



AN AUSTRALIAN ARTISTIC SENTIMENT.

Sir John Longstaff, the well-known Australian artist, in a recent article on "Australian Art," said:—"We have some fine talent here, and a fine basis on which art can develop. But, I do not see any immediate prospects of the development of an Australian point of view. This will be a matter of centuries. America, which is much older than we are, still reflects powerfully the influence of French art."

But, is this absence of a national sentiment to be wondered at, when every artist, at the first opportunity, rushes away to the other side of the world and remains there for the greater part of his artistic life, saturating himself in the old world traditions and contemplating the old masters?

They all do their best to forget Australia, and Australian ideals and sentiment, as things too mean and modern to be tolerated for a moment by anyone who wishes to achieve distinction in the world of art.

Sir John spent all his best years in Paris, and though he showed original genius before he left his native land, he found it more profitable to become a mere copyist, and carefully forget the originality with which Providence undoubtedly endowed him.

When enthusing over the old masters, artists universally forget that the men they rave about had no old masters to rave about, and also they as conveniently forget that the same old masters knew nothing of our wonderful "To-day," and, as a natural consequence, they did not, and could not interpret "Our wonderful to-day."

It is reasonable to suppose that, if left to develop on natural lines, artists would begin to see with their artistic eye the wonderful beauty in things around them, and they would produce far more original work than they now do, naturally, on lines quite

different from the traditional works that are now turned out, all over the world; but works worthy of founding new traditions, which would inspire a new school of art.

In many ways, it could be easily shown that the world has become an intellectual parasite, entirely depending for inspiration on schools of thought dictated by works of men long in their graves, who, were they with us to-day, would be doing work of quite a different nature.

There should be neither rules nor traditions to hamper creative art. There is more cant spoken of art than any other mental activity, and extravagant prices are paid to-day for many Old Masters, not worth the price of the canvas on which they are painted, because a number of sordid dealers, without any taste, are able to gull the world into the belief that they are treasures. Without this boosting many of these pictures would go unnoticed, and it is well known that many of these pictures are sold merely because of the signature they carry.

The great Pierpont Morgan spent millions of pounds on pictures that were afterwards found to be frauds, and it is common knowledge that there are hundreds of artists all over Europe who spend their lives manufacturing "Old Masters", for which the unscrupulous dealers find ready sale.

In his beautiful picture, "Breaking the News," which won John Longstaff his scholarship, he produced a work of truly Australian sentiment, painted on truly Australian lines, but he never attempted to paint another picture on those lines. Born in the Australian bush, Sir John inherited the sentiment that could have enabled him with his native genius to develop that point of view which he says is absent.

In the early days of Victorian colonisation there were many truly Australian artists, whose works were constantly on view, because it was not then so easy for every budding genius to rush away to the other side of the world.

We are the poorer for the absence of an Australian school of art, because there are so many phases of Australian sentiment that should be perpetuated for the sake of posterity.

At times we are told that Australians are braggarts, and at times we hear that we are handicapped by the inferiority complex; but, if what Sir John says is true—and there is strong evidence in support in art at least—there is far too little of the braggart, and an overwhelming quota of the inferiority complex, which it is high time that something was done to combat.



"Breaking the News" – Sir John Longstaff