THE NOTABLE BEQUEST OF ISAAC D. FLETCHER

HIS SOLUTION OF THE MUSEUM PROBLEM OF CONDITIONAL GIFTS

ISAAC D. FLETCHER'S bequest to the Museum is notable for the number of works of art it includes. It is even more notable for the amount of money given. But it is most notable for the delicate line which he has drawn between his strong desire to make his collection a permanent memorial to his wife and himself by keeping it together, and his recognition of the inexpediency of making the acceptance of his gifts conditional upon carrying out that desire as a legal obligation. Legally, his bequest is absolute; but his making it absolute while expressing a strong desire puts upon the Museum the strongest obligation of honor to meet that desire to the farthest extent consistent with wise museum policy.

The number of objects of art which the Museum has selected from Mr. Fletcher's collection under the terms of his will is 251. They may be roughly classified as follows: paintings, 37; sculpture, 10; textiles, 31; ceramics, 157; miscellaneous, 16. It is expected that all these works of art will be exhibited together early in the coming year and any description of them in the BULLETIN is reserved until the time of this exhibition.

The amount of Mr. Fletcher's residuary estate, which passes to the Museum under his will, is not as yet definitely ascertained. It is unquestionably over $3,000,000. But the terms of his will, which seems to be a model in drawing the delicate line referred to, can now be precisely stated and read as follows:

> "I give and bequeath to The Metropolitan Museum of Art all my objects of art, whether in my residence, No. 2 East Seventy-ninth Street, in the Borough of Manhattan, City of New York, or elsewhere, which the Museum may select for exhibition as a permanent part of its collections. By giving this opportunity of selection to the Museum, I wish not only to include in my gift all objects of art which should appropriately form part of the permanent collections of the Museum, but to separate therefrom any which may be deemed unsuitable by the Museum for such purpose. I use the term 'Objects of art' in its broadest sense, intending thereby to include pictures, statuary, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, metal work, and all objects of a character included in the collections of the Museum.
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> "It is my earnest desire that all the objects included in this gift shall be exhibited in the Museum, grouped together in some special gallery or galleries.
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> "It is also my desire that if it is found impracticable to exhibit the heavier pieces of statuary and sculpture embraced in this gift in the same gallery with the other objects of art, those pieces shall be exhibited together in a single group.
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> "I also desire that the gallery in which my collection or major part of it shall be exhibited, shall be known and designated as the 'Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Gallery,' and that all the objects of art included in this bequest shall be properly labelled as belonging to the 'Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Collection,' and in so far as they may be arranged in groups, there shall be a group label as well as an individual label.
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> "I also desire that all the objects of art included in this bequest shall be designated in the Museum catalogues as belonging to the 'Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Collection.'
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> "It is also my desire that such part of my collection as the Museum shall select for permanent exhibition shall be exhibited in its entirety separate from other exhibits, in some gallery or galleries to be temporarily set apart by the Museum for this purpose, for a period of not less than one year.
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> "I do not intend that this expression of my desires shall constitute a condition upon this bequest, nor constitute

> a legal obligation on the part of the Museum to comply therewith, but the assembling of these objects of art has been the result of many years of effort on the part of my wife, now deceased, and myself; and it is my very earnest desire and expectation that this bequest shall be maintained as a memorial especially to her, and I rely upon the high character of the Trustees directing the Museum, that they will fully meet my wishes in providing as dignified, safe and permanent exhibition of my collection as shall be practicable."

Under the eighth clause of Mr. Fletcher's will, the Museum is also made his residuary legatee.

Mr. Fletcher has evidently carefully thought out his bequest to the Museum, both on his own side and that of the Museum Trustees. It would seem that he has considered quite as much the duties of Museum Trustees as his own wishes. Nothing could be plainer than his strong expression of desire to form a permanent memorial collection, shown separately from other museum exhibits. On the other hand, he has no less clearly recognized the limitations imposed on Museum Trustees in carrying out such a desire.

Subordinate to these controlling principles he has given no less attention to other important details. From the same double point of view he has not obligated the Museum to take his entire collection. He leaves the Museum free to select only those objects which it desires for exhibition. This is a very wise provision in his own interest and equally wise in the interest of the Museum and the public. Any collector, desirous, as was Mr. Fletcher, of representing his taste to future generations by a gift of his collection, might naturally, if his own point of view were to be considered, wish to be represented by his entire collection; but from a public point of view, many objects, however important to his collection when exhibited by itself, would not be important to his collection when exhibited in conjunction with other Museum collections. Mr. Fletcher has, therefore, very considerately put upon the Museum no obligation to take anything it did not affirmatively select. He undoubtedly realized that in forming any collection which is to be permanently kept together, exclusion is quite as important as inclusion, and that the higher the quality of the objects included in such a collection, the greater their public value even if to secure that quality their number is restricted.

His desire that this collection shall form a permanent memorial to himself and his wife and be kept together in a gallery which shall bear his and her name is a very natural and proper desire on the part of any donor. None of us should be ashamed of wishing to be remembered as public benefactors. It is the motive which underlies many great and useful public gifts of the present and past generations. None the less, Mr. Fletcher recognized the limitations which all great public art museums must observe in accepting gifts of this character, and the obligation of such museums, having in mind prospective growth, not to tie their hands in the future so as to prevent them from classifying their collections properly and displaying them as a balanced whole. Only thus can such museums best accomplish their fundamental educational purpose.

Mr. Fletcher's compromise between his wish and his sense of public duty undoubtedly evidences the conclusion of a conscientious and thoughtful man in this conflict of purposes. It would have been quite possible for Mr. Fletcher to have turned his own New York house into a museum and endowed it so amply with his residuary estate as to provide for future maintenance. He could have done this either by creating an independent institution with trustees of his own selection, or he could have left his collection and his house to the Metropolitan Museum to be managed by its trustees with income which he would provide. In such case, by either method, he would have gained a more exclusive memorial but at the sacrifice of a greater public benefit. For unless the purpose of a museum be solely to charm the aesthetic sense like a tastefully furnished room, its usefulness depends largely

upon the scientific arrangement of its collections as a whole. Not that in scientific arrangement the aesthetic should be ignored but that it should be properly subordinated to principles of period, nationality, and material. Only by such an arrangement can the historical development of art and the relation of different countries to the development of art be illustrated. There certainly may be exceptions to this rule. There are collections so homogeneous in character, which either have or can be given such an appropriate setting, that they should preferably be kept separate, so as to be enjoyed and it may be also studied in their home surroundings. Such a conjunction, however, is rare and the very exception proves the rule, because the reason for the exception is the reason for the rule.

It may be pertinently asked how far the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and for that matter any like institution, can recognize the natural desire of donors for some lasting recognition of their gifts without impairing scientific installation, present and prospective. The action of the Metropolitan, taken promptly after Mr. Fletcher's will was made public, indicates this. It can label every object with the donor's name. It can group together objects which naturally belong together and are likely to remain together and give them a group label. It can recognize the donor in its catalogues and handbooks. It can exhibit a new collection as an entirety for a limited time, as it intends to do with Mr. Fletcher's collection. It can even give a donor's name to a gallery, as it has done in the case of Henry G. Marquand. But it cannot wisely prevent the proper arrangement of its growing collections as an integral whole by accepting gifts conditioned on perpetual segregation. There are exceptions to this rule as, indeed, there are exceptions to any general rules. Such an exception was made in the case of the Altman Collection. There undoubtedly will and should be exceptions in the future. But these exceptions in case of a museum so well established as the Metropolitan and with such certainty of continued growth will become rarer and rarer, and when made will be predicated either on the great value of the collection or on its being so homogeneous in character as to fit naturally into any proper prospective installation.

ROBERT W. DE FOREST.

THOMAS EAKINS: TWO APPRECIATIONS[1]

AFTER a long and careful survey of modern paintings in America, the conclusion is plain that innovators in art—men who follow no traditions but who select their themes from impressions of somewhat unusual phases of nature—men like Degas, Monet, Pissarro, and Whistler, all great masters—have created a very baneful influence upon the painters who have attempted to follow them. There are, on the contrary, great traditions that march through the centuries, like giants in armor, shining with beauty and strength. Such a tradition is that which passed from Jordaens to Rubens—the prince of all painters—from Rubens to Van Dyck, through Kneller and Lely to Carolus Duran, and now proudly lives in the portraits of John Sargent. About fifty years ago a little picture was painted in Philadelphia by Thomas Eakins and for many years this small canvas has been hanging, perhaps unnoticed save by a few searching and discriminating eyes, in the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Thomas Eakins in The Chess Players followed the traditions of the Dutch school, and at that time—the early 'seventies of the nineteenth century—when Manet, Monet, and Whistler were either unheard of or derided, this Philadelphian, after a short visit to Europe, rivaled in this mas-

[1] On Monday afternoon, November 5, the memorial exhibition of the paintings of Thomas Eakins will be opened with a private view for members and their friends. The exhibition will be shown until December 3. In connection with this loan exhibition, the BULLETIN publishes the following appreciations of the work and character of Thomas Eakins and estimates of the ultimate place that will be accorded him in the history of American painting. They are written by J. McLure Hamilton and Harrison S. Morris, respectively, two men who knew the artist personally and have been for many years familiar with his work.—THE EDITOR.