dry, if necessary do the small things. Did it ever occur to you that you could make things look lighter, not by using more light paint, but by making a sharper edge where the shadow comes? Paint exact shapes." (He takes mixed paint on the brush, held loosely by the end, and drags it over an area that needs light or dark, leaving irregular edges, slowly and carefully - modifies it, if necessary by another brushful of darker color dragged over it. As different as possible from mixing a lot of the same color and slapping it on. "Tentative." And the effect is miraculous. More like nature than the most meticulously painted area. And glowing with light and color. He says it is because he is putting down values in relation to the whole picture. That does not explain it. To me.)

AND RELATIONSHIPS

"Look at the whole scene constantly. You are too anxious to complete the thing instead of trying to see it right. You have got to give up what is easy and attractive (and natural, too) to do, and simply try to see the relations of values. A skillful man will seem to be making things at the same time, but really if he is good he will be only painting the relations of things. You think you do, but you have got to do it entirely differently if you are to get a real effect. Careful drawing of shapes is not making things.

BIG LOOK

"You are always making things too complicated: looking for small variations and little reflected lights. The trouble with most women is that they soften and prettify things and so lose punch. Don't make it look right near to — make it look right twenty feet away. Keep a *flat* tone over all that background, edge on to the light, with a solid figure in front of it.

VALUES

"You are paying too much attention to getting different colors in the background. Colors don't matter much--values are what you must get right—they are the only things that give any effect of sun and shadow. Don't mess around with your color and pat it down and smooth it out. Put it on and leave it. And make it "strong." You can't exaggerate too much—in the house it will all tone down and look too feeble. If a thing looks pinkish to you, make it vermilion. Don't be afraid of making things too strong. Draw very carefully the fine shape of a handsome tree or object. Take plenty of time and draw it well. Not easy to do.

(Concerning a portrait). "Don't draw the hair with strokes of the brush or make ringlets. Make a *flat* mass of the correct value, and lay on the lights drawing carefully the exact shapes. The light on that black hair must be cool. And don't paint it with black paint even if it is black. Against that green background It must have a certain warmth. (The model was not present) ."The things that are important are the correct relations of one thing to another—the hair, the shadow, the reflection, the half-tones, etc. Until you have these values right it is absolutely no use going ahead with anything else.

(Sketch of Mother on the piazza). "Composition, drawing, values, color, hot local color, edges. Above all, values. How the light falls. Keep comparing everything else with the darkest spot. With the lightest. Draw shapes carefully - that is not finishing. Don't paint objects. Paint only values.

"When you don't know what the values are, you make It fuzzy, try to fix something that's wrong by doing something more wrong. If you can't make sharp edges between the values, they are wrong ... By making a sharp edge between the light and shadow, here, the shadow does not need to be too dark.

"Scumble it with white or black if a thing goes wrong and start over.

LOST AND FOUND

" I am going to talk to you about something I have told you many times, and you don't know anything about. You over-represent things. You should be looking for the places in the picture where you can't quite see things, and paint those the way they are. Choose a subject with those places in it. Look at that face and then at the shoulder. Compared to the head you can hardly see it. You

make it that way and the head will suddenly stand out. In your effort to get the features and likeness, you make everything alike, and immediately everything loses its force. I don't mean things are absolutely vague, but relatively vague. Try it. No one can understand it 'til it happens to them.

"If that head wasn't there, you'd have a darned hard time telling what that coat was. Well, make your coat just as hard to see. This is something people never get told in school. It shows in all your work, landscapes and everything.

COLOR

"When we speak of color, we do not mean colors, such as the green of leaves or the pink of cheeks. We mean the effect of light on an object, and the effect which one color has on another nearby. No relation to what the ordinary person calls color.

(Still Life.) "You don't keep your lights *flat* enough. That is *flat* yellow light right up to the edge, not fading away pinkly at the bottom. And you will not get an effect of light unless there is more warmth in your shadows. I don't know whether I see the colors — I think I do — or merely have learned that things must be that color in order to have the necessary effect. I sometimes think I have no sense of color, as people mean it.

"When most people talk of color, they mean colors. What I mean is not the local color of any object but the relative value of light and shade. Warmth in the shadows. It doesn't matter whether a model has a colorless face — there is color in the contrasts of light and shade. Don't make your shadows so slatey. When painting the drapery don't make it in carefully modeled stripes. (Drapery at the top of the picture). Look at the center of the arrangement and then notice how much of the folds you see—practically nothing, just a vague light here and there. Paint it so.

"What gives charm to a picture is not the brilliant color—the strong contrasts, but the delicate bits, where one thing comes against another with no difference in value, and only a slight one in color. This is what is hard to do, and hard to see. Only a trained eye can see it. But the doing well of these bits is the most essential part of making an interesting picture. What makes the difference between a good picture and one where only the obvious differences are put down is how these delicate, intimate details are made." (This is as near as I can remember, and frequently repeated.)

WARM AND COOL

"The difference between warmth and coolness gives the true colors. See in the shadow there, behind the figure (still-life) there are lots of rich colors. But look away from it and you will see that it is all very vague compared to the figure itself. But vagueness does not mean fussiness, it means a very narrow difference between the different values. Paint it crisply, but keep it well in the background.

"Put down things strongly that indicate the nature and character of an object. Look for the significant things. Don't paint and model each little detail, (of the drapery) but put down in proper value and warmth or coolness of color the salient and characteristic lines.

"When you notice that one color is cooler or grayer beside a warm shade it does no harm to intensify the color of that spot as you do with effects of sunlight.

NEUTRALS

"A real artist is constantly looking for, searching out, the places in a picture which are not brilliantly colored. The neutral colors—Tarbell calls them the dirty colors. Without them, the rest lose their effect. A picture all bright colors loses the effect it would have if there were in it these contrasting bits of dull color. They are not noticeable in the picture, but they are what makes for its effectiveness—something that people not painters think is made in some magical way.

DRAWING

"Drawing is only learned by long hard practice. You can't learn it quickly, and you won't learn it quickly."

"Drawing can be learned — a sense of color must be born in a person").

"You are beginning at the wrong end; no one should begin to paint until he is able to draw well.

Drawing is always hard. You always have to work at it, even after forty years (said in a discussion

of Jacobleff's work).

“Get rid of all that purple molasses. You draw things light-heartedly and slap on paint. It would take anyone two hours to draw that branch properly.

FLATNESS

"Lay the values in *flat*.

"You haven't painted long enough to know what "*flatness*" means. It is the most valuable quality there is. You see a mere breath of difference in value, and you put in all sorts of changes and modulations."

"You don't know what *flatness* means. When that is dry, scratch on a few lines of paint over it to make that place lighter. Get It *flat*.

EDGES

"The most important parts of a picture are where edges meet, or one thing comes against another. Anybody can paint the rest of it. Edges must be very carefully studied. If there is no defined edge, don't make one” Don't make edges meet. Paint one over the other. A sky with variations of light and dark and especially a light or a dark line around the edge of objects simply spoils all effect of reality.

"Don't make a thing inconspicuous by making it fuzzy." (difficulties with the background).

"Make it *flat* in tone, all over, and it will stay back. Never make fuzzy edges, unless it actually is fuzzy, like the back of the hair." (portrait)

DETAILS

(About outdoor painting.) "Don't fuss around with all the details until you have your masses in and your composition arranged. The important things are the edges. The contrast between the hard sharp outline of branches against sky with the soft edges of shrubbery and foliage.

"If you make things right in the order of their importance you will never get into trouble. This

business of fussing around with the details before you have gotten the masses in correctly is what makes for a poor picture.

"Do not make the unimportant parts of the picture in detail, only do as much as you can see when you are looking at the main theme of your picture. Don't make so many different values and colors. Decide on what you want. Mix It. Try it. Mix it again if it is wrong. Then put it on *flat* and leave it. If you can only do a small part of the canvas, do it right and leave it that way."

"The reason you got into a mess with that picture is that you get fascinated with details and forget the main things. You had to have because you had gotten into a state that you couldn't have gotten out of alone. Now you have gone ahead in the right way." (The help consisted mostly in blotting out and blurring what I had done, leaving the plan and the drawing but obliterating the details, giving me a chance to start fresh and repaint the lower part of the canvas.)

THE MAJORS

People who paint cheap things do it by modeling the pieces. People who paint good things seem to do it without modeling. If you put on a pure value there, right up to the edge of the shadow, it will seem to model. Don't paint square inches, paint large masses.

TIGHT V. LOOSE

"We used to talk about "loose" and "tight" methods of painting when we were young. There are only a few people - Lucas Van Leaden, Holbein, for instance - who can paint as tight as a drum and still have it good; and that is because they look at it in the same way I am teaching you. And they are able to paint in that manner and still not lose the effect." (In answer to my question as to the explanation of the effectiveness of "loose" painting.) "Because it admits the varying qualities of the unseen. Literal description in painting will never make a picture. In order to be good it must have some touch of that magic which gives the effect of light and shade, leaving undescribed the places that are dim and cloudy, and painting sharply the silhouetted values."

SKETCHING

"Do carefully and well what you do. If you haven't time to finish a sketch, make what you do count. Don't hastily rub it in just to cover the canvas and say to yourself you will go back and do it better later—that's lazy, and besides it never looks the same.

LAY-IN

"A head which is to look right when finished, in the early stages of blocking in the lights and darks, ought not to look right; it ought to look raw, crude, almost violent. Then all the qualifying tones will not spoil its strong effect of light and shade when it is finished.

JOINTS

"Never leave white spaces around the edges of things. That absolutely ruins any effect of reality whatever. Beginners always make that mistake. Don't paint two things up to each other, paint one on top of the other. Sargent always said to paint the background of a head half an inch inside the outline of the head, and then paint the head on top.

"Where trees look thin, don't put a thin wash of color on over the sky. Decide what the value is and they lay it on with plenty of paint.

PAINT QUALITY

"Don't paint with soup, paint with paint. You will never get any effect of color without using lots of paint and very little medium.

"One of the most interesting times in my painting life was when Tarbell and I saw some pictures in Boston by a European artist— I've forgotten his name — who evidently got his effects by using a very "full" brush. We decided from that time on to use only a very full brush in all our work. The effect is produced because you carry your color, or value all across and it does*not thin out at the edges, but keeps it full effect everywhere." (This still does not explain to me why this method of dragging a full brush loosely across an area, leaving a more or less broken surface of color, is so effective. I said it gave a certain effect of texture, but he said no.)

PAINT HANDLING

"Sergeant was said to "dash" his paint on to his canvas. It is good practice (apropos of working from a model) to make a sketch by mixing your paints carefully, studying your model carefully and then lay the paint on where it should go and don't touch it again. Never puddle around and go dab, dab, dab. Scrape it off if it is wrong and lay on some more. But don't pat it and blur it and try to remedy it by blending it with something else.

STUDIO CONDITIONS

"Its no use trying to paint under unfavorable conditions. It's hard enough to paint with everything just right.

STRENGTH AND DELICACY

(When I said that my finished portrait looked "soft") "It is very difficult to make the right adjustment between strength and delicacy. Both are important and one must not be allowed to spoil the other.

ATMOSPHERE

"Colored moving pictures do not attract me because although the local color is there, the subtle variations of light and reflections are missing. Those are what make any scene In nature attractive to the eye, although the casual observer does not realize it. When one has analyzed it with the eye of an artist and tried to paint these very subtle variations he appreciates them, they are what makes the picture good, what gives it an atmosphere, and must be painted very delicately and with nice attention to the minuteness of the differences. Although not at all obvious in themselves, if well done they make the success of the picture.

STUDY

"There is a saying that there is nothing more to be found in a picture by the beholder than has been put into it by the painter. The more a painter knows about his subject, the more he studies and understands it, the more the true nature of it is perceived by whoever looks at it, even though

It is extremely subtle and not easy to see or understand. A painter must search deeply into the aspects of a subject, must know and understand it thoroughly before he can represent it well. The bald, obvious aspect of a picture are not the interesting ones. That is why the public will never understand painting. They admire it, yes, and like it, but will never understand it because they cannot understand what goes into the making of it. They ascribe all sorts of motives and ideas to the painter - none of which he ever has - because they can't understand how he thinks."

INSPIRATION IN THE START

"Those things which you do when you are freshly inspired and excited by the beauty of what you are seeing before you are important things. If you go back to them later and think you will improve them by making them carefully, slicking them up, you will lose that important thing and there is no method of getting it back. It is gone for good. Let things look rough, rather than try and smooth them out. There is a certain inspiration which comes when you work quickly and surely and enthusiastic about the beauty of the light. You should leave this work and go back to it later to realize how good it is, and that it must not be painted over. Get the force of the light.

AND POETRY

"A picture or drawing is like a poem, when the poet starts, he has no more and no different words to work with than you have. A work of art is made by his choice — selection and combination of ordinary material. Each man sees a subject differently and selects different things in it to emphasize. See any roomful of student's drawings."

LANDSCAPE

(When I asked how to get the effect of a mass of bare tree branches against the sky)

"The general mass effect is darker than the sky, even than the pieces of sky seen through them. So don't draw a faint tracery of branches against the light value of the sky—you'll get no effect that way. Put on a *flat* tone just faintly darker than the sky and then indicate a few darker lines against that.

SUBJECT

"The trouble with you is that like most beginners you try to embrace too wide a scene. You are looking for the sort of scenery that a photographer would look for with lots of sky and distant hills. Be broad-minded and don't go out with a pre-determined notion of what you want to find to paint. Intimate studies of light and shadow in a small area are most interesting. A thing to be beautiful must be complicated. Don't paint something bad just because it is simple. It's just like a tailored suit—the thing must be subtle in order to be good. The fine distinctions of value where one object comes against another are what make a picture interesting. When Sergeant went up to visit Billy James at Chicorua, they went out painting and Bill led him along without saying anything, and took him unobtrusively to the "town view", mountain reflected in lake, etc. Asked him if he thought he could find anything round there to paint. Sergeant said yes, he could find something anywhere, looked around him and sat down and painted an old gnarled root with, some leaves and branches on it. What interested him (and F. V. 3.) was the delicate play of light and shadows on the leaves and trunk.

"Whenever I find myself—as I do sometimes—painting a "scene" I am disgusted with myself. Take a small piece of something with a handsome shape—don't include too much. That tree trunk against the cedars veiled "by the thin underbrush in front. Don't take in the branches against the sky, that gives a second center of interest."

"In looking for a subject don't look for a grand panorama but a near thing with interesting lines and values. DON'T PAINT A SCENE.

GOOD PICTURES

"A good picture has a certain austerity, a distinction, whether of the thing itself, the lighting, the color, or the arrangement. Mere craftsmanship, representing nature, does not make a picture.

MODERNISTS

(Speaking of modernists)" That is what the most honest of the modernists are trying for. The plain fact does not interest them. They say "I will not say D-O-G spells dog, because that is stupid and literal. So they make something else, liberate themselves to say the same thing in another, more interesting way. But the others, less honest, merely look at the fact of liberation, do not understand what they were liberated for, and merely think they can make anything and call it

Art. They are not happy about it, don't enjoy what they do, so says J.P.B (John Benson).

"The modernists think they are Inventing something new every day. Men's minds don't work that way. Every invention is based on completeness. You might say I invented something. I merely noticed and painted an aspect of nature that had escaped other men's observation. Now there are hundreds of men who do the same thing, more or less well, according to their real knowledge."

**Order of paragraphs and headings incorporated later by others.*