

Excerpt 1

The ancient Romans in time past forbade that any should be taught the art of painting, **save gentlemen only**. I conjecture they did it upon judgment of this ground: as thinking that no man using the same to get his living by, if he was a needy artificer, could have the patience or leisure to perform any exact, true and rare piece of work; but men ingeniously born, and of sufficient means, not subject to those common cares of the world for food and garment, moved with emulation and desire thereof, would do their uttermost best, not respecting the profit or the length of time; nor permit any unworthy work to be published under their name to common view, but deface it again rather, and never leave till some excellent piece of art were by him or them performed worthy of some commendations. By reason whereof it was no wonder that the most excellent nation and the greatest wits of the world then brought forth the most rare works in painting that ever were; it must needs be granted then for ever. And like as one good workman then made another, so one botcher nowadays maketh many, and they increase so fast that good workmen give over to use their best skill, for all men carry one price.

Now, therefore, I wish it were so that none should meddle with limning but gentlemen alone, for that it is a kind of **gentle painting**, of less subjection than any other; for one may leave when he will, his colours nor his work taketh any harm by it. Moreover, it is secret: a man may use it, and scarcely be perceived of his own folk. It is sweet and cleanly to use, and it is a thing apart from all other painting or drawing, and tendeth not to common men's use, either for furnishing of houses, or any patterns for tapestries, or building, or any other work whatsoever. And yet it excelleth all other painting whatsoever in sundry points, in giving the true **lustre** to pearl and precious stone, and worketh the metals gold or silver with themselves, which so enricheth and ennobleth the work that it seemeth to be the thing itself, even the work of God and not of man: being fittest for the decking of princes' books, or to put in jewels of gold,

and for the imitation of the purest flowers and most beautiful creatures in the finest and purest colours which are chargeable;¹⁹ and is for the service of noble persons very meet, in small volumes, in private manner, for them to have the portraits and pictures of themselves, their peers, or any other foreign persons which are of interest to them. And this is a work which of necessity requireth the party's own presence for the most part of the time, and so it is convenient that they be gentlemen of good parts and ingenuity, either of ability, or made by prince's fee able so to carry themselves as to give such seemly attendance on princes as shall not offend their royal presence. Seest thou not that these men, then, must often in their business stand before princes, though they be born but common people? But God, the author of wisdom and the giver of all good gifts and goodness, He giveth gentility to divers persons, and raiseth man to reputation by divers means: we read that He called Bezaleel and Aholiab by name, and filled them with wisdom, skill and understanding, without any teaching, but only of His own gift and grace received. He taught them Himself to be cunning in all fine and curious work, in embroidering in silk, in painting, in setting of precious stones in gold, and carving of wood. The text sayeth He filled them with the spirit of God to devise cunningly in such works, being men before brought up but in slavery and making of bricks in captivity, they and their ancestors for many generations. Ec

Here is a kind of true gentility, when God calleth: and doubtless though gentlemen be the meetest for this gentle calling or practice, yet not all; but natural aptness is to be chosen and preferred, for not every gentleman is so gentle spirited as some others are. Let us therefore honour and prefer the election of God in all vocations and degrees: and surely he is a very wise man that can find out the natural inclinations of his children in due time, and so apply him that way which nature most inclineth him, if it be good, or may be made good; as it may be used, though in childhood abused. And as for a natural aptness of or to painting after the life, those surely which have such a gift of God ought to rejoice with humble thankfulness, and to be very wary and temperate in diet and other government, lest it be soon taken from them again by some sudden mischance, or, by their evil customs, their sight or steadiness of hand decay.

Excerpt 2

And now to the matter for precepts, for observations or directions to the art of limning, which you require as briefly and as plainly as I can, concerning the best way and means to practice and attain to skill in limning. In a word before, I exhorted such to temperance; I mean sleep not much, watch not much, eat not much, sit not long, use not violent exercise in sports, nor earnest for your recreation, but dancing or bowling or little of either. Then the first and chieftest precept which I give is **cleanliness**, and therefore fittest for gentlemen; that the practicer of limning be precisely pure and cleanly in all his doings: as in grinding his colours in place where there is neither dust nor smoke; the water well chosen, or distilled most pure, as the water distilled from the water of some clear spring, or from black cherries, which is the cleanest that ever I could find, and keepeth longest sweet and clear; the gum to be gum arabic of the whitest and brittlest, broken into white powder on a fair and clean grinding stone; and white sugar candy in like sort to be kept dry in boxes of ivory; the grinding stone of fine crystal, serpentine, jasper or hard porphyry at the least. Let your apparel be silk, such as sheddeth least dust or hairs; wear nothing straight.³⁷ Beware you touch not your work with your fingers, or any hard thing, but with a **clean pencil**³⁸ brush it, or with a white feather; neither breathe on it, especially in cold weather. Take heed of the dandruff of the head shedding from the hair, and of speaking over your work for sparkling, for the least sparkling of spittle will never be helped if it light in the face, or any part of the naked.³⁹

the light and place

Excerpt 3

This makes me to remember the words also and reasoning of Her Majesty when first I came in her Highness's presence to draw; who, after showing me how she noted great difference of shadowing in the works, and the diversity of drawers of sundry nations, and that the Italians, who had the name to be cunningest and to draw best, shadowed not, required of me the reason of it, seeing that best to show oneself needeth no shadow of place, but rather the open light. The which I granted, and affirmed that shadows in pictures were indeed caused by the shadow of the place,

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or coming in of the light only one way into the place at some small or high window, which many workmen covet to work in for ease to their sight, and to give unto them a grosser line, and a more apparent line to be discerned; and maketh the work emboss well,⁴⁹ and show very well afar off, which to limning work needeth not, because it is to be viewed of necessity in hand near unto the eye. Here Her Majesty conceived the reason, and therefore chose her place to sit in for that purpose in the open alley of a goodly garden, where no tree was near, nor any shadow at all, save that as the heaven is lighter than the earth, so must there be that little shadow that was from the earth. This Her Majesty's curious demand hath greatly bettered my judgment, besides divers other like questions in art by her most excellent Majesty, which to speak or write of were fitter for some better clerk.

This matter only of the light let me perfect, that no wise man longer *Lig* remain in error of praising much shadows in pictures after the life, especially small pictures which are to be viewed in hand; great pictures placed high or far off require hard shadows, which become them better than nearer; in story work better than pictures of the life. For beauty and good favour is like clear truth, which is not shamed with the light, nor needs to be obscured; so a picture a little shadowed may be borne withal for the rounding of it; but so greatly smutted or darkened as some use, disgraceth it, and is like truth ill told. If a very well favoured woman stand in a place where is great shadow, yet showeth she lovely; not because of the shadow, but because of her sweet favour, consisting in the line or **proportion**. Even that little which the light scarcely showeth greatly pleaseth, moving the desire to see more, *ergo* more would see more; but if she be not very fair together with her good **proportion**, as if too pale, too red, or freckled etc., then shadow to show her in doeth her a favour. Wherefore I conclude great shadow is a good sign, in a picture after the life, of an ill cause, and showeth plainly that either the drawer had no good sight to discern his shadows except they were gross, or had a bad light to draw in, too high or too low or too little; or else the party drawn needeth and chose those shadows for the cause above said; or it was perhaps for some special device or affection⁵⁰ of the stander to be drawn in so standing.

... as we well call it, and to round