

**HINTS ON PORTRAITS AND HOW TO
CATALOGUE THEM; A TALK GIVEN TO THE
FELLOWSHIP OF THE PENNSYLVANIA
ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS AT
PHILADELPHIA, MONDAY EVENING, APRIL
18, 1898, BEING THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING**

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Hints on portraits and how to catalogue them; a talk given to the fellowship of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts at Philadelphia, Monday evening, April 18, 1898, being the first annual meeting by Charles Henry Hart

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CHARLES HENRY HART

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BY CHARLES HENRY HART

**EDITOR OF CATALOGUE OF HISTORICAL PORTRAITS
CATALOGUE OF WASHINGTON LOAN COLLECTION ETC**

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HINTS ON PORTRAITS AND HOW TO CATALOGUE THEM

HAVING, within a few days, been honored by election to this important body, I have the privilege of saying "our," instead of "your," distinguished president has asked me to administer to you to-night a sleeping potion, in the form of statistical tables giving the square miles of canvas, panel and ivory, covered with pigments, to be found in ancient Philadelphia. But having had only something short of a year in which to formulate my data, I fear I shall fall short of fulfilling his precise desires. I will, however, endeavor to give you some idea of the artistic material in our midst, and which essentially helped to give

to Philadelphia, until some fourscore years ago, the right to be looked upon as the Athens of America.

It is Philadelphia's own fault that she has lost her old prestige in art and in letters. In colonial and in revolutionary days, and well on into the present century, she was the metropolis of this broad land. We have a living proof of the truth of this right at hand in our alma mater, this dear old Academy, of whose alumni you are honored Fellows. Would it be, do you think, the oldest institution in America devoted to the fine arts if, when it was founded, in 1805, Philadelphia had not been the centre of American cultivation and of learning?

But Philadelphia, with her retiring modesty and self-abnegation, has permitted herself to be jostled and elbowed out of her rightful sphere by more arrogant and aggres-

sive neighbors. Among ourselves, however, we cannot do otherwise than admit that this is largely the result of the narrow provincialism of her own people. Whether this condition is due to the circumscribed atmosphere of her Quaker founders and their progeny, as is generally claimed; or to the weakness and lack of appreciation shown by "those teachers of disjointed thinking," as Dr. Rush called the public press, as others feel; or to the money-grubbing propensities of her up-coming generations crowding out the finer instincts, as seems forceful, I shall not stop to discuss now. It may be a combination of these conditions with an admixture of some others in homœopathic quantities.

Whatever the cause of her present decadence in art and in letters, her old and proper place will give you an inkling of

what may be found of art treasures within her bounds, and about which I shall say a few words to-night, with special reference to the advantage and value of having such objects, their ownership and their whereabouts, adequately recorded in permanent form, conformably to your action of a year ago.*

The present is essentially an age for facilitating study, and with no higher aim can the nineteenth century draw to a close. What the Historical Manuscript Commission is doing for writings hidden away in private hordes, you propose to do for pictures, so that when the future student comes to write the history of American art, you will have furnished, to his hand, vital material for his work. For, although you propose

* "*Resolved*, That a committee of five be appointed by the president to take up the work of cataloguing the art resources of Philadelphia."

to confine yourselves to this locality, this is the locality where art in America had its birth. Until recent discoveries that I had the good fortune to make, this high place has been given to New England, with John Smibert, who came over from Scotland, with Bishop Berkeley, and arrived January 29, 1729. But I have wrested the palm from Smibert and given it to Gustavus Hesselius, a Swede, who "flyted" to Philadelphia, in May of 1711, and to whom was given, ten years later, the first public art commission in this land,—to paint an altar-piece of the Last Supper, for St. Barnabas Church, in Queen Anne's parish, Maryland.*

Nor is this the sole claim to precedence

* For an account of Hesselius and his work, with portraits, after his paintings, of himself and his wife, see *Harper's Magazine* for March, 1898, "The Earliest Painter in America." By Charles Henry Hart.