

# **FIFTY PAINTINGS**

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Fifty Paintings by George Inness & Elliott Daingerfield

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**GEORGE INNESS & ELLIOTT DAINGERFIELD**

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BY GEORGE INNESS

INTRODUCTION BY  
ELLIOTT DAINGERFIELD



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## INTRODUCTION

## GEORGE INNESS



O one who intends making the study of the work of a master in painting there is an intense interest in knowing the paths through which he has walked, the difficulties he has surmounted and the beginnings of his labors—the formative processes as well as the successful expression which is the result of his labor.

That no such complete analysis of the life-work of George Inness has been made is well known, although much has been said and written of him. So much, in fact, that we all have a partial knowledge, a speaking acquaintance, so to say, yet few who see or who own his pictures would venture to express complete understanding of a mind that was gentle and child-like at times, yet always complex and difficult, even erratic, and which with advancing years grew to be highly nervous—vastly emotional—intensely interested in philosophical research when considering questions relative to art or religion, the two subjects which lay at the core of his deepest sympathies and which he intermarried in a way that, for the outsider, the listener, was most distracting. Yet I do not believe that anyone, whether craftsman or connoisseur, will ever rightly comprehend the art of George Inness unless he



places himself squarely on the platform of the man's religious convictions, and seeks in his works those eliminations of the gross, or the material, in order that the spiritual may be seen, which was the aim and intent of his best and highest effort. The representation of things was needful merely that significance might be fully understood. That he was willing to give up nearly the half of a life-time to the mastery of things, of the craft which would assure him power in this elimination is characteristic of the man,—“I paint in all these details in order that I may know how to paint them out”, he said.

The fabric then, the substructure, is never fully seen in the noble later works of the master, yet it would be fantastic to think it absent, or that he had achieved this nobility without the long process of trained observation, effort, and rendering, for the painter must practice his processes as constantly as must a musician labor with the scales.

Wherever and whenever the opportunity comes to study and know the great painter, it becomes our duty to seize it, for he is very rich in interest, intense in effort, and dramatic in result, and above all, what he did he did for us, his countrymen, and we should know him as we know a statesman or a poet who has ennobled his time and his people.

The grouping of the following pictures into periods of longer or shorter time, is done to aid in this knowledge, and while one may not be dogmatic in assigning a date to a particular work, since Inness was

habitually careless about dating his work and, also, because upon many canvasses the date has been supplied by other hands, and wrongly, still there is a latitude which may be accepted, and which will do slight harm to a right understanding of the beautiful pictures we have before us.

The earlier works, running from number 1 to number 6 are all unmistakably filled with that conscientious fidelity which makes him master of detail, are delightful in just that open door quality of mind which was present with him as he worked. One sees at a glance, (if indeed one has the rhythmical sense) that Inness always 'felt' composition both of line and mass; that he knew, also, projection and scale. Seldom does he offend by an over large or an over small grouping in a given space. At no time a decorator in the sense used by the mural painter, there is ever a symmetry and style of placement in these early works which proclaim him a master of composition almost by intuition.

Try, for a moment, the rendering of any one of these works into mere outline, and you gain part of the idea I mean,—add to this the color spots, and his 'largeness' even in the more elaborate canvases is felt at once. Then proceed to an observation of the works here chosen to mark what may be called the middle period, and we see, easily, his growth in expression, the enlarging of his power with no loss of accuracy, no omission of essentials, but with less of the surface of things, less that is of doubtful importance, less reflection of others, and a broader vision.

To many painters and even to some collectors, these earlier works are more delightful. The Hobbema-like delicacy of leafage, the wealth of detail, done with a touch quite as sure as the Dutch master, and the added charm which comes from great distances with the aerial perspective and the panoramic vision which he employed in some of the smaller canvases. The painting, also, was done in an understandable way—there were no habits, no processes which interfere with a directness of statement.

To some folk painting is merely the sitting down and copying of forms in their relations to one another, with small appreciation on the part of such people of the infinite difficulties of color, tone, balance, rhythm, weather, knowledge of sky, of time, of the intricate mysteries of light and atmosphere. That Inness achieved these things in much of his early work is true, and we are not in error in loving them.

The influence upon ourselves is nearly always from the objective to the subjective, and if we find a man who in painting can give us, without offense or loss of that relationship of parts which belongs to beauty, the completeness of things, we may study and love him to advantage.

It would be a very delightful thing if a writer could find words to make plain all the many touches, lines, spots and balances which a painter employs; if, in brief, he could tell people how it is done; but this may not be,—not any plainer is it than the language used by the painter himself in his work.