

A description of, and critical remarks on the picture of Christ healing the sick in the Temple : painted by Benjamin West ... and presented by him to the Pennsylvania Hospital / by John Robinson.

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Robinson, John, -approximately 1829.
Brown, William, 1785-1853
Sully, Thomas, 1783-1872
Pennsylvania Hospital (Philadelphia, Pa.)
Kneass, Young & Co.
National Library of Medicine (U.S.)

Publication/Creation

Philadelphia : Published by S. W. Conrad, no. 87, Market Street, for the Pennsylvania Hospital ; William Brown, printer, 1818.

Persistent URL

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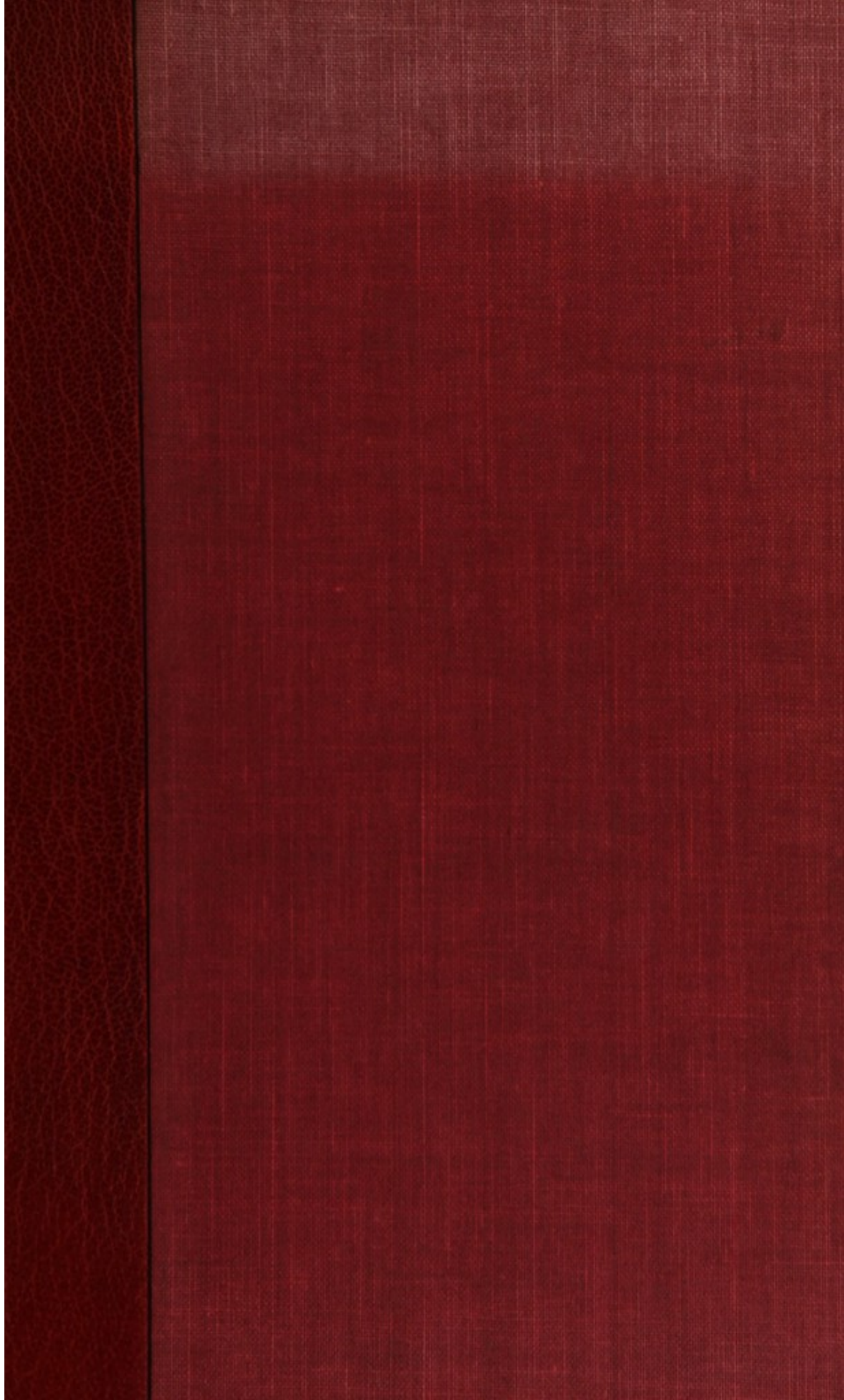
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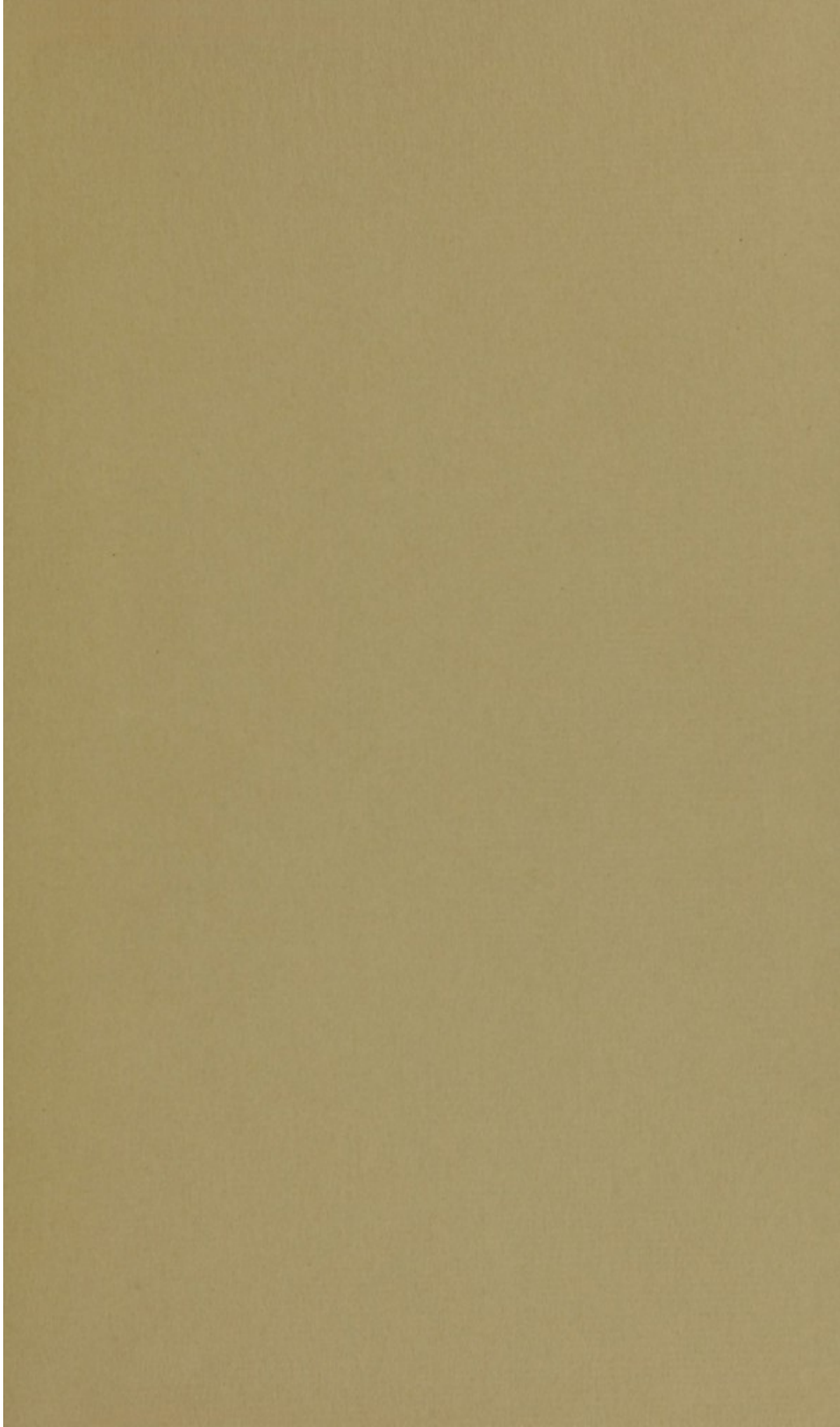


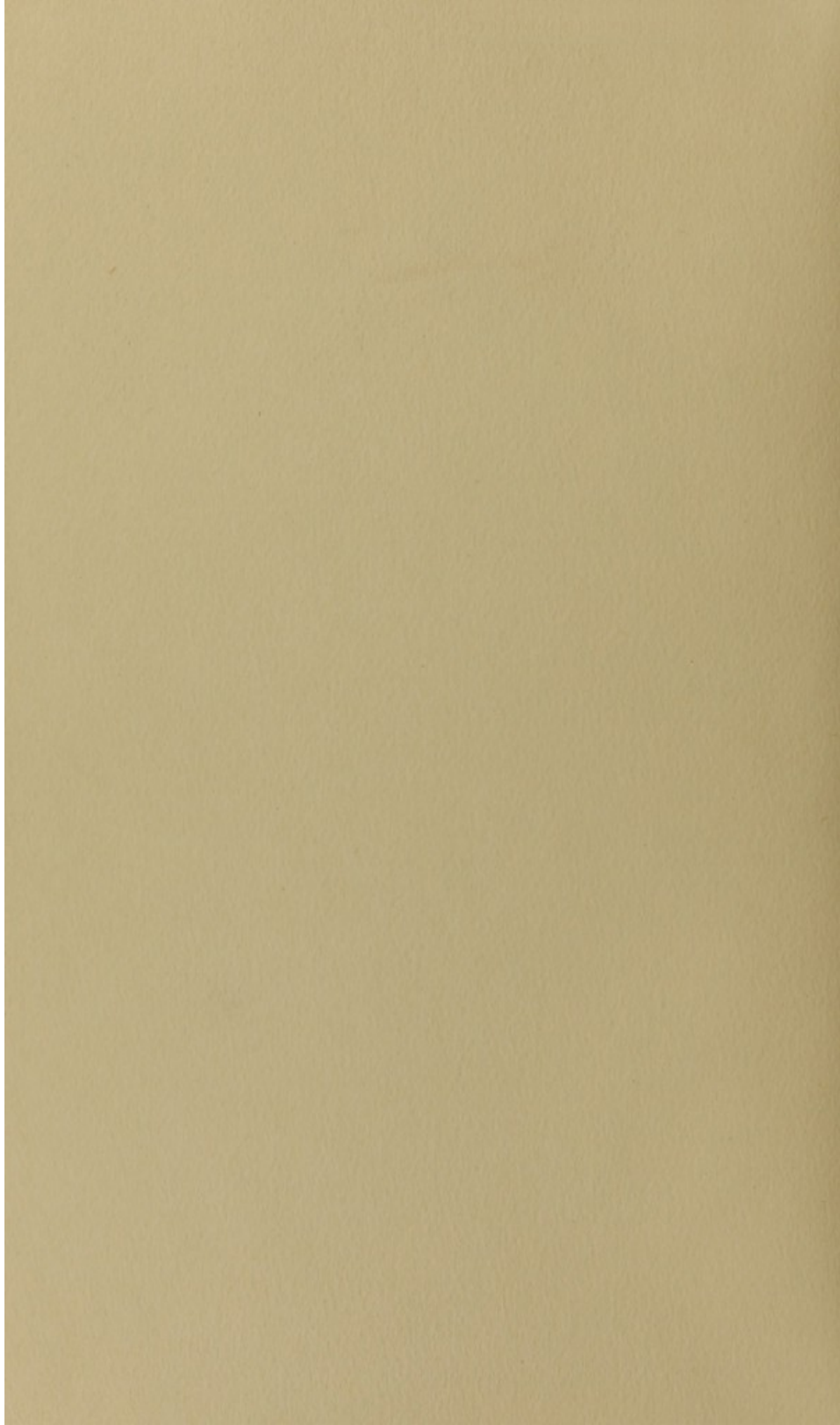
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



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WASHINGTON, D.C.





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A DESCRIPTION
OF,
AND CRITICAL REMARKS
ON
THE PICTURE OF
CHRIST HEALING THE SICK
IN
THE TEMPLE;

PAINTED BY BENJAMIN WEST, ESQ.

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY, LONDON,

AND PRESENTED BY HIM TO THE PENNSYLVANIA HOSPITAL.

BY JOHN ROBINSON,

PORTRAIT AND MINIATURE PAINTER, PHILADELPHIA.

"I also will shew mine opinion."—JON xxxii. 17.

PHILADELPHIA:

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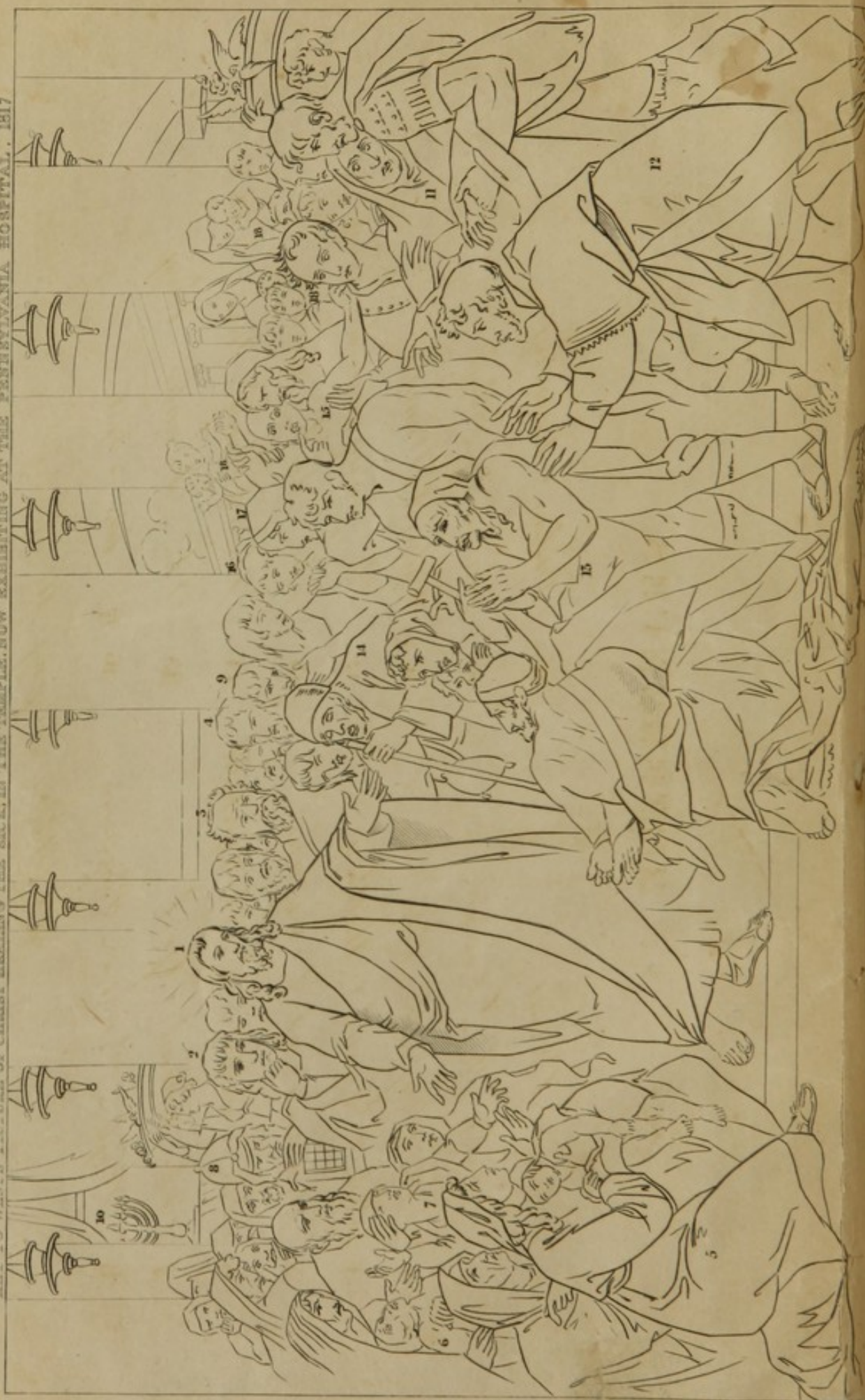
FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA HOSPITAL.

William Brown, Printer.

1818.

387

KEY TO WEST'S PICTURE OF CHRIST HEALING THE SICK, IN THE TEMPLE, NOW EXHIBITING AT THE PENNSYLVANIA HOSPITAL. 1817





REFERENCES

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Jesus Christ | 9 | Judas Iscariot |
| 2 | Where the Divine | 10 | The holy Place |
| 3 | The Apostle Peter | 11 | Abigail Woman |
| 4 | The Apostle Matthew | 12 | The young man kneeling |
| 5 | Woman & Sick Infant | 13 | The Sick Man |
| 6 | The mother & rickety child | 14 | The Blind Man & Son |
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| 8 | High Priest & Pharisees | 16 17 | his Sisters |
| | | 18 | Children singing Hosannas |

A DESCRIPTION

AND CRITICAL REMARKS

THE PICTURE OF

CHRIST HEALING THE SICK

THE TEMPLE

ILLUSTRATED BY BENJAMIN WEST ESQ.

AND

AND PRESENTED BY HIM TO THE PHARMACY AND HOSPITAL

BY JOHN ROBINSON

PHILADELPHIA

PRINTED BY A. W. LEITCH AND BY ROBERT SMITH

THE NEW YORK BOOK CONCERN

NEW YORK

1795

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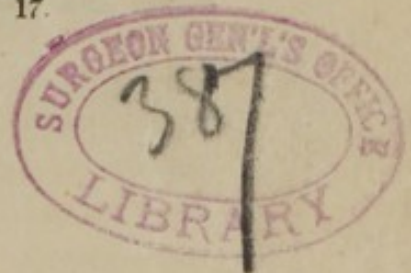
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A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H. I. J. K. L. M. N. O. P. Q. R. S. T. U. V. W. X. Y. Z.

AND CRITICAL REVISIONS

BY JOHN ROBINSON

THE PICTURE OF

CHRIST HEALING THE SICK

THE FEMALE

AND THE PICTURE OF

AND THE PICTURE OF

BY JOHN ROBINSON

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INTRODUCTION.

UPON first viewing this celebrated painting, the mind is struck with awe ; and our admiration is excited and increased, the more we enter into the spirit of the performance.

Such is the nature of the subject of the picture—so happily chosen for the benevolent institution to which Mr. West has presented it, that some description may be necessary, to arrive at this great artist's conception of, at least, the principal personages represented, and of their several actions : the picture being one of those things which is found to be of higher value, the more it is contemplated ; the writer of the following pages endeavours to assist the mind of the observer in forming more readily a just idea of the general intention—not to describe in detail all the beauties of the work. He deems it proper to intimate, that he deprecates controversy ; and that, according to his motto, he desires only “to shew his opinion.” Nor does he, in this brief attempt, aspire to literary honours, but simply to give that opinion as an humble suitor of the fine arts, and a friend to truth.

THE TEXT OF THE PICTURE.

"And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased." Matt. xxi. 14, 15.

The Principal Figure.

To appreciate with justice this grand and beautiful performance, I consider it necessary to state, that the highest achievement in the picture appears to be, that the artist presents the general scriptural character of the person of Christ to the mind of the beholder. The subject being that of Christ healing the sick, the individual figure before us performing that action, is at once known as the pictorial representation of the Lamb of God.

To illustrate the correctness of this delineation, other scriptural recollections should be present to the mind, beside those found in what we may call the text whence it was taken, and without which the extraordinary merit of the principal incidents of the picture cannot be distinctly felt. Among the most prominent traits of the character of Christ are the following: "he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" he was not esteemed, but "despised and rejected;" yet, "he bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows." From these passages, we are warranted in saying, that his benevolence and compassion were more enlarged, active, and refined, than those of any other man. The chief source of his sorrows was, the constant evidence of the immoral and degraded condition of mankind. He saw that man had become the chief foe of man; and there cannot be any doubt, that his vast and wondrous mind was far

more severely pained, and all his feelings wrought into higher exercise, at seeing and reflecting as he did, upon the universal dislocations of society, both public and private, than by witnessing their effects through the single medium of bodily sufferings. Thus, in the attitude and face of Christ in the picture, and even in those of some of his followers, the artist has evidently infused a deeper feeling than is called forth by the anguish of those, brought into the presence of the Saviour. We find therefore a dejected languor in every part of the figure. This is evidenced by the attitude of the head, in connexion with the gently depressed chest: in the body with the lower limbs, and in the arms and hands, whose benign motion indicates all but the utterance, "be thou healed." These form a graceful whole, plainly expressing kindness, gentleness, and sorrow. That sympathetic, god-like bosom seems a place of refuge for the deeply stricken child of misery, worn out by fruitless cares, to rest his weary head upon. In the face, also, whose beauty may be considered the highest refinement of humanity, the same expression is continued; the nostrils are slightly expanded by softly restrained breathing, such as is the cause of sighing. The corners of the mouth are depressed, whilst its expression is that of peaceful and patient meekness: but the dejection is still more apparent in the downcast look of those otherwise fine eyes, which are not directed to any particular object—not even at the sick man, but below him, and most probably cast upon the pavement of the temple; and whose lids, when the complexion of the face is considered, will be seen to be slightly inflamed, through weeping. Thus we see, in the movements and expression of the whole person, and of every part, separately considered, the same harmonious evidence, that this is the man who is bearing our sorrows. On the brows, and the parts near to them, are witnessed the residence of power and greatness, far beyond fallible humanity. Power in wisdom, a greatness not so much of commanding majesty as of that calmness, which, in connexion with the rest of the face, indicates constancy and perseverance in love to the human family, which engages the affections: all which finely assimilate with the gentleness of the Saviour, who often wept

and prayed for mankind in secret. Nevertheless, the attitude still presents a generous and free invitation, and offers the kindest reception to all that will come. Such is the Saviour's character throughout the Scriptures.

The artist, I conceive, entertained the foregoing views, in composing this grand and interesting figure. The great object of his coming was not to heal the bodies of men only, but the maladies of their souls; and as few, comparatively, sought him for that purpose, and very few faithfully adhered to him, the healing of physical maladies alone removed not, though it might have alleviated, in some degree, the Redeemer's continual mental afflictions. The artist has, however, so managed the figure, as to render the restoring of the sick man the most conspicuous and primary action of the moment.

The Sick Man,

Rendered gray by the ravages of disease, is a most admirable representation of so deplorable a condition. He appears to be under the immediate influence of the omnipotent word, though his countenance wears the expression of long continued suffering. His looks are fixed on vacancy, his respiration is suspended, and his head is moved a little forward, and lowered through the exercise of his feelings, which are concentrated within himself, and occupied with the sensation of the restorative power; all other feeling is absorbed in this. His hands are in the attitude of supplication, and the utterance of the petition for mercy, yet unfinished on his lips, is suddenly stopped, from the prayer being already granted; and the swift and almost electric change from the disease to returning health, comes upon him by surprize. The sick man's wife, who is evidently a Jewess, is seen bearing her husband's crutch: she is exerting her affectionate eloquence, and pointing to the object of her solicitude: tenderness, distress, and the most earnest supplication, are finely blended in her worn and haggard countenance, unconscious of the glad tidings that await her. But the thought of the great Physician has gone forth;

the Almighty Will is already in victorious operation against the disease. Her child, participating in the prevailing emotions of his mother, is innocently looking at the Saviour.

A beautiful Jewess, presenting her Sick Infant, accompanied by its Grandmother.

This passage of the picture, including the above three figures, is addressed to every feeling heart; but especially to parents who have seen their child, in that early period of life, brought near to death by sudden illness, when every child-like action is at an end, and the aching head lies exhausted and pining on its best earthly home: the correct and vigorous mind of our artist has here brought forward all the tenderest traits of such a scene. He has given the utter helplessness and relaxed look of suffering innocence; but he has not chosen to add the expression of *poignant* distress to the mother's tender and feeling character, though a tear has stolen from her eye, in the agitating moment of addressing the Saviour; nor even to the deeply interested and expressive grandmother has he given the character of acute affliction; hers being that of hope and expectation, mingled with anxiety and sorrow. Thus exhibiting female piety and fortitude, in cases of the most affecting sickness.

The Rickety Boy and his Mother.

The artist has shown great judgment in the introduction of this figure, yet concealing the most disgusting features of the case. At the same time that sufficient is seen in the old look, and the form of every feature, in the large joints of the hand, feebly grasping a crutch, to inform us fully of the nature of the calamity. His mother is anxiously pressing him forward to be healed.

The Blind Girl and her Parents.

The expression of the pain suffered by this object of parental solicitude, is managed with great dexterity, so as not to disturb the beauty of her features: she seems to be afflicted with some dreadful disorder in that tender organ, the eye, which has caused blindness. Her character is that of exquisite sensibility: though young, she partakes of the intellectual superiority of her father and mother accompanying her, which, together with the hope of being cured, produces an approach towards calmness of countenance, notwithstanding her bodily pain. The bending of her fingers, and the raising of her right hand and arm, are caused by sympathy with the pain she suffers; at the same time they express the utter helplessness always produced by blindness, more particularly, when the person has been so afflicted but a short time. Her mother, in a kneeling posture, is supporting her daughter: in her patient, though afflicted expression, we see the calm resignation of piety, accompanied by faith and hope. The father, who is tenderly holding the head of his daughter between his hands, presents the firmness of a naturally dignified and elevated character: he looks anxiously at the Redeemer, in hopes that, should he turn, he will be able to gain his attention to the case of his child.

The Apostle John.

The person of John is young, manly, and of a firm, though pensive character; of an elevated mind—a suitable companion in the most exalted friendship; his expression is that of profound thought, in sympathetic agreement with his Divine Master. His eyes indicate frequent weeping. From his situation in the picture, being behind the Saviour, he sees not the passing occurrence of the moment, nor is he occupied with any of the surrounding objects; but, like his Lord, in his degree, the general scene of things at this eventful period affects his mind. He is at the same time afflicted, that one altogether

lovely in goodness and grandeur of character, whom he felt it the highest rationality to adore, should meet with such apathy and inattention from the people as to his doctrines ; and such bitterness of enmity from the chief priests and rulers, and the leaders of the different sects. These things form the nature of his thoughts, and give the character of his expression. In short, the gentle breathing of his dejected spirit, so apparent, seems to be caused by reflecting upon their unwillingness, really to receive, and abide in the instruction of his beloved Master.

The Apostle Peter.

In the head of this apostle we have a most striking representation of that forward and affectionate, but ill-applied, and erroneous zeal, which always distinguished him during the life of his Master. He seems grieved and offended, that the priests, and the Jewish people at large, will not consider the overwhelming evidence displayed before them that this is the Christ ; and thus his natural disposition predominates. This is evidently that hasty personage, apt to err ; yet, from the strength of his affections, as ready to acknowledge and repent of wrong. The masterly hand has exhibited him profoundly engaged in considering these things, and their consequent hindrance to the commencement of the reign of Christ as the acknowledged Messiah.

Matthew.

Our attention is next directed to Matthew, standing at the left of Peter. Judicious and calm, intelligent and energetic, this faithful follower of our Lord is filled with deep and solemn reflection. His head is somewhat averted from, though he is not inattentive to the present glorious event ; as a similar transaction must have left a strong and peculiar impression on his mind, and, in all likelihood, first led him to become a fol-

lower of Christ.* He wonders and is sad, that the people should deny the divinity of the Saviour, and not receive more lasting impression from his doctrines.

Judas Iscariot.

Sly, artful, and active, mean and deceitful, a disguised, close, subtle querist, without great depth of mind, is the general character of this masterly head of him who could kiss to betray. His immediate expression is that of a malignant scowl. He is lurking behind, observing all that passes; not that he cares for the poor, or diseased, but because it is his business to be present, as he bears the purse of this holy family. He is probably, even now, employed in meditations which remove his last scruples against the act which has marked his name with infamy. From the history, it may be supposed, he went the next morning, or very soon after the occurrence here represented, to treat with the priests, relative to betraying his Lord; as the time chosen for this picture appears to be about five days previous to the awful catastrophe that closed the life of Jesus.

The other Apostles

Are admirable heads, finely diversified, and expressive of solemn contemplation, mental vigour and calmness—their greatness is not that derived from the schools, where perplexity rather than clearness reigned over the mind; nor do they exhibit the refinement of manners and dress, peculiar to the period in which they lived. They are alike unembarrassed in mind, and unshackled by any gaudy accoutrement of attire; we see simple nature under divine instruction, the character of unsophisticated men of sound understanding.

* See Matt. ix. to verse 9 inclusive.

*The Chief Priests and Scribes.**

The character of the Chief Priest is that of indolence and voluptuousness, by no means great in mind: his face expresses hatred, anger, envy, and jealousy, but rather subdued by suspense and expectation.†

The expression of the face next to him is that of the fiercest ranklings of malice, envy, and mortal hatred, which cause him to gnash his teeth; but these passions are under some check, by fear and suspense: his eyes glance round at the apostles, particularly at Peter.

The second is in the act of endeavouring to infuse his villainess into a third, who is pointing to our Saviour; and who, from the malignant glance of his eye, shows an inclination to receive his instructions. The instructor, or second character, has all the venom of his heart displayed upon his countenance, which exhibits hatred, envy and malice, in their most lively activity. The third, who, from his dress, and the anxious manner of the second character respecting him, I take to be a person of importance, seems already to answer the hopes of the second, who is anxiously waiting, though eager to reply, that he may assist in rooting his prejudices, and in bringing forward his malice.

A fourth is seen, between the first and second, behind them, and is involved in the dilemma of not knowing how to gratify his evil desires: he seems to be considering some means of accounting for the expected miracles, otherwise than by allowing the presence of God; or, if he can, to accomplish the death of the benevolent worker of them.

The fifth and sixth are seen above the third, and appear to be going apart to consult. They cannot bear, any longer, the tortures of expecting miracles. The face of the fifth is red-

* For an explanation of the colouring of these persons, see *Critical Remarks*, page 19.

† Herod the Great having sold the priest's office to those who would pay most for it, the persons who filled it about that period were degraded, and not unfrequently ignorant and wicked characters.

dened with contemptuous anger, whilst that of the sixth, expressing anger and hatred, and appearing sore displeased and disturbed, meditates the destruction of him "who did no evil, neither was guile found in his mouth."

The Blind Man and Son,

From the wallet which is seen suspended round the shoulder of the son, are evidently travelling beggars. The attitude and face of the blind man powerfully express expectation, hope, and suspense, with a degree of eagerness yet accompanied by a feeling of awe, and a consciousness of the Divine presence. Full of faith in his power, he is endeavouring to touch the Saviour's garments with his right hand, whilst his son is pleading with nature's pathos, O restore my father's sight! The unaffected goodness in the son's dejected, care-worn, faithful looks, blended with his youthful features, excite our pity, that he should suffer under the slothful and comparatively degrading occupation, of attending his mendicant and helpless parent.

The Young Man in the fore-ground,

Who is in a kneeling posture, I have no doubt is intended for the person who was born blind, and was excommunicated by the Jews, for his manly vindication of Christ. His sight had been given at a previous visit of our Saviour to Jerusalem: he has been a beggar, but the energy of the character here represented, accords with an improved situation in life, which we are informed of by his dress. Like the hands of a person who had been born blind, his hands are exceedingly delicate; and the eye, which appears in the profile view of his face, is very beautiful. It is very natural that some of the persons healed of maladies at Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, at former periods, would be present on this public occasion; and as one is sufficient for historical delineation, the fine character of this young man is judiciously selected. And it

is presumable, that having now heard of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, he resorted to the Temple, where his grateful devotion has bowed him to the ground, in open acknowledgment of his divinity—a feeling similar to that of Thomas, when he exclaimed, “my Lord and my God.”

The Palsied Woman.

In the palsied woman we have a truly distressed object, neither a look nor an action is under the control of the miserable sufferer. Her expression is that of faith and hope, and she is endeavouring to fix her eyes upon the Saviour. Her gentle and refined mind is benumbed, and dulness pervades the former dwelling of mental liveliness. Her situation, sympathetically affects her surrounding family with its depressing weight. The soldier loses the fire of his spirits, and sprightly beauty all its vivacity: the disease resembling death and life dwelling together in morbid association. The firm manliness, and heroic character of her sons, and the delicacy of her distressed daughter, with that of the healthy young nurse between her and her mother, are finely contrasted with the afflicted woman’s complexion, and the total debility of her person. Grief is depicted upon the countenance of the most prominent of her sons, as he looks at the Saviour; and the solemn downcast expression of the other appears as though he felt himself unworthy of the favour of God, and therefore did not expect that his wishes would be granted. The person of the daughter expresses great tenderness of feeling: she is peculiarly interesting, also, from her retired and modest deportment.

The Lunatic Boy.

This boy appears intended to represent the worst case of the worst malady that afflicts the human being—the most affecting and humiliating to see or to think of. Man is distinguished from all other animals by his reason; and when that is perfectly alienated, what animal so degraded that is not superior to

man thus afflicted? He becomes, indeed, in some of his paroxysms, the perfect image of a demon. At one moment, what fierceness of desperate intention! and at another, what chills of fear and horror mark this awful disease! His feeble circulation is almost stagnated at the extremity of his limbs, and his skin exhibits various unnatural hues, from the cold damp he perspires. Mr. West has wisely chosen to present us, not with one of the worst paroxysms, but evidently with one of the worst cases. The unhappy subject may be conceived to have been a beautiful youth, of delicate feelings; and I should think his immediate expression to be that of fear and horror, from imagining himself fighting with, and struggling to avoid an abhorred object. His mouth is parched with the thirst of fear, and the tongue involuntarily protruded to catch the coolness of the air. The face of the father evinces the deepest anguish of distress, combined with firmness; his haggard and dishevelled looks are wonderfully painted. One of the sisters, whose face exhibits distress and terror, is urgently imploring aid, while the other, in whose countenance her nation is strongly marked, attends to the directions of one of the Apostles, who, from his young appearance, I take to be James, directing them to his Almighty Master, which he does with a feeling confidence, arising from having witnessed the stilling of the raging sea, the calming of the winds, and casting out devils.

The two Persons carrying the Sick Man.

I know not how to account for that look of absence or indifference, in the face of the athletic figure, bearing up the shoulders of the sick man, otherwise than by considering him a slave: and if a slave, he may be supposed to form a touching case of human degradation and wrong in the Saviour's mind, as affecting as any of the maladies in the scene before him. The person holding the feet of the sick man, expresses awe and expectation. His condition seems to be that of a slave also, but in a superior station.

The women of the temple carrying doves past the entrance into the holy place, express the ceremonious reverence habitual to their situation, thus exemplifying their adherence to the typical shadows of the dispensation of the law, though almost obliterated by the traditions of the elders, and superseded by the glorious realities of the gospel.

The artist has not failed to make the most pleasing and beneficial use of the fulfilment of the prophecy, "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." We derive a thrill of solemn pleasure from the idea, that though the Saviour is neglected by the Jewish people, yet the loud hosannas from the sweet voices of these innocent children reach the heavens, in celebration of the presence of the Son of God, and of his glorious acts.

CRITICAL REMARKS.

It shall be my endeavour, in these very rapid remarks, to give them as free from technical phrases, and as plain to the understanding as possible.

The subject being that of Christ healing the lame and the blind who came to him in the temple, the moment seized for representation is that when Christ, by the action of his hands and arms, is silently but evidently expressing the fiat of his mind for healing the sick man, who is now feeling the efficacy of the Saviour's mercy. In this situation, they are presented to our view.

This principal action is given with such natural effect, that we can readily conceive what has immediately preceded it, and that which will probably follow. The Saviour is not now looking at the sick man; and it may justly be supposed, that he has observed him at a previous moment, or that he viewed him at the time of his approach, as it is probable he was the first of the afflicted that arrived near him: and the miracle which we may presume is intended to follow is, that of the healing of the sick infant, as the mother is in the act of supplicating for its restoration. This supposition accords with the action of the Saviour, as the balance of his figure almost equally on both feet indicates, with probability, that the next action will be the turning from the sick man towards the infant.

The grand conceptions and design of the artist are here perspicuously given, and the sublime feelings intended to be excited are vigorously impressed upon the mind. Thus there is in this picture the strictest adherence to the subject chosen, without any thing to draw the attention improperly from it; every thing is in unison with, and is kept in proper subordination to the one act sought to be impressed upon the mind, the healing of the sick man: however vigorous and expressive other parts or figures may be, they are not permitted to interrupt the mind from calmly contemplating this occurrence.

From the urgent desire of each of the applicants to be heal-

ed, the scene must be rather that of a bustle ; but as the generality of those present feel an awe of the Divine Personage, decorum and even meekness prevail ; and though surrounded, he yet stands pre-eminently distinguished. To speak professionally, the stillness and propriety of the secondary parts are obtained by the judicious manner in which the groups are composed as to class or kind of persons, in rank, size, form, age, sex, expression, and action, and their variety from, yet just relation to each other, as well as the general effect ; and again, by the way the several parts of the figures and drapery are disposed, which arrangement is produced in this harmonious, consistent, and spiritedly illustrative manner, by the extraordinary invention of our artist. Thus placing before the spectator a variety of expression from the meanest and basest of the passions to the most exalted goodness, almost all the varieties of mental and bodily sufferings accompanied by great diversity of mind and condition, from the elevated and refined companion, John, to the nearly idiotic rickety boy—from authority and respectability in life, to the beggar and the slave : But they are all inferior, though they contribute to the interest and illustration of the principal figure, the heavenly beauty of whose mind and affections, and the simple grandeur of whose character, shine through the clouds of his dejection and sorrow.

The groups are managed with sufficient view to contrast and combination of attitude, and so as to preserve a gentle motion, which increases, generally speaking, in proportion to the distance from the fore-ground, and the person of the Saviour. The central approach of the lame and the sick towards Christ is well contrasted ; the woman and sick infant, from before him, the rickety boy and his mother, parallel with the base line, the blind girl and her parents, from behind ; and so on the other side of the picture, but with still greater variety and beauty of manner, differing from those on this side. There is also great variety in the disposition of the hands, faces, and other parts, in an agreeable manner, and with the same view to stillness, order, contrast, and unity of arrangement in every part of this masterly production, so artfully managed, that art is concealed,

and every thing seems the result of accident. The waving line of heads reaching nearly across the picture, is conducted with the same simplicity and nature, full, three-quarter, and profile faces, agreeing in a concentrated attention to the Saviour, without a monotonous presentment of the same sort together. The contrasts of health and sickness, infancy and age, are well introduced; those of emotion or passion, as in the countenances of the priests and scribes, of the Saviour, and of Peter, greatly illustrate each other, and are accompanied with softening intermediates, as the head of John forms a happy gradation between the Saviour and the Priests.

The waving line of heads, just noticed, being composed of persons standing upright, or nearly so, is judiciously managed by means of the point of sight in the perspective of the picture, being placed lower than the line of heads, and the Saviour being the most advanced figure, causes him to appear taller than most of the others; whilst the glory surrounding his head, combining sufficiently with the other figures near him, produces quite enough of the pyramidical form to render the grouping highly pleasing, and to assist in uniting the several groups; thus forming an agreeable whole.

The Light and Shade.

The light is not given with powerful contrast; but in fitness to the subject, and the sublime character of the principal personage is that of a broad beam of clear daylight, which permits objects to be accurately defined, without disturbing by the display of its effects. It is strongest upon the upper part of the principal figure, but its brightest ray is received upon his clear coloured forehead, where it rests, as upon a congenial throne; its power gradually decreases upon the surrounding groups, in the most perfect agreement with their well ordered arrangement; behind the apostle John, the light declines upon the retired figures; and upon some of the heads in the group of priests and scribes, it is so weak, as to be nearly overcome by the powerful light from the seven branched candlestick,

standing in the holy place ; by this management the light and shade become efficient agents to combine the groups together as a whole, and in that unity to assist also in subduing them to their relative importance to the main subject.

Colouring.

The beauty and excellence of fine colouring consist in its brilliancy according to the subject ; in its variety and freedom from monotonous dulness, in the arrangement and contrast, and above all in its harmony. A picture should possess a just opposition of colours, at the same time they should be sufficiently softened and subdued by balancing, or intermediate hues, to harmonize their otherwise too forcible contrasts. The bluish green, on the shoulder of Peter, richly harmonizes the blue of the Saviour's drapery to the yellow across the body of Peter ; and the blue in the sky agreeing with the large mass of blue drapery, just mentioned, prevents it from becoming a conspicuous blemish by standing alone ; and these two masses of cold hues balance, and are balanced by the mass of candle-light colour in and from the holy place, together with the yellow and orange-coloured dress of John : the same may be said of every part of this judicious performance. There is no transition which comes too abruptly to the eye ; nothing inconsistent with just spirit, either in the colouring, or light and shade ; there is always something to prevent it from offending the eye, except where a degree of it adds to the spirit and value of the part, or of the whole picture. Harmony of colouring is like harmony in music ; the three parts, treble, tenor, and bass, may be compared to the three primary colours, yellow, red, and blue ; if either or any two of these parts are too strong for the other, or any instrument or voice amongst them is discordant, the effect is lost, and the harmony is hurt or destroyed ; and so with our colours : a glaring or heavy colour, standing alone, is like a discordant note. In music there is a master key or note, and the tune is higher or lower, according as is the key ; and we have our master tone or tint of colour, and our picture is

warmer or colder, that is yellower,* or bluer, or darker, or lighter, as this tint varies. The compass of our instrument may be considered as extending from black to white, and from yellow to blue. The tone of colour, which pervades and rules over the whole of this picture, I take to be an olive, somewhat bordering upon the russet. The effect of Mr. West's picture, as a whole, is that of a well arranged bouquet composed of flowers, variously rich in their colours, none of which are so powerful as to impair the beauty of the others.

The tints of the face of the principal figure are clear, and beautifully managed; the drapery is coloured very chastely, becoming the character of the wearer; all the other draperies are modulated to fit the just spirit and gravity of the subject; the flesh tints of the picture generally are bright, and the carnations pure where they ought to be, and always clear. The whole of the colouring is finely harmonious.

It may now be proper to make some observations upon the group of the Chief Priests and Scribes; a part of the picture which is remarkable for its difficulty and success in point of colouring. The justness of the balance of the hues on these faces, thus disfigured by the basest passions, is exceedingly happy in its execution. These persons are in a severe and trying situation; they become insignificant the moment Jesus and his followers enter the place where they are accustomed to exercise absolute authority. They are sure that several real miracles are about to be performed, and are unable, yet forced to try to account for them in some measure to their own minds: thus they are tormented in their endeavours to avoid acknowledging the finger of God in these astonishing events; which, together with their fears of the people, and the perplexity of not knowing how to act, turns the venom of their characters, scorpion-like, upon themselves. The various malignant passions with which they are affected, have caused the florid hue of the blood to leave their cheeks, and livid and bilious hues to take its place: hence the difficulty of painting these faces;

* It may justly be doubted if warmth of colour is ever without some tint of redness or more.

which, taking into consideration the very peculiar effect the light and shade in which they are placed, must have upon *any* complexion, I conceive are managed, to say the least, with justness and truth; and that those who have studied, or even seen nature in this situation, so degraded by violent and evil passions, will feel and admire this fine passage of the picture. They are all placed in a weak light; their passions have turned their faces pale, and affect their complexions with various hues; and those hues are rendered deeper by the contrast of the warm light from the holy place. The second character from the high priest is the darkest of them, and the chief reason for his peculiar tint is, that the artist has contrived an appropriate darkness fitted to the soul of this man, wherein to place his evil expression; the effect of the day-light is very nearly excluded from his face, as he is overshadowed by the tall figure pointing to the Saviour, and by the white hood which covers his head, which also contrasts with his face, as upon the other figures near him of the same kind. These things taken together, give a tone of discord, or wolf note, highly proper for this part of the performance. I have chosen thus to explain the effect of this head, because when the mind perfectly understands how to account for *his* complexion, the justness of the colouring, beautiful in its kind in all these characters, will be allowed; and the moral, or artist's intention, will be felt and followed, by a just detestation of the evil passions of such men, who could thus hate the most exalted goodness.

Of the Natural Relief of the Figures.

Objects are made to look separated, or, as it is termed, relieved, from each other in painting, by three modes: First, from the judicious manner of opposing the natural difference of their colours, as bright and dark colours contrasted with each other; and also from the light naturally falling upon one part, whilst another is left in shadow; and again, by the reflection of the light into the dark shadowed parts. In subjects where the intention is to affect the mind with serious and salutary

impressions, as in the present instance, this should be ordered in such a manner as to realize the objects without disturbing the mind by its particular, or too great effect in any one part of the picture, which is here judiciously attended to, yet with sufficient boldness in its general management. The chaste and able manner in which Mr. West has performed this part of his work, will vie with the most select productions of the greatest masters in this branch of the art.

The Keeping, or Aerial Perspective.

Upon objects that are near to the view, the light and shade and colours are all stronger than when the same objects are seen at a distance, through a greater quantity of the atmospheric air, where the light and shade and the colours will appear faint to the eye, in comparison to their appearance when near. The correct observance of this strength and faintness in just proportion to the distance of objects, is termed keeping; because, acting with the correct size of distant and near objects, obtained by lineal perspective, it keeps them in their proper places. There is, in every part of this picture, a masterly illustration of it; for a particular instance, see the head of the son of the palsied woman with the figure of a female, in a white veil above him, and the distant view of the temple and the clouds.

The Execution.

The drawing and anatomy is most beautiful; and should the picture be handed down to after ages, free from accident, it will be more highly prized, as coming from the pencil of the worthy president, after that period of his life when *he* had *studied* the works of Phideas, in the Elgin Marbles, so truly wonderful for their surpassing beauties: thus confirming his own grand conceptions and acquirements; and possibly rendering his pencil still bolder and more free.

“The anatomy of the sick man forms of itself a most excel-

lent and splendid exhibition of art." The same may be said of the two slaves; and indeed of every other nude part. The heads in general are very fine in this respect—some of them merit the highest praise. There are several intrepid foreshortenings, which are wonderfully executed—for instance, the hands and arms of the blind girl. The drawing of all the hands and feet is finely finished, and in happy agreement with each other, and characteristic of the whole person and face they belong to, as are the ears and other parts. The hands of the Saviour are very beautiful. Those of the young man in the foreground, kneeling, are worthy of great attention. There are many expressions in the variety of the passions here depicted, which will be standard feasts, ever new to the mind, and improving the more they are considered. Some of the draperies are very grand, and gracefully disposed, especially those of the principal figure; all the others are appropriate, agreeing with the action and condition of the wearer; as, for example, in the distressed situation of the lunatic boy's father, it is in happy union with his expression. I do not believe there are *any* portraits in this picture, though Mr. West has no doubt had nature before him, somewhat applicable, in the general outline, when designing many of the characters. This is known to be the common practice of the best historical painters, for obtaining the verity of nature. There may be some slight likeness, but not a direct portrait in any of them.

The evident touches of the pencil, technically termed the pencilling or handling, have in many parts such ease that they seem to have proceeded from a daring and happy playfulness. It has in general the freedom of a sketch; and a flowing line pervades the whole: in short, it is such as could spring only from the bold hand of a confident, long experienced master; all was ready in his sage and matured mind; and the vigorous, effective touch, flowed forth with a full richness upon the canvass.

Viewing the picture at a proper distance, the whole has a powerful, rich, and highly finished effect. The artist bears us many ages back, and we become included in a scene calculated

to touch and improve the mind, and to excite a just admiration of the powers bestowed upon man. Those who have seen the celebrated works of art in Europe, and who really feel their beauties, justly admire the sublime, terrific greatness of Michael Angelo's ideas, and his grand manner of execution; the grace of elevated nature, and force of expression in the works of the heaven-fraught Raphael; the just and high feeling of nature in the colouring of Titian; and the various beauties of the other masters, who truly deserve the name of great, in their several branches of the art. To combine their different excellencies in the degree they possessed them, is perhaps what no man will ever effect. In the chaste execution of Mr. West's picture, however, will be found, in my opinion, an assemblage of them as successful as ever was achieved.

I am conscious that temperate and rational praise is the most forcible eulogy; and I have not, in my attempt at describing this great work of art, dared to use any other. My best endeavours have been exerted to give my author's meaning, and I think I have done so. Whatever may be the fate of this short essay, the credit or discredit will be only mine, as I have not consulted any one upon the subject; but thus present my description and critique to the public, in strict adherence to my motto.

We now possess a most noble production of the graphic muse, truly worthy of becoming the foundation of an American school of historical painting. May that future school rise to the highest excellence; and its celebrity, united with the certain fame of this picture, reach the latest posterity!

Philadelphia, February 23d, 1818.



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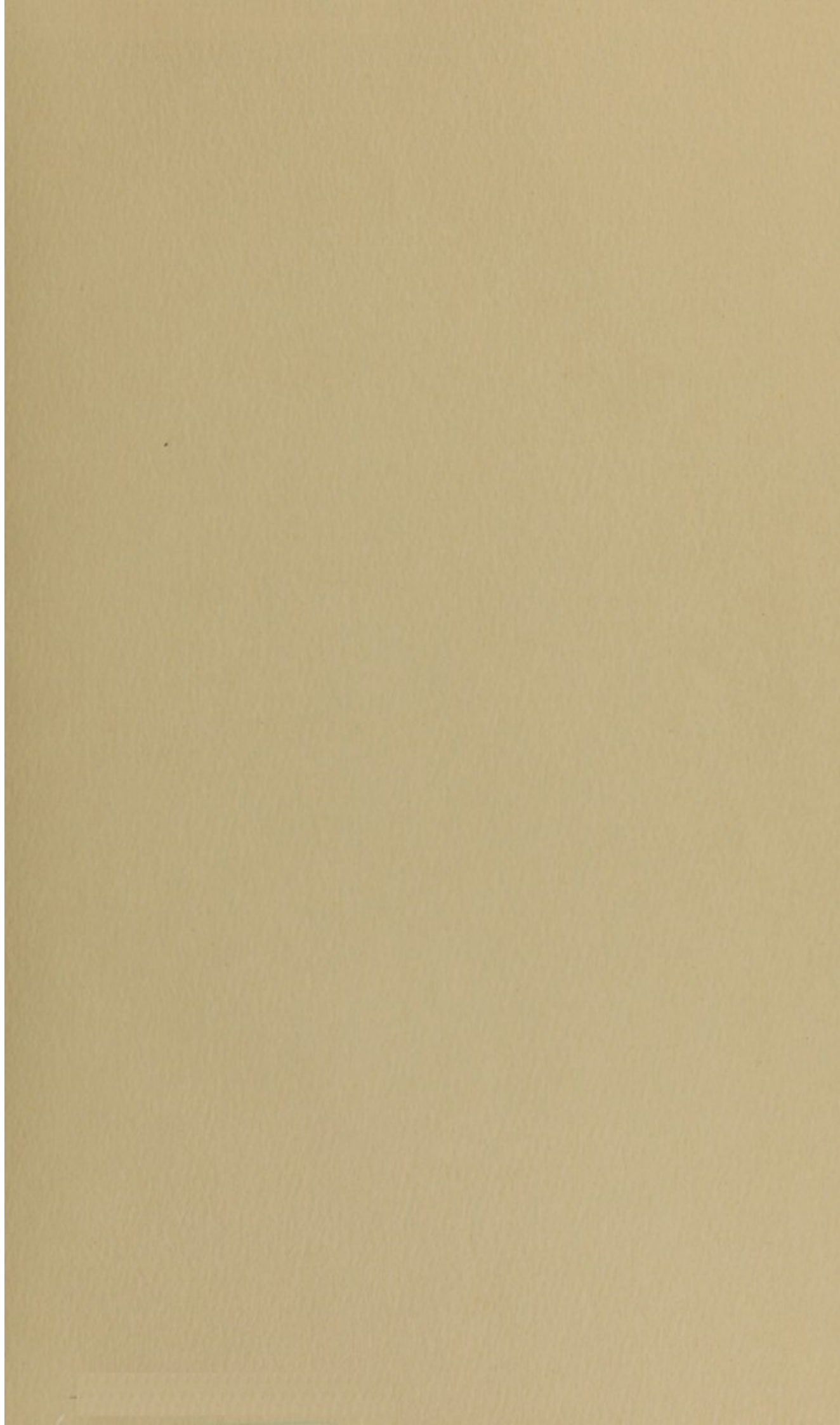
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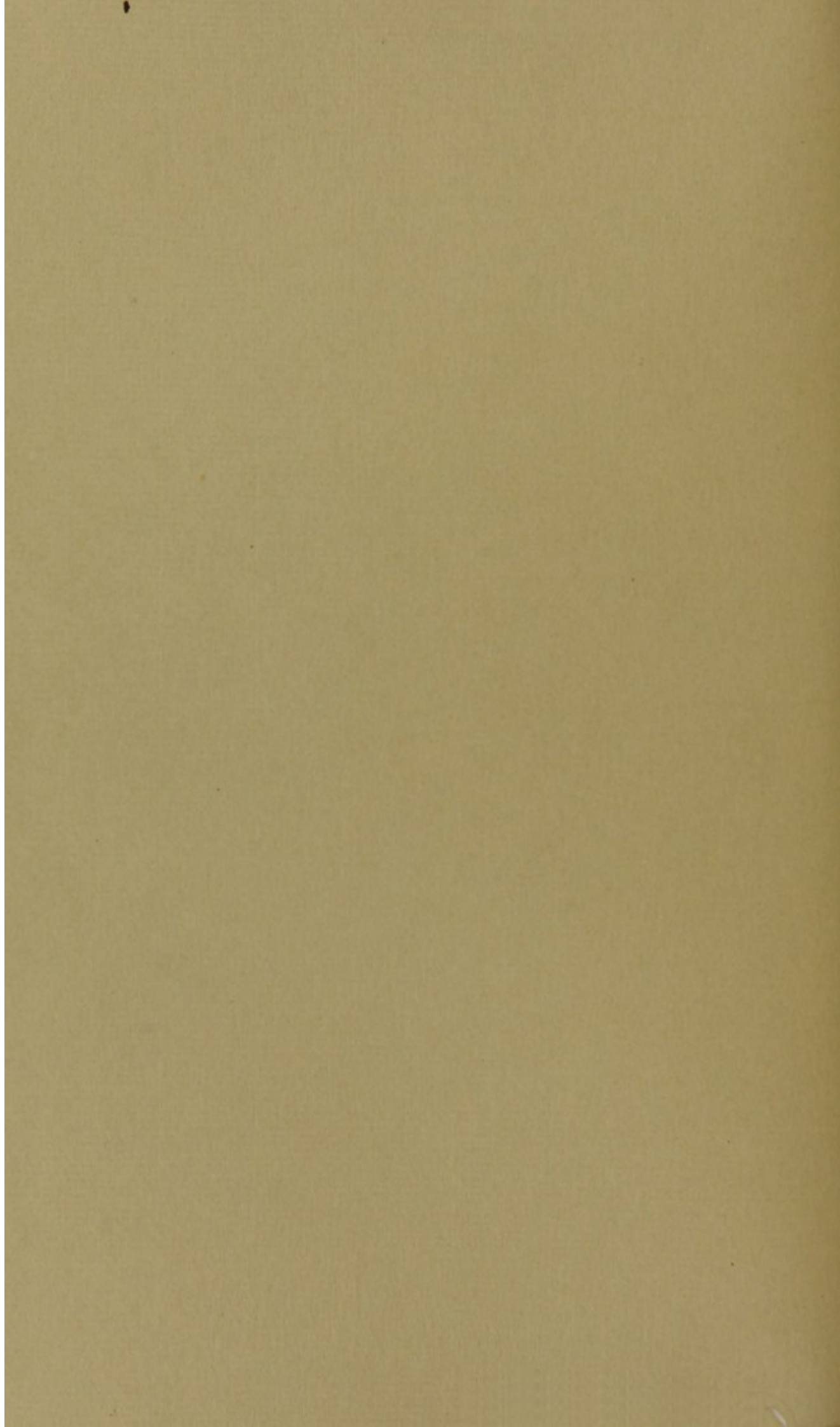
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