

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

A Reminiscence

Richardson was a firm believer in his own greatness as was his most enthusiastic worshiper. "There", he would say, striking an attitude before a large drawing of the Senate Staircase at the Albany Capital, "there", he would say to in awe stricken admirer, "that will be the finest staircase in the world." That of course immediately placed the matter beyond all possibilities of a shadow of a doubt. And yet, the very next week he deliberately discarded the fourth set of elaborate drawings that had been made for this master work and began anew to [] and remodel his ideas, only to give a higher grade of refinement and excellence to the work; not that it might possibly please the public more, but rather because his own genius had not been fully satisfied with the first or the second or even the third result.

Practically such performances involved him in enormous expenses; but that worried him little; he could bear great burdens with comparative ease; his wonderful intellect controlled the mental strains and his ponderous frame responded faithfully until it was finally over-taxed by high living.

Poor man, he did American civilization a lasting service; Art received full justice in his hands and North Eastern is a little mecca for the Architectural student. But American civilization rewarded him poorly; it undermined a robust constitution and hastened the end. Richardson led a royal life; it was high art and high life; in fact everything with him was high even his fees; and wealthy clients vied with one another to pay him the highest prices. There was a deal of joking at his expense. Upon one occasion a stray vest of his which was discovered in his workroom was seized by one of us, Roberts I think it was who threw it about his shoulders like a cloak and walked into the office reciting "The air bites shrewdly. It is very cold." A colleague. James – seeing this, at once got into the vest with him and so gave us a da capo performance. "There's room for one more" cried I and suiting the action to the word placed myself in front of James, and with Robert in the rear who had on the vest, I button the double-breasted garment about me, and so our trio in lockstep paraded the field for the edification of twenty jolly workers.

It was a much sought privilege to be shown through Richardson's office. The visitor was ushered in through an anteroom leading into an irregular series of odd shaped rooms that had been built from time to time as the business developed, until there finally arose a long series of alcoves, one for each of the numerous assistants, all overlooking a large general workroom at a trifle lower level in whose farthest corner his lordship puffed and snorted behind a huge table heavily draped with the most expensive goods that Boston could furnish. From this position he could keep his forces well subdued; and he would sit in state to give audience to some humble creditors that made bold to assert their claims; if the unfortunate collector ventured into his royal presence he was forthwith paralyzed by the effect of the surroundings and was readily convinced that another time would answer

quite as well for payment of bills.

Unwary clients were handled differently. Their way to the trap led through an avenue of tables, which finally came up to a small vestibule decorated with large photographs of the works of the old Masters. Here a low heavily hung opening revealed the splendor of a dreamland beyond. All was quiet save occasional muffled noises from without of carriages bringing visitors to the study. The skylight in the center of this large room was concealed by a curtain of soft India silk diffusing its rosy light over the bewildering mass of niches spread before you; Oriental rugs were relieved on a solid ground of deep blue carpets. A huge center table was filled with the rarest volumes, bric-a-brac and choice bits generally; bookcases and cinches ranged along the walls; casts and vases showed off beautifully in the subdued light against deep maroon walls; the solid gold ceiling with its great sturdy cherry beams from which were suspended here and there all varieties of Oriental lamps of the most intricate metal workmanship – all were overpowering. The wall opposite the entrance was a great old fashioned crane fire-place upon whose hearth the cordwood crackled gleefully for the entertainment of the lazy guest who might lie outstretched on luxurious divans. There were stupendous volumes in sumptuous bindings inviting study. Away off in a quiet corner lay some happy pupil in blissful repose, reveling in the resources of the land of plenty in his seventh heaven. This room was a magic source of inspiration, and in the long winter months it was the retreat for all during noon hours.

But the summer brought other attractions; we play tennis or pitched quoits; some played ball while others took strolls about the country. This last was my weakness, the suburb was all that a romantic mind could desire, but it was a dangerous place for the amateur poet. I think with his ah's and oh's, and oh's and ah's, he would not survive one season. We took strolls around the block as we termed it, which meant three miles in one direction and about five in another. It was a succession of shaded walks under rows of stately elms. There were long lines of New England fences and moss covered stones with rich meadows beyond, often barely discernible through thick hedges of sweet syringa or blackberry briars. Now and then an ancient colonial farmhouse, gray with time, arrests our attention and its simple chaste beauty compels admiration. But we hurry on for it is a long walk to be accomplished in a short hour. At three miles there is a charming village such as produced the famous old blacksmith; and as the road leads slowly up the hill behind the church, the silence becomes oppressive, relieved only by the same old monotonous rustle of the leaves and the twittering of birds, that rustled and twittered from times immemorial and will rustle and twitter to cheer up the depressed spirits of mankind for ages to come. There are the same old moss covered rocks at the roadside, such as delight painters and puzzle naturalists by nourishing tall scraggly pines upon their barren backs; and the same old babbling brook still tumbling merrily along over its rocky bed, greeting us lustily as it passes; then a turn of the road through the bushes brings us to the brow of the hill and a glorious panorama lies before us. A bright shining speck immediately claims the center of the picture; it is the gilded dome of the distant State House. The "Hub" as it is rightly called for all creation seems its vassals. On the sea beyond, vessels flock like birds about it; in front the proud River rolls by doing homage; furious railway trains shriek defiance in the mad rush from all sides, but they dare not

assault; and the quiet landscape studded with Village spires and clustered elms forms but a frame for this little far off magnate. But it cannot hold its own; Trinity's beautiful red spire at once challenges for supremacy. Ah, there is beauty, dignity and modesty, and we bow in reverence to the genius of our master. There never was Ancient with more refinement, nor medieval artist with more fascinating picturesqueness. His Trinity will in ages to come tell the story of an epoch in American Art; but it will hardly be believed now, for time has not yet enveloped it with its thousand charms that foster a fuller appreciation and obliterate faults now painfully magnified here and there in their newness. At this though we [cling] fast to the image of our master rising before us and pray that he may be preserved to the world. But our conscience calls to duty; time is up and we are still out; a quick rally, a long steady run down the slope along the shaded country road, we rush into the house half out of breath and all in a glow, longing for a cool plunge bath, which though is not to be had. Such was the daily programme.

Richardson was at the height of his glory. It was the ideal; but alas, it soon proved to be the impracticable. We saw the gradual change come on. Commissions assumed greater magnitude and importance; work was done in less time; we were rushed on and were no longer allowed to seek relief among the treasures of the Study. Our beloved goddess was losing power; she was being crowded out by the clamor for modern improvements; we grew uneasy and became alarmed; and when the tide of success was running highest lo, the fatal hour arrived. Richardson died peacefully, the victim of a dread disease. He was mourned by a world of admirers. Those that had the privilege of association with him will remember his marvelous power over men; his princely manner, his generosity and kindness, his indefatigable industry and devotion to the cause of Art, have borne fruit and will be the foundation for a school that promises to be the key to the solution of the problem; the development of a modern pure classic style. May the rising generation carry on the noble work.

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