



William Keith
As Prophet Painter



By Emily P. W. Hay



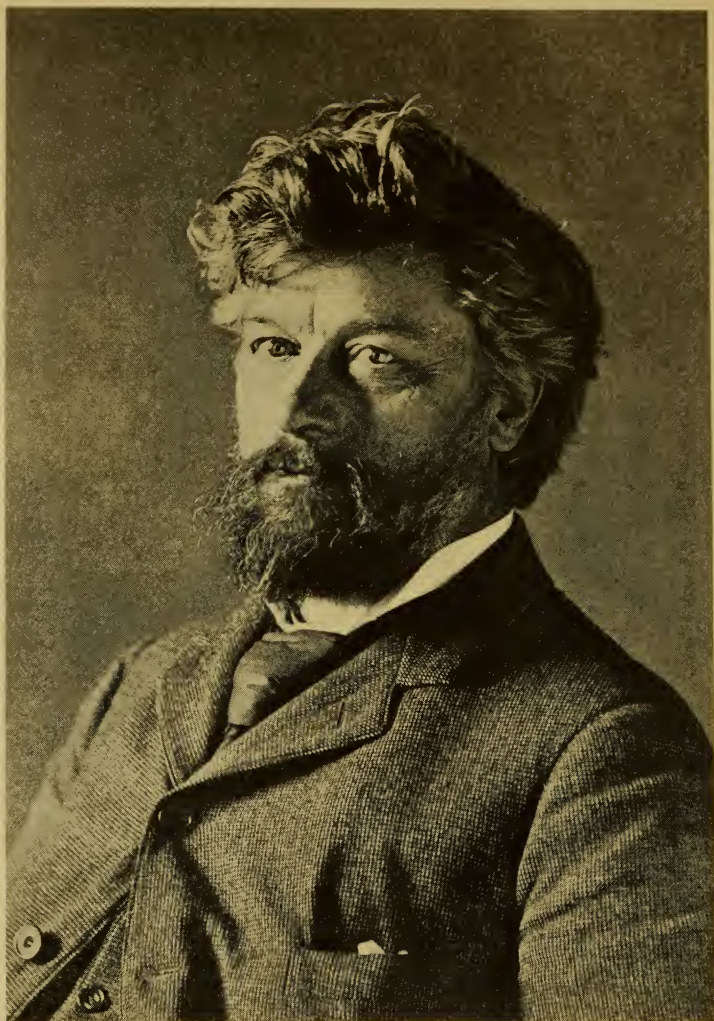
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WILLIAM KEITH
AS PROPHET PAINTER



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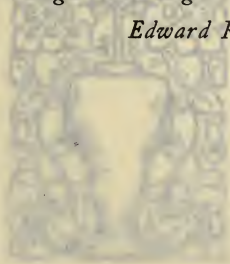


WILLIAM KEITH

AS

*What is this vast, stupendous universe,
With all its timeless, great eternities,
Its countless worlds that hang so far in space,
But the expression of the mind divine?
And some of that small part in which we breathe
Keith sought in terms of color to make plain
To us who else might rest in ignorance.*

Edward Robeson Taylor.

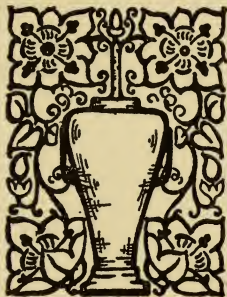


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It had a fair trial, stupendous universe,
With all its wonders, great certainties,
Its countless worlds that hang so far in space,
But the expression of the mind declines,
And some of that small part in which we breathe
Keeps sought in terms of color to make plain
To us who else might rest in ignorance.
Edward Robeson Taylor.

WILLIAM KEITH
AS
PROPHET PAINTER

By EMILY P. B. HAY



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TO OTHER PUPILS
OF THE OLD STUDIO, THIS
MONOGRAPH IS CORDIALLY
ADDRESSED

WILLIAM KEITH
AS PROPHET PAINTER

WILLIAM KEITH *as* PROPHET PAINTER

I.

WILLIAM KEITH was born in Old Meldrum, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, 1839. This is the conventional opening of a biography but consider its import. In applying commonplace phrases to a genius we disclose in our words a secret motive—a modest whispering in our consciousness that, in his ultimate personality, he is yet a man like unto ourselves; merely going before in the wilderness of our own emotions proclaiming, *There is a Perfect Beauty yet to come.* Such is the vocation of the Prophet in Art, in Religion or in any other sphere designated by such partial names as we utilize in this our temporal condition. Such was the office of William Keith in that fragmentary activity of life which we please to style: *Painting.*

We know that in the history of Religion two streams are apparent, distinct though often confluent; hieratic and prophetic. The prophetic is a torrent nearly pure from its source, constantly pouring into the stream of ecclesiasticism to illumine its sluggish waters which

threaten to stagnate in the dead letter of the law. We know, too, that these fresh impulses of the individual soul offend the official keepers of the flood-gates of religious truth who fear intuition as a dangerous substitute for measured anise and cummin of priestly legislation. Analogous in attitude stand the High Priests of Technique who condemn the subordination of brushwork and pigment to the unfettered impulses of poetry and religion. Hence, if you find all-sufficiency of peace and happiness in the Oak Forests and Harvest Fields of William Keith, you may be sentenced in the High Courts of Authorized Criticism with the epithet—"Provincial."

Yet the Ninth Symphony was not written while Beethoven was globe-trotting, and in a certain very small province —Judea—the bounds of universal humanity were forever eliminated.

In his relation to the academical laws of technique, Keith was as one, who, discerning the existence of a higher law, pulls out his ox on the Sabbath Day. Was not the Sabbath made for man rather than man for the Sabbath? Was not the brush created for Keith rather than Keith automaton of the paint brush?

Unlike mere representations of Nature as produced by many of the Hierarchy, he revealed to his followers the increate

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glory of the landscape which passed into their souls as an abiding delight: to be fanned into ecstasy by the sight of every living tree, rock or rivulet "composing" throughout the length and breadth of California. Not alone in California; wherever splendid masses of gray and white clouds mount in cerulean skies or the departing sun dissolves in rose and gold.

Since every prophet is swayed by racial influences, we may discern in the names of "Keith" and "Aberdeen" insignia of his temperament. Follow the fortunes of Bruce and Wallace to be in sympathy with my characterization; for all the courage, honesty and resolute independence of his Scottish ancestors who fought with those chieftains repeated themselves in the personality of Keith. Indeed, this exile of Highland strain, with his sturdy form and dark-blue eye, was exceedingly proud of his brawn, doubting at times but that Fate had played a strange prank to thrust into his hands the pliant paint brush instead of a doughty claymore. This really being no more a whim of Fate than are coincidents the shuttlecocks of Chance, over-ruling Destiny ordained that within the span of life allotted Keith, 1839-1911, he should have within his grasp such stuff as reacting on his soul would mold and cast it forth for use on the Plane Beyond.

The leonine strength in which he prided must be sublimated to spiritual activity; his canvases must disappoint many who look for a culminating masterpiece at his hands. But the Lord was *perfecting that which concerned him*—not primarily the temporary walls of an Art Exhibition. His work must reflect the progress of his soul. Hence, in the twilight of his earthly life are we surprised to find his “Inspiration” and “Gethsemane”?

Celtic—which is to say impulsive and imaginative—rooted in a soil dominated by such monarchs of the Highlands as Ben Nevis and Ben Macdhui, his youth was bent by the hand of a not-too-tender stepmother allied to the yet sterner hand of Presbyterianism. He was obliged to attend the Kirk five times of a Sabbath. This is not provocative of high spirits in small boys—though I may seem to contradict myself a few sentences later—and the periodical return of a Sabbath depression attended Mr. Keith throughout his successive years, enveloping family, friends and pet dogs alike. With his Sunday clothes he enveloped himself in an atmosphere repelling all suggestions of, “Checkers?” and I really think that the sympathetic ears of “Hegel” and “Jumbo” drooped just a bit nearer the ground on Sunday than they drooped on any other of the six secular days of the

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week. He acknowledged these periodical disturbances of his system; ingenuously admitting that, as a boy, he had made desperate revolts against their obsession; but invariable suppression of these early revolts left, in his naturally heroic nature, a lasting impression of ignominious defeat. In his own words, here is a description of Keith's Rebellion.

"You know they used to make me go to church five times a day on Sunday. Well—the seats were so high that my feet couldn't touch the ground. The consequence was, first my feet and then the rest of me went to sleep during the preaching. My mother would lay me down under the seat—which generally woke me up. Then I would sit up and, realizing my captivity, proceed to revenge myself against Fate. I would creep along very quietly on all fours the whole length of the pew, then suddenly poke my head out from my hiding place. It never failed to produce the result which I was hoping for: everybody jumped or squealed! There was another result, though, that followed: my mother!—with a rush of suppressed dialect: "*You, Wullie! when I get ye hame!*"

I think that this must have been the germination of a lingering uncertainty as to what would be his deserts in the After Life. He always seemed to be

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haunted by a whispering conscience.
“*You, Wullie—when I get ye hame!*”

The current of his life suggests a mountain torrent of his own Highlands: the Findhorn, itself, channelling through wild glen and forest, steep cliff, gnarled birch, moss, broom and eglantine: finally, inevitably drawn to the Sea of Divine Realization. We must look not only upon the brilliant waters as they glance in the sunlight, but we must comprehend the dark pools of sombre thought shadowed by opposing, overhanging rocks of circumstance: the angry swirl about lesser obstacles and all the babbling foolishness engendered by trifling pebbles of daily life. We must see him—to quote his own oft-repeated words—as “A Whole.”

“*Don't pitter-patter over one little detail in the landscape!*” he would implore us: “*Can't you see that everything belongs together? Can't you see things as a whole?*”

Dear Master; Gone to a perception of the Whole Design, he now sees this earthly life as but a fragment, a sketch for immortality's reference; and mindful of the wider meaning which he unconsciously urged, I will try to follow his instructions in the handling of details as they incorporated with the full current of his life.

II.

At twelve years of age, in company with his mother, Mr. Keith first set foot in America: New York. Here, uncongenial employment in a law office and the more attractive occupation of wood-engraver secured him means of support. There was great demand at the time for wood-engraving in the illustration of books and magazines, and through employment by such firms as that of Harpers he was floated onward in his career to the yet indefinite goal of his emotional desires. The very particularity of detail demanded by engraving, served later to free his hand to essential strokes in delineating objective forms in the landscape. He would return to bold action which was his by nature only after he had served artistic vassalage in the exigencies of microscopic observance.

When the invention of half-tone printing and newer methods of photography displaced the more expensive process of hand-engraving, Mr. Keith, with others of like profession, was thrown out of employment. At this point, 1859, he came to California, where he awoke fully to the growing conviction that he was mysteriously attuned to the moods of Nature, and in an attitude of love and reverence sketched in water colors the various

phases of these communications. The sale of such attempts—crude or no—helped to swell the sum which he began to accumulate with a view to studying abroad.

In 1869 he entered the Düsseldorf Academy. Here, the Teutonic influences of the school created pictures in the tight, orderly system of military organization, —strictly in accordance with academical tradition which “finished” pictures with the same precision that polishes a buckle for military inspection. This method of procedure easily complemented the discipline of his former work through the lens of a wood-engraver, and I shall never forget my surprise when a few years ago I chanced upon a full-fledged illustration of this same geniture. I was calling on a friend and while waiting in the parlor glanced up at the pictures on the wall. The owners of the house were German and I thought that one of the pictures which I contemplated must certainly be of German workmanship. Everything about it was so painfully exact: from definite trees with their precise little leaves to the neat little road travelled by a punctual little horse drawing a tidy little wagon. Who was the artist? I looked in the corner of the painting to read *William Keith*. I think that I then first realized that great men

as well as small men fall under the same law of evolution.

At that period of his work I was not in objective existence and when he undertook to initiate my humble self into the expression of nature on canvas, he had once again thrown off the trammels of academical restraint and was roaming the free Highlands of his native genius: vast, uncompromising forcefulness. To this, the scenery of California is nobly confederate, and so imbued were we of the Old Studio with this spirit of our Chieftain, that when he appealed to us to "Work Largely!" we proved our allegiance to his slogan by wielding brushes of enormous size and squeezing out paint unlimited in quantity.

Several later European trips influenced Keith's work to the extent that he has been "classed" with the Fontainebleau-Barbizon school: with Corot, Dupres, Rousseau and others.

Arboreous fretwork of misty gray may suggest the *Paysage* of Jean Corot; love of the wild, the rugged and the powerful was characteristic of Theodore Rousseau; but irrespective of Corot, a physical defect of short-sightedness, uniting the innate rhythm of his being, often resulted in a symphonic impression of gauzy earth, tree and sky. Love of the wild, rugged and powerful, was Keith's birthright in

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the Highlands—not the reflected passion which those aspects of nature kindled in the heart of Theodore Rousseau. Like Rousseau, he sketched directly from nature long before he was aware of a contemporaneous movement designated as the Revolt from Classicism.

Though, like many of the artists of Fontainebleau-Barbizon, he eventually painted many of his scenes in the studio and not directly from nature, innumerable were the solitary walks in which he jotted on the pages of his inevitable note book a peculiar short-hand record of the component tones which he discerned in the afternoon aspect of a mountain or gathering storm. These were to him what the notes of a piano are to the musician, whose long familiarity with lines, dots and spaces permits him at length to close his eye to the key-board and vest memory in dreamy rhythm or solemn chord.

Keith was as responsive to the vibrations of music as to those of color, having a tenor voice which often delighted us with "Scots wha hae," the "Ingleside," and so forth. His superlative power of mimicry presents, apart from its place in the babbling foolishness of his life's current, a serious side to its psychology: ability to enter the very emotional substance of any personal quality. Had he

chosen any other career he would have made a success of it; not merely by dint of concentration and perseverance, but through power to direct his irrepressible emotion along any selected channel.

Impersonating Paderewski for our hilarity, he temporarily identified himself with that genius. A Paderewski—to be sure—meriting dismemberment by Redfern Mason: nevertheless, a Paderewski. Who that has heard his improvised “Storm in the Alps” will ever forget the sensation? Thrusting his hands through his leonine locks, he would sound a few disconnected notes, follow them with brief and prolonged pauses, then, glancing over his shoulder to enjoy the tension of our nerves, suddenly plunge into phenomena of strange harmonies and agonizing discords surely illustrative of some cataclysm in nature.

As a linguist he might have persuaded a polar bear that he understood its jargon of the ice-fields. With a few words of many languages at his command, he mystified Frenchman, German and Italian alike, his apparent fluency was so bewildering. In several artfully simple sentences he would address a certain old French lady of his acquaintance, and while she was straining to grasp the elusive meaning of his insinuating speech, he would glide into such volubility that

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the old lady doubted the veracity of her own hearing rather than the doggerel which slipped from the tongue of William Keith. We have listened to him in the Old Studio, maintain a prolonged conversation with an Italian lemon vender, leaving the fellow, at the close of it, to wonder if he had not been interviewed in some archaic dialect of Tuscany. All the while Keith was simply reiterating: *la luna—niente—Rafaelo*.

As a tragedian he might have electrified a public as he succeeded in electrifying family and friends whom he pressed into service for impromptu performances. No one enjoyed this nonsense more than one of his greatest friends, Professor Joseph Le Conte, who, like Mr. Keith, possessed the delightful simplicity of a child-like nature. From him I learned that, with the truly great one may be very much more at one's ease than in the company of a man nearer one's own intellectual level—just above or just below. Not only did he respect your observations, but he actually assayed them for what metal of true value therein might be contained.

It was a source of much amusement to both Mr. Keith and Professor "Joe" that they surprised each other at the circus. It was Ringling Brothers, I think, who made a short stay in Berkeley, luring

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artist and professor from studio and college. Under cover of darkness, with scarcely a hint to their families, all unknown to each other, Mr. Keith and Professor "Joe" slipped away to enjoy the clowns and the elephants. Great was their astonishment when after an interval of thrilling absorption each discovered the close proximity of the other. "*You here!*" cried Keith, accusatory, "I never would have believed it."

"*You here!*" ejaculated Professor "Joe." "You're the last person that I would have dreamed of seeing!" They doubly enjoyed the rest of the performance together.

This love of play—be it in Keith, himself, or in others—rendered life in the Old Studio where some of us had the privilege of constantly working and observing him, a joyous experience of piquant alertness. I shall describe one such day as typical of the many.

III.

The Old Studio, formerly a photographer's gallery, was down on Montgomery Street at the very heart of Old San Francisco. One mounted two long flights of stairs, passed through two long gloomy halls until they branched into four dingy rooms lighted by skylights black with the soot of many chimneys. The Master yet defied all attempts to train him into a social lion, in his new and luxurious lair decorated with Indian baskets: conceding only two old swords crossed high on the wall and one little strip of faded blue damask. What cared we for such paltry accessories when, at a touch of the master's brush, splendid crags reared their snowy heads into blue skies—meadows washed with the rains of early Spring burst into efflorescence about the hoofs of wandering cattle? All—at the touch of a few hairs of camel or sable—even pigs' bristles! They say that this is a commercial age. Do not we who incline to the call of the Beautiful discern this to be only a half truth? Have we not an inkling of other laws at work inflecting the meanest object to the path of Perfect Beauty? Witness this principle at work in the interest of commerce, itself—in the Keen Kutter Department of the Exposition. Behold that most

useful but prosaic article, a steel chain, glistening as the spray of a fountain!— That most matter-of-fact article, a meat cleaver—the sail of a picturesque wind-mill! Marvel not, then, that swine— incidentally utilized for the deposition of maniacs—may yield not only a few bristles for masterpieces of painting, but serve the very Master of Masters for expounding the Perfect Law of Harmony!

To return to the Studio. The first little room on the left of the second hall was used for the overflow of pupils on class days; also for the brewing of tea and general high spirits. The official class room connected with Mr. Keith's special work room by folding doors which were never folded. The fourth and smallest room was a black pocket garnished with an ash can and a pile of rubbish, to become historic as the refuge of a burglar. He repudiated such calling to the Detective Agency occupying the front rooms of our same hall, asserting that he merely wished to sleep off the effects of liquor before indulging his more expensive taste—the contemplation of Mr. Keith's landscapes. It had not occurred to us as an attractive spot for *siestas*, but so varied were the characters which frequented the Old Studio that only a burglar was needed to make the *rendezvous* thoroughly cosmopolitan.

"Nice tree!—if I do say it myself!" Bertha submerges her brush in chrome green No. 1 and dabs it on her canvas. Complacency vanishes, however, as the Master approaches and her voice grows quite apologetic. "I would have made this shadow a little darker," she reassures him, "but I dabbed my brush into yellow ochre instead of burnt sienna."

"Go to nature!" rejoins Keith abruptly; whereon she bursts into tears. They are transient, however, and Keith, knowing it, sweeps her rootless tree into oblivion only to replace it with a hoary monarch of countless ages.

"All very well to copy *some*," he continues, "but this pittery puttering won't do, Bertha! You've simply *got* to go to *Nature*. You've got to get in and *gouge!*"

Bertha promises to gouge. "Your sky isn't bad!" he observes, amelioratingly, "but your clouds are boiled potatoes. *Smash* in your clouds—*this* way! Use a big brush—work *largely!* Keep everything *together!* See things as a whole!"

As he approaches my easel I feel that I have nothing to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon me for imposing on the helpless cattle of my landscape unpalatable soapiness of grazing land.

"What is *that?*" Keith has pounced into the middle of my canvas.

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"A house—" I expound, "blue smoke curling up—"

"Where do you see a house in *my* picture?"

"There,—the smoke—"

"Bother the smoke! Those are *horns*—not chimneys!"

My house is swept to the land of Bertha's tree to be followed thence by mountain, rill and meadow perpetrated by other members of the class. Where lies that lost Atlantis of our early endeavors? Out of the submerging seas of consciousness rise the peaks of Cubist and Futurist. Somewhere in their locality may be found the lost continent of our first creation.

A light, accustomed step now sounds in the hall and Reverend Joseph Worcester, the Swedenborgian clergyman, appears, punctual to his usual hour. He will exert a powerful influence over the lives of some of us, for to our restless spirits will he prove an apostle of peace; what has he found and where has he found it—that *Something* which invests him with tranquility? We, too, will make search for that mysterious *Something*.

We follow him to forest-depths of introspection, there to discover him seated at the brim of a fountain which he interprets to us as the Fountain of Life. It is indeed, a well-spring of influences, in-

cluding the Doctrine of Correspondences which reveal the natural world as but a shadow of the real or spiritual world. Later, finding the waters constrained by too elaborate usage of sculptured detail, viz., the Arcana Coelestia, we conclude that there must be yet other fountains where the waters well up more freely. So we continue search in the vast forest of religious experience, along little by-paths in tangled wildwood of ever-deepening consciousness, discovering not only more beautiful fountains, but that each and all are fed by one yet profounder Source.

Silently—for an hour, perhaps, Mr. Worcester sits lost in contemplation of a landscape forming on the Master's easel. Such prolonged absorption somewhat amuses Mr. Keith, for he, himself, has not yet sounded the depths of his own thoughts and emotions as read into forest and meadow by his devoted friend, the clergyman. No, the artist does not yet realize that this is the beginning of self-realization to culminate in "Gethsemane."

The sound of Mr. Worcester's footsteps dies away giving place to the limp of Judge Hager—leading light in judicial circles. He is coming by appointment to have his portrait painted. Mr. Keith is not usually happy in his portraits of women, although some of his European studies of peasants are superlatively

characterized: in those of many of his male subjects, however, he is extremely successful. Now, despite the fact that he is progressing satisfactorily with the Judge's portrait, he declares that he has half a mind to give up portrait painting altogether. "Who sees a person just as someone else sees him?" he groans. "A wife comes in, one day, and says I've painted her husband's face too thin. The daughter comes in the next day and says I've painted her father's face too fat! Nobody is satisfied!"

Worst of all troubles just now, is the Judge's cravat. The Judge desires immortality for his cravat which, strictly up-to-date, is polka-dotted. Keith objects to speckling the cravat, be it undeniably fashionable. The specks are inartistic; regardless of the Judge's appeal he engulfs the dots in ivory black. Of course the judge has the legal right of the case. The dots are his own—are they not? The dots are fashionable—are they not? They will be paid for generously. But Keith tips over the scales of Justice, holding the dots confiscate. So the warfare of soul and intellect proceeds within the limited area of a speckled cravat.

Speaking of the Judge recalls Hadjji, who makes her *debüt* on our little stage while the Judge is "sitting."

All is quiet but for the swishing of

brushes and fragmentary argument in Mr. Keith's work-room. All at once a slap-slap of heavy footsteps in the hall, followed by terrific pounding on the closed door of the class room startle the inmates. All cry: "Come in!" There is merely the repetition of the pounding; whereon someone hurries to the door and opens it to admit a little old woman with gray curls dancing about her face, which is half hidden under a flat black straw hat tied under her chin with red ribbons; about her shoulders is folded a green-and-blue shawl, while in her hands she grasps the cane—or rather—club with which she has solicited entrance.

"I want Mr. Keith!" she announces.

"He is very busy—" Anna begins to explain.

"I—want—Mr. *Keith*."

"He is very *busy*!"

"I came to see Mr. *Keith*!" pounding on the floor with her club. "I crossed the whole continent to see him! He did *that*!" levelling her club at an oak tree. "*My* idea of a *great man*!"

The increasing volume of voice brings the Great Man, himself, to the dividing-line. "I am Mr. Keith," he announces with dignity; "what is it you wish, Madam?"

"*You*! Come out where I can look at you—*Lion*! H'm! And you *look* like a lion! God knows you *paint* like one!"

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Savage indeed must be the breast not to be soothed by such music! The lion lowers his palette, balances irresolutely on one foot. But the Judge is to be reckoned with. Descending from the podium, advancing in the full majesty of his judicial prerogatives,

“Madam—” he begins, impressively.

“Who are *you?*” sniffs Hadjji.

“Madam—you must excuse Mr. Keith; he is painting my portrait.”

“*Your portrait!* Well! I hope he will paint your nose turned up—*this* way! Your mouth screwed up—*this* way! Your eyes bulging—*this* way!” Suiting the action to the word, Hadjji demonstrates her hopes for the ultimate representation of Judge Hager. He retreats before such warmth of sentiment leaving Keith to face the situation alone. With infinite tact born of a situation unprecedented—an irate little old woman levelling her club at the Supreme Court, itself—the Great Man devotes several minutes to facing about from the wall some of his finest canvases. We come to his rescue, at this juncture, inveigling her into the work-room across the hall.

“Won’t you have a cup of tea?” I shout into her ear. She only pauses before an easel whereon rests a large photographic reproduction of the head of Aesop.

"Mormons!" she ejaculates, regarding the two easels where two of us are engaged in copying the same study. "After the same man, eh? Aesop! Oh, yes—dead! So much the better! Dead men are better than live ones. But stop wasting breath on me! Can't you see I'm stone deaf? Take this—if you *will* keep on talking!" She unwinds from the folds of her shawl the coils of a drop-light which she holds to her ear, and I, summoning all the breath in my body for the purpose, shout into it "*Sugar?*"

"My God!" The tube falls from her hands. "Don't you know that is an *earthquake?—Whisper*—if you have any mercy! "*Sugar?* Yes—I'll take some sugar. When I was in Damascus—" with that she glides into a description of her adventures by land and sea, holding us spell-bound. She had received the name of Hadjji from the Turks for visiting all the holy shrines in the Orient, and one by one all the other pupils come to listen, in turn to be fascinated by the strange visitor. We are presently joined by the Master, himself, who leans, enchanted, against the door almost forgetting that he is to lunch with Mr. Worcester. Hardly a day passes that he does not ascend the heights of Russian Hill to lunch with his clerical companion on nuts and cocoa and subsequently to ascend other heights

whose crests are eternally unattainable. He begs Hadjji to wait for his return, but she starts away in the middle of her discourse on holy sepulchres leaving us with a sense of lost mental treasure. She turns once, to invite us to see her curios collected from all parts of the world, and we half-promise; but never see her again. As she declared her inability to rest more than a week or two in one city, we conclude that she is abroad again circumnavigating the globe.

Now we hear the approach of two men together. Returning to the Studio, Mr. Keith has met John Muir, naturalist, who drops in to look at Mr. Keith's last picture of the Sierras. The two are great cronies although they collide at certain points of their intimacy regarding the relative values of truth and beauty. Later on, mountain masses, themselves, will cement their friendship: when they ascend Mt. Ranier together. Keith will return from the wonderful trip marvelling at the inexpressible grandeur of snow scenery in glittering contrast to Persian carpets of gorgeous wild-flowers blooming to the very limits of the snow-line.

Muir delights in Keith's mountains, but incautiously challenges some of his geological "formations." This, like the Judge's cravat leads to argument—extremely edifying to us who sit with open

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ears for the discussion. The ominous rumbling in the caverns of their minds explodes in short, sharp sentences. There is much disdain on the part of the artist for the foot-rule criticism of the scientist. But along comes Prof. Davidson of the Geodetic Survey, his fine old face muffled in the habitual woolen scarf, and to the chagrin of Keith, sides with the scientific accuracy of Muir. The seemingly-endless discussion is closed abruptly by the arrival of old Schow loaded with newly-stretched canvases. The other two men leave and Keith is still gritting his teeth over rocky "formations" when Dr. Edward Robeson Taylor appears with a relief-supply of poetry. Disregarding the mooted strata he quotes soothingly from Rossetti. He gazes rapt into the landscape on the easel and, touched by the zephyrs of inspiration which move the interlacing branches of saplings in the mystic hour of gloaming, he, too, composes: in the word-tones of the poet.

“Would that my rhyme could run as
does the stream
Which on thy canvas breaks in rap-
turous song
Where Spring, triumphant bursts from
every clod,
Then would be realized my vain fond
dream.”

Or perhaps it is Ina Coolbrith, future poet laureate of California who will come presently to bathe her emotional nature in the glowing recesses of Keith's forest interiors and emerging will interpret her impressions to the Master in words of silvery rhythm which will renew his own spirit for the work of his hands.

Or Charles Keeler in the symbols of a poet will assure Keith that he has heard the warbling of the nightingale from out the leafy vaults of those same forests.

These poets may be followed by another type of humanity: a man of much flesh and blood: a splendid type, indeed: Dan Burnham visiting here from Chicago. At a later day he will give us a plan for the City Beautiful; gazing from the heights of Twin Peaks he will discern in our hills and valleys the Sleeping Beauty: Neglected possibility.

Our next visitor is Theodore Hittell—to be expected any day, at any hour. Much “joshing” between the two friends will follow. Mr. Hittell will probably venture a criticism—in consequence thereof be “squelched.”

“*Make the grass greener?*” cries Keith in assumed indignation. “What do you know about painting, anyhow? Because you've written five volumes on the History of California you think you can paint grass better than I can!”

"I don't!" protests the other, humbly, "but I guess I've *seen* grass all my life!"

"*Seen* grass! Can you build houses? You've *seen* houses all your life!"

Hittell only chuckles, readjusts his long, familiar overcoat and departs to sterner duties.

Scarcely has the excitement of all these interviews died down and every one once more become absorbed in work when—Crash! Something awful has happened. Old lady M——n's easel has *gone through Shasta!* Her long gray curls shake pitifully from side to side, her hands wave up and down, her mouth opens and shuts despairingly. We all wait one event in life: the approach of Keith. This is his largest picture, which, leaning against the wall, covers one side of the room. He comes; he pauses at the dividing-line. He moves—toward Shasta; pokes at it; then, slowly, he approaches Mrs. M——n who refuses to open her eyes. He takes her by the shoulders: "*I can patch it!*" he gasps.

"Noblest words man ever uttered!" she solemnly assures us afterward: "*I can patch it.*"

Dear old lady M——n! She, too, has slipped away to a perception of the Whole; yet, while still on this plane she made remarkable progress in her art studies. Over sixty years of age when

she came for her first lessons she advanced rapidly within the space of a few weeks. Addicted to sunsets, her first creations suggested impending conflagration; later, however, they cooled down to blue, green and violet: the danger was averted.

She will always remain in our memory as an example of what may yet be accomplished in the sunset of other lives.

In and out flit many faces familiar to San Francisco's public. Joseph Redding, conceded to be one of our city's handsomest men; naturally he is to be scanned with interest when he comes to have his portrait painted. Little will he realize the close scrutiny to which we subject him, whilst debating and differing amongst ourselves whether his nose *is* really so meritorious or his eyes *really* superior to men's eyes in general!

Dr. Robert Beverly Cole is also a "sitter" accepting sassafras tea at our hands, delighted with its reminiscent flavor which recalls his boyhood in Virginia. Mr. Bartlett of the Bulletin—a genial old gentleman who often drops in for a cup of tea, in return entertaining us with humorous anecdotes of his own experiences.

Bruce Porter is a frequent visitor: he belongs to the younger set of art lovers and with his brothers represents the spiritual element in culture which will

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deliver San Francisco from mere commercial aspiration.

Now comes somebody who is humorous without knowing it: an Irishman with a thatch of glowing red hair. He is not seeking the beautiful: simply the useful. All he wants is a good square meal and he is ready to work for it. Mr. Keith slips a quarter into his hand but tells him that he has no work to give him. The man turns away; but Bertha cries out, "Call him back, Mr. Keith! Oh, do call him back! We can have him sit as a model!"

Keith hurries after the retreating figure. "Say—you!" he shouts down the passage. The man turns round again.

"I haven't any work for you," explains Keith, "but these young ladies would like you to sit for them."

"*Sit* for them!"

"Yes—they say they'd like to paint you."

"*Pant* me!"

"Yes—at twenty-five cents an hour."

The fellow has returned to the doorway and surveys us dubiously. "*Pant* me!" with a forlorn glance at his clothes. "And if I do let them pant me, sor, how'd I git th' pant aff me?" He is not reassured by the gale of laughter which follows his misgivings, but finally strikes a bargain with us; departing, he passes

another model who advances with a gay little piping of Norma. It is Pietro, a professional model of great *aplomb*, and those of us who are trying our hand at life studies greet him with equal enthusiasm. Cherry-cheeked, though over ninety, he assures me that were he only twenty years younger he would make formal declaration for my hand. Preserved by these precious twenty years from matrimonial entanglement, I suffer him to pipe forth from any opera the choicest of sentimental avowals. Alas—the tragedy of his musical themes will soon invade the province of pictorial art!

I have miscalculated the proportions of his figure on the small piece of canvas in which I purposed to encompass him, and having established his head too low in the area, I impulsively contract his legs under it. I am unconscious of this enormity until Mr. Keith comes to inspect my progress; having done so, he drops into a chair and buries his face in his hands. This arouses intense curiosity—especially in Pietro. His eyes flash with indignation: we must be *laughing at him!* His suspicions are confirmed by the ludicrous spectacle which I have made of him and he dances about in fury. “Paint it out! Paint it out!” he cries frantically. “Nev-a will I come here no more! Nev-a-, neva-!”

Keith saves the situation. Seizing a big brush he envelops the spindly legs in a mantle, lays a book open on the cricket knees — and behold! I have painted William Cullen Bryant. (So every one believes it to be who sees the picture.) Pietro's wrath is somewhat appeased. But my Italian romance is blighted; he never pipes Norma to me again: whereby womankind may profit. Should anyone wish to remove a suitor painlessly, promptly, effectually, let her but paint his head in the middle of a small piece of canvas and contract his legs under him!

Yes—we had our romances in the Old Studio, under the efficient chaperonage of William Keith who, although he disliked the role exceedingly was always equal to an emergency.

Can you wonder that at the close of so interesting a day as the typical one just described, we look forward eagerly to the morrow?

IV.

The frontispiece of this volume is an excellent photograph of Mr. Keith at the time when we were under his tutelage. It was mutually snapped by him and myself. The camera was his own, for he was temporarily enthralled by the use and divertissement of photography, testing the patience of every friend who unwarily entered the Studio.

One day, having agreed to pose for his own picture, he arranged everything so carefully that I could not possibly make any mistake in the manipulation of the camera. It was my first attempt at photography, and always lacking in boldness when I approach the mysteries of mechanical contrivances, I delayed so long the culminating "touch," that he lost what limited patience he possessed, and jumped at me shouting: "Go it!" I went it—with the result of the frontispiece. It must have been I who "took" it, for certainly there was no one else beside me.

At this period he was still painting in broad, free strokes which repelled all interference of detail; reared as were we of the Old Studio, in this untamed life of brush and pigment, we surpassed even our Chief, himself, in unbridled criticism of veteran painters.

It marked an epoch in our free estate when the impending visit of George Inness was announced. He would share the workroom and easel of Mr. Keith where we might watch him and criticize him to our hearts' content. The excitement first roused by the announcement resolved into a disquieting quiet. Did we foresee that restraining chains of progress were forging for our clanship? That tribute in the form of "finish" would be exacted from our unfettered Lord? We began making such preparations as the royal visit warranted; we picked every stray paint-tube from enclosing floor-cracks, and sorted into more or less homeogeneous piles the accumulations on Mr. Keith's work table: crayons, photographs, engravings: articulated wooden animals of a prehistoric age in Keith's career, imbedded in strata of envelopes and cigar stumps. Everything was in perfect order when the Dean of Eastern Landscape painting drew near to the Dean of the West.

We found the two men similar in many respects: in personal appearance but especially in their moods. They were sociable when they inclined to be sociable and uncommunicative when they felt otherwise. Both were of Scottish birth, both professed the doctrines of Swedenborg, both were dominated by poetical

sentiment. The main difference in their handling of the landscape was based on an idea. To our mind, Inness deliberately destroyed the first freshness of bold strokes by constantly retouching the canvas. As soon as our guest left at night, we would hasten to inspect his creation. "Woolly!" we pronounced it invariably. "We don't like his work half as much as we do yours, Mr. Keith!"

This naturally pleased while it amused our Chief. Had not he, himself, taught us to fly the gerfalcon of original criticism? But he looked very thoughtfully on the canvases of his fellow-artist; he was taking him seriously. The two were discovering that they had been born under the same star of the artist's firmament: that it was guiding them over moor and mountain of human endeavor to some new-born Mystery of Life. This daily interchange of speculation and conviction naturally interacted in the work of their hands.

Inness, like Keith, preferred to express his idea fully, at once; but, convinced that it was insufficient to have one's idea clear only to oneself, he declared that it should be made equally lucid to others, even though in so doing—working over many parts of the canvas—he diminished the crisp brilliancy and strength of his work.

The influence of Inness on Keith was along this line of sacrifice, and, although in alarm for the integrity of Keith's virile brush-work we implored him not to give heed to the opinions of Inness, from that time on there was an increased "going over" of his own canvases.

To express the Mystery of Life which brooded over his spirit dissatisfying him with the objective limitations of even brush and pigment, he resorted to strange expedients, thereby scandalizing the Priests of Legitimate Art. He was as a child gamboling about their sacred edifice. Now—he puffed smoke from his cigar upon the canvas; now—he turned the picture upside down; now—pressing newspaper on the wet paint of the canvas, he presently removed it, enraptured by the wonderfully soft tone resultant on the foreground. Once he ordered the construction of a high steel mirror, convinced that in its polished surface he would discover a tonal effect which haunted but steadfastly eluded him.

At this period in his emotional life, the word "subjective" entered common parlance, helping to make clear for the ordinary ken, mysteries of our inner life hitherto unexplained. "I have found the path!" cried Keith, one day; "I've found the one true path which I must follow in order to reach my highest results!"

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He began devouring the works of Hudson and Hyslop, of Sir Oliver Lodge and others: saturating himself in "suggestion," "thought transference,"—"phantasms of the living and the dead." Several years later, hearing the wonderful vibrations of a great brass bowl which had served as gong in an oriental temple, he cried again: "Eureka! I have found the very thing to stimulate my color sense!—to set my subjective self *dum-thundering!*"

You will have observed by this time that we of the Old Studio had a rich and expressive vocabulary at our command not incorporated in the tomes of the Hierarchy.

For awhile the marvelous waves of sound sufficed our artist but—"the Lethe of Nature won't trance him again." His soul had seen the Perfect which his eye sought in vain; and when the glorious undulations died away into silence the finite ear of the man still inclined to *something beyond*. Had he been fore-ordained Priest of the Hierarchy instead of Prophet no doubt he would have gone the way of cubist-futurist. Following still the road of subjectivity often confused with religious or spiritual, he might have ended in that *cul-de-sac* peopled with weird phantasmagoria. Allowing these to be the logical developments of subjective law, rather are they the sha-

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dowing forth of mere molecular agitation
than the reflection of a heavenly vision.
They suggest that conscious straining of
the finite will for expression, exemplified
in Rodin's statue of Balzac. *Inspiration*
is accompanied with relaxation, passivity
to a Higher Source—calm faith in its in-
exhaustibility.

Thanks to daily commune with poet
and clergyman, the crisis of Keith's
emotional life was safely passed and he
quietly followed the path of his vocation
as it opened before him, convinced that
through a final splendor of molten gold,
ruby and emerald, it would merge into
the White Light—Source of all illumi-
nation.

This idea absorbed the failing strength
of his earthly activity, revealing itself
in the "Glory of the Heavens," by many
considered his masterpiece.

V.

Anyone under the impression that the last period of Keith's work, dating from the Earthquake and Fire, signalizes a deterioration of his powers, labors under serious misapprehension. Confusion arises from the conflict between his impulsive work and secondary consideration of the same. Several weeks after the Fire in which he lost many of his pictures, I watched him paint one of the noblest landscapes which he ever executed: massive oak, brilliant blue California sky, luscious green grass. My exclamation of delight was promptly suppressed.

"*Nothing* to what I *can* do," he declared. "By George!—But *I'll get there yet!*"

"You don't seem to mind losing your pictures in the Fire a bit."

"What should I 'mind' about?" Where do pictures really come from? Open yourself to Inspiration—the *Source!* Is there any end to *that?* Pshaw! I don't always stick to my own convictions!"

A little later I saw this self-same picture in public exhibition—changed! Tones of gold and brown had been worked into the brilliant hues—the summer idyll was become autumnal.

This tendency to veil many of his gem-studded canvases with tints of autumn

was induced by the peculiar epoch of his consciousness; his activity in the world was tonal with subdued russet and gold of harvest-time. Though honor and wealth had come to him he scarcely missed a day at his studio in San Francisco to which he crossed from his home in Berkeley, frequently through densest fog and heaviest rain. Next to this spot he preferred his own ingleside listening to books read aloud to him by his wife or tweaking the ears of his devoted dogs. Married twice, he had two children by his first wife who, herself with a charming gift for painting, sympathized most tenderly with his early struggles toward the goal of art. The second wife, of intellectual bias, proved a fitting complement in the latter part of his life; brightening the yet more trying days of his earthly pilgrimage by reading aloud to him and discussing the contents of choice volumes from his well-stocked library.

It was sad to watch the decline of that once-powerful physique, but William Keith had accomplished his part of the work on earth. As the Hero of Letters, so he as Hero of Painting discerned for himself and manifested the Divine Idea of this world: as it breathes through the landscape.

In the autumn—rather than in the winter—he passed beyond the vanishing

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point of this world's perspective and no more fitting lines can be inscribed under his last canvas than these of Longfellow:

O what a glory doth this world put on
For him, who, with fervent heart, goes
forth

Under the bright and glorious sky, and
looks

On duties well performed, and days well
spent!

For him the wind, ay and the yellow
leaves

Shall have a voice, and give him eloquent
teachings;

He shall so hear the solemn hymn that
Death

Has lifted up for all, that he shall go,
To his long resting place without a tear.

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