

FREE ART.

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS,
Washington, D. C., May 18, 1892.

The full committee met at 11 a. m. for the purpose of hearing a delegation of members of the National Art Association in attendance on the Art Congress now in session in this city, in behalf of removing the tariff on works of art.

The CHAIRMAN. I have the pleasure of introducing Mr. Albert Bierstadt, vice president of the National Art Association.

Mr. BIERSTADT. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the committee: I desire to direct your attention to the National Loan Exhibition which is now being held in the Smithsonian Institution, to which you are all invited.

I take pleasure in introducing Miss Kate Field, secretary of the National Art Association, who will make a few remarks, and then read some letters in connection with the subject of free art.

STATEMENT OF MISS KATE FIELD.

Miss KATE FIELD. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the committee: The history of the fight for free art in this Republic is a twice-told tale to many of you, but I tell it once more in order to explain the birth of a new association destined to play no small part in the advancement of popular taste.

I appeared, by their request, before the House Committee on Ways and Means on March 27, 1890, and argued against retaining a tax of 30 per cent on paintings and statuary. My reasons were these facts: For 20 years preceding 1861 there was no tax on foreign art in this country. In 1861 a tax of 10 per cent, the lowest of all, was instituted as a war measure. This comparatively mild burden was borne for twenty-three years. Then artists asked for its abolition, and Congress replied by increasing the tax to 30 per cent, making the burden 200 per cent greater in peace and prosperity than during the period of bloodshed and financial depression:

The history of the passage of this 30 per cent measure is significant reading.

It was not advocated by the press.

It was not demanded by the people.

It was not recommended by the tariff commission.

No bill was introduced or considered.

No legislator proposed or advocated it.

Congressional requirements were not complied with.

Senate and House disagreed on details of a bill on general tariff.

The committee of conference inserted two or three lines which were passed unnoticed, March 3, 1883.

Does not such a trick savor of dishonesty?

Taxation is justified by two reasons, revenue and protection. This increase, therefore, was an outrage, for revenue was not needed; and artists wanted no protection.

The law was disastrous in its results. Duties fell from \$307,000 in 1883 to \$191,000 in 1884, a decline of 40 per cent, while general trade only fell 7 per cent, and jewels advanced.

The sales of American artists decreased; the demands for American art lessened. The export of paintings amounted to \$387,000 in 1883 and fell to \$176,000 in 1884. Foreign nations remonstrated, as well they might, for in Italy, France, Germany, and Russia art is free, while in all other countries, except Servia and those speaking Spanish, it is taxed only 8 per cent.

"We don't want a tariff on foreign art," sing American artists in chorus. "It is our ruin." "As long as wool is taxed you shall be," reply certain critics. "You represent the rich, wool represents the poor." This is a fallacy. It matters little to the rich what tariff is put on anything. They can afford to pay it and enjoy a monopoly of what should belong to the whole people. The burden falls on those who can barely pay for art without a tariff, and hence we are shut out from what France long since discovered was the best education for its people. If our sister republic across the Atlantic leads civilization to-day and makes the whole world bow to its taste in art and design, even unto the dresses we wear and the paper on our walls, it is because her rulers welcomed foreign art several hundred years ago, fostered what was good, made it her own, and created anew. Give our people the same chance and with our quick intelligence we will be the France of the new world. Had Patti, Rubenstein, Paderewski, Bernhardt, Coquelin been shut out by a tariff, do you think that American musicians and actors would have been benefited thereby? The presence of these artists has been such an inspiration as to whet public taste for the best and to inspire native talent to renewed effort.

Keeping out foreign art decreases popular interest in art, deprives home artists of inspiration, and renders their work less valuable and less profitable. To claim that this tax falls solely on the rich is to ignore artists who are, as a class, poor. It is to forget the people who are dependent upon public sales, exhibitions, and museums for their knowledge of the beautiful, whereby they become better educated, and consequently make better citizens. Not only this, but it is to forget all artisans who are prevented from attaining a high standard of work in many industries.

Not the least objectionable feature of this outrageous tariff is the resentment it inspires in foreign artists, and the difficult position in which our own art students abroad are thereby placed. Our young men and women go to Paris and are received with open arms, never paying a sou for their education so far as public galleries and instruction are concerned. Their works are well hung and generously treated. They make reputations which bring them fortune, more or less great. At the exposition of 1889 American artists received 104 medals and recompenses, the largest number ever given to a foreign country. We repay this magnanimity by virtually slamming our doors in the face of Europe. We said to Millet, when sent here for exhibition—an exhibition of incalculable benefit to artists and the public—"Remain in bond longer than a year and you must pay into our custom-house 30 per cent

of your value." So this wonderful educator was galloped through the country in order to get back to New York in time to take a steamer before the twelve months were up.

Let us now return to the Fifty-first Congress.

Twelve hours after my address I received this delightful note:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, March 27, 1890.

DEAR MISS FIELD: Governor Gear and myself were authorized to inform you that, after your eloquent plea, the committee unanimously voted to place art on the free list. The governor wishes to join with me in congratulations.

Yours truly,

SERENO E. PAYNE.

It seemed too good to be true. In one brief hour's argument a tax of 30 per cent had been taken off art. Yet so true was this assurance from the Committee on Ways and Means that the McKinley bill passed the House without a moment's discussion about this art clause.

I knew so little then of politics as to believe the victory won, despite the cold water poured upon my ardor by an editor who had seen far more of Congress than I, and better understood its methods. "Don't be too happy," said he. "There's the Senate. Nobody knows what changes it may make in this tariff bill."

Alas! that wary man was right. The Senate restored the 30 per cent duty, but in conference a compromise resulted in leaving a tax of 15 per cent.

Disappointed but not disheartened—for half a loaf is surely better than no bread—I began to wonder what should be done next. As a woman had done some good to art I saw no reason why my sex should not persevere until the removal of the last burden. Then I thought of Mrs. Harrison, the first lady in the land, who, practically interested in art, could do it royal service. This idea so grew upon me that I suggested to Mrs. Harrison a special reception to American artists, who had never yet been officially recognized by a Republic claiming to be founded on intelligence.

Warmly responding to this appeal, Mrs. Harrison signified her desire to honor art, and it was decided, after much consultation, that at the proper time American artists and art patrons should be invited to meet Congress socially at the Executive Mansion. Out of this idea has sprung the National Art Association, organized for the advancement of art throughout the country, with special reference to the capital.

Honorary president, Mrs. Harrison, Executive Mansion.

President, Daniel Huntington, ex-president National Academy of Design.

Honorary vice-presidents, Hon. L. P. Morton, Vice-President of the United States; Mrs. Morton.

Vice-Presidents, Albert Bierstadt, F. D. Millet, Augustus St. Gaudens, Wm. M. Chase, E. F. Riggs, C. M. Ffoulke, F. Colton, Jefferson Chandler, Thos. E. Waggonman, M. M. Parker, C. J. Singer, C. L. Hutchinson, Jas. W. Ellsworth, Edmund Clarence Stedman, Beriah Wilkins, Richard M. Hunt, Stanford White, John Armstrong Chanler, Mrs. Candace Wheeler, Mrs. George Hearst, Mrs. S. V. R. Cruger, Mrs. Potter Palmer, Mrs. Bellamy Storer, Mrs. H. K. Porter.

Treasurer, J. W. Thompson.

Secretary, Kate Field.

This association, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the committee, though only six weeks old, already numbers hundreds of members, made up of men and women, rich and poor, artists, patrons, art lovers, and artisans, who clamor for the removal of a tax on education. This is not a matter of politics. An association which embraces women of all classes who don't vote, and men of as diverse political opinions as

the Hon. Don M. Dickinson and the Hon. Whitelaw Reid, stands upon the broad basis of human need and appeals to Congress regardless of party. The National Art Association held its congress yesterday, with the Hon. Jefferson Chandler (Democrat) in the chair and Senator Wolcott (Republican) beside him. The following resolutions were passed:

Resolved, That in the opinion of this congress the advancement of art in America would be greatly promoted by the abolition of the present tariff upon works of art, which is not only useless as protection, but a positive hindrance to American artists, in so far as it diminishes the importation of such works and tends to impede the growth of that general cultivation which is necessary to the progress and prosperity of a native school of art.

Resolved, That we therefore ask the Congress of the United States to pass a law placing works of art, as defined in section 465 of the present tariff, on the free list.

Delegates of the association and their guests now appear before this august body of legislators to plead a cause of the people. Give the United States free art and the sons and daughters of the soil will learn that the family chromo is but the dawn of beauty.

By request of Vice-President Bierstadt I will now read his argument in behalf of our cause.

TARIFF ON ART.

[Albert Bierstadt.]

The object of the tariff seems to have been to protect American artists. They have never asked for this kind of protection; on the contrary they have expressed themselves as opposed to it, and as a proof of this I will refer to what the art committee of the Union League Club did some years ago. They sent out 1,400 letters to the artists of the United States; out of this large number only seventeen favored a tariff on art. It does the artists great harm; it is a reflection on his work, and the unscrupulous dealer makes use of it to aid him in disposing of his foreign art. This tariff is a great aid to the dealer, as he is able to show his custom-house bills of duties paid, and he prefers to pay a duty because he gets the Government indorsement that the work of art he has for sale is genuine, and when the customer comes in he makes use of these documents to sustain his position.

Frauds in art are common on both sides of the water, but we consider that we have a duty to perform to the art-loving public who are willing to spend their money for works of art. I know of several instances of fraud being perpetrated on American buyers of pictures, who after some sad experience of this kind, let art severely alone and advised their friends to do likewise.

Artists generally have been too slow in seeing the true cause of the decline of American works of art. Place art on the free list and you will at once see the change. The public will see that the true artist is not afraid of competition. The American buyer wants the best art that is produced, and the artist does not object to his buying the best; on the contrary should aid him in doing so. If we had the contents of the Louvre, the Vatican, the Pitti Palace, the Dresden Gallery, in fact all the great collections in Europe, in this country, we would be rich indeed, and the benefits to be derived are incalculable.

No American can be forced to buy American pictures. Give us free art, free books, free everything that educates. One argument against free art is that shiploads of pictures will come here. To some extent this is true, but then consider what effect it will have. A shipload of Corots, Duprés, Daubignys, etc., would at once cause the price to tumble to \$1 each, or less, and when the public see this tumble, which is already begun, they will cease to care for them.

A French writer on art has stated that 12,000 Corots have been sold in the Hotel Druot in Paris. As Corot only painted all told 700 sketches and pictures it is evident he must have had some imitators who after his death used his name on these canvasses to sell them, and when we reflect that most of them came to this country, we are not happy.

I know an American gentleman who paid 150,000 francs for two pictures at this same Hotel Druot, in Paris, and soon after found he had been defrauded. He sought the French courts, but they were powerless to give him relief. The auctioneer said he never guaranteed anything that he sold. This man lost 150,000 francs, and I never heard of his buying any more pictures.

The United States is almost the only country that levies a tax on works of art. We should get our raw material free, as this makes quite an item in the long run. American art will not revive in this country until these obstructions to its true progress are removed. No American will be forced to buy American pictures by any tariff imposed on foreign works of art. Make art free and you have laid the corner stone of a new art prosperity.

Miss KATE FIELD. I am next called upon to read the arguments of a very hard-headed business man, Charles Stewart Smith, president of the chamber of commerce of New York City. Mr. Smith is a member of the National Art Association.

REMARKS OF CHAS. S. SMITH, PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

Guizot, in his "Etudes sur les beaux arts," said that when the Greeks wished to testify their respect for their gods they made an offering of pictures and statues; each state constructed at Delphos an edifice which they called its "Treasury," where they placed the pictures which represented their most celebrated victories and the statues of the men whom they wished particularly to honor.

The art, which was the creation of the genius of Greece, and which has received the homage of the centuries since the time of Pericles and Phidias, still rules supreme, for the study of the antique has been the inspiration for the work of the great masters from the time of Angelo and Raphael to the present day. We are imbued with the spirit of Greece when we endeavor, as our friend, Miss Kate Field has done with conspicuous ability, to make art a national treasure and to assist in the organization by the Federal Government of a "commission of art and architecture."

I shall not occupy your time in the repetition of what we all concede regarding the gifts and graces which follow in the train of an art-loving people. What Mr. Huxley styles the "serene world of art" has certainly been an important educational factor in favor of all the amenities of life. No man or woman can ever become very bad morally or socially who has cultivated a knowledge and has a passionate love of art.

My purpose now, however, is to consider this question from the standpoint of practical affairs, and to ask and answer the question—would the official encouragement of art pay? Is it right for the General Government to spend the people's money for the promotion of art, even as it distributes garden seeds or establishes extensive plants for fish hatchings or grants a subsidy to a railroad?

I remember hearing some years ago in Paris an address from the minister of fine arts, in which he advocated the policy of larger appropriations on the part of his Government to buy pictures and statues for the museums of Paris on business grounds. He said that to fill the hotels and bring all the world to the city of Paris, and give prosperity to its manufactures and merchants, it must continue to be the principal art center of the world; it must admit of no rival in any European capital; its art galleries, theaters, and operas must lead the artistic van of Europe. And he referred to the fact that the English Government was then spending large sums of money to increase the attractions of the national and Kensington galleries, and insisted that the Government of France must not allow them to successfully compete with the Louvre and Luxemburg.

Why, Mr. Chairman, Rome, Florence, Venice, Naples, indeed all Italy, have lived for the past half century on the money spent by strangers who come to see their historic monuments and art treasures. It is true of all the great art centers and of all the famous galleries of Europe that aside from their educational value they pay indirectly a very large percentage on their cost. Take, for example, the small city of Dresden. How many millions of dollars have been spent in that city by strangers drawn hither by that famous gallery? The Metropolitan Museum of Art is doing the same service for the city of New York. Its art treasures, all gifts from its patrons, now amount in value to \$7,000,000, and its future is full of promise and certain to rank within the next quarter of a century as one of the world's great collections. Andrew Carnegie has laid the foundation in Pittsburg of an institution which will become the Mecca of American art. He has given \$1,000,000 to build a suitable building, and endowed it with an annual income of \$50,000 to be spent in the purchase of works of American artists.

Goethe said that "a work of art can be comprehended by the head only by the assistance of the heart." This philosophic remark is true in a general as in a particular sense. We must spread the knowledge and the love of art among the people by schools of design and by object lessons such as the Metropolitan Museum is doing with its schools and collections of architectural casts, its famous specimens of bronze,

iron, porcelain, glass, and textile work. France has made more money, and makes to-day a larger per centage of profits, upon the products of her artists and artisans than any other country because of the art education of her people, which for one hundred years has been the fixed policy of the Government and of her public men under all changes and revolutions. Paris furnishes the models for the world in art and fashion and the manufacture of all articles requiring a high grade and skill because of this universal art education. If you go into a silk manufacturing establishment of Lyons the manager will speak of his workers as "artists;" if you visit a similar establishment in Paterson the same workers are simply "help;" and there is some reason in this distinction of words.

Now, if all this be true, can there be a more unwise economic policy for our Government than to place a duty upon art objects entering this country? Is it not an embargo upon the knowledge, refinement, and cultivated taste of the people, as well as a great pecuniary disadvantage to their future wage-earning power? Will you pardon an allusion to an incident personal to myself which illustrates the value of the example of foreign art as an educator of American students? A short time ago a young gentleman called at my house and introduced himself by saying that he had studied in Paris under Cabanel. "I understand," said he, "that you have in your possession Cabanel's picture of 'Echo.' I am painting a portrait of a lady, and before completing it I want to study that picture." Well, the young man made three visits and each time mounted a stepladder and studied the work of his late master. I subsequently had a letter from him saying the portrait was a success, and he thought he had caught something of the spirit and method of the famous Frenchman.

I know of three or four large establishments in this country (of their kind among the largest in the world) whose designing departments cost each from \$40,000 to \$50,000 per annum. Nearly all of their designers are foreigners. Indeed, I can call to mind but one American who achieved distinction in these establishments as a designer.

Again, in this country, where the law does not permit family treasures to descend permanently by hereditary conveyance, the destiny of all famous private collections is to find a permanent home in public galleries, where they are open to the public free or charge. The collection of pictures of the late Catherine Wolfe, of New York, now in the Metropolitan Museum of that city, was valued at a half million of dollars, and all paid a duty to the Government. Meissonier's great picture of 1807, imported by the late A. T. Stewart, upon which he paid a duty of \$6,000, is now also on free exhibition at the same museum. The same is true of Rosa Bonheur's "Horse Fair," and other important works by great foreign masters, and all have paid duty to this Government. Equity would seem to require that an act of Congress should be passed by which the duty should be refunded when such works of art become public property and dedicated for all time to the free education of the people.

The question of the use of the public money for the promotion of art now in the manner herein advocated is, in my opinion, only limited by the question if it can be wisely applied; that is, if a commission of the right sort of men can be appointed to administer such funds with wisdom and knowledge.

I hope, Mr. Chairman, that the wise men of Congress will give considerate attention to the views of this convention. The city of Washington, at least, should be placed directly under the patronage of the General Government in the matter of liberal appropriations for art, and not be left entirely to the generosity of private benefactions.

No one is better authority on this vital subject than Prof. W. T. Harris, of the Bureau of Education, one of our members, whose argument I now present:

ARGUMENT OF PROF. WILLIAM T. HARRIS.

I believe in protection of manufactured industry—in protection that protects. I do not believe in protecting ourselves from spiritual influences—those three spiritual influences which I consider to be religion, science, and art. Those three things we do not wish to protect ourselves from for the benefit of any home industry that we may have, and especially because such a protection would not protect. If we protect ourselves from science, and do not learn to avail ourselves of the insight of all our fellowmen we dwarf ourselves, and do not produce anything that will compete with the science and art of other lands. Literature is a difficult thing to legislate against, but if we exclude the work of sculptors and painters, especially these two subjects, we can in a certain way exclude them from us, and the result will be, of course, a

dwarfed development among our own people. What is the character of this Anglo-Saxon race to which we belong? Is it an art-making nation? We are not an art-making people by nature and we must light our torch from Europe, from the great artists there; therefore it is necessary, if we wish to protect art in this country, to open our custom-houses to the best art that can be purchased abroad. We have in our Anglo-Saxon people, the home people in England, and then we have the colonists in Australia, Canada, and the United States. The colonies of Great Britain are more given to art than the native home country.

It is a curious observation of those who have looked into the matter that frequently people who go to Paris, Rome, and other art centers of Europe, get inspired, so to speak, seize the art and have great success. Moreover, every year we are told that those who visit the various studios in Europe from America are making names for themselves. They have to do it by going there. There are thousands of our brothers and sisters who live at home that would have the same inspiration if they went there. We are a people first in the point of furnishing a large contingent of artists, but without the influx of the best art into this country, we can not have that education necessary to develop the possibilities that are with us. I think the argument of Mr. Charles Stewart Smith is the argument in which this thing can be carried in Congress. It is the peculiar one. The other day I was hunting up protective notions. I wished to see the effect of rapidly increasing wealth. I wished to see the effect in reference to education, which, you know, is my hobby. I saw that the English people had more steam engines, except the people of the United States, per capita, and that their machinery was producing wealth rapidly. We have been producing wealth rapidly. We are producing it rapidly now. We are increasing our wealth at the rate of \$2,000,000,000 a year, the fastest increase of wealth anywhere in the world. With the increase of wealth comes a love of art. Every year we have more means for getting works of art.

As I was saying I looked into the English record and I found from the income returned of Great Britain that thirty out of every one hundred families in Great Britain were actually receiving an income of \$1,000. That is nothing wonderful under the circumstances. Soon it will be 50 per cent of families that are receiving absolutely \$1,000 a year. I turned to Italy, knowing there were few steam engines there and few machines, and I found that only three families out of every one hundred were getting a thousand dollars and upwards—just one in ten as compared with Great Britain. I then looked to France. I was not prepared, however, to find such a lesson as I did find. The item of income was not given for \$1,000, but it was given for \$1,400 and upwards, and I found it was 24 per cent in \$1,400 a year and upward. That is a statement that wise statesmen will listen to. We must not protect ourselves against spiritual influences, against religion, against science, and against art, but we must protect our home industries and our home industry, so far as art can be an industry among us, by importing the best and making them as cheap as possible. We want the best pictures in this country, and our cause is the cause that will produce good art in this country.

There is no sculptor present. I will read a letter from one of our most eminent sculptors, Mr. J. Q. A. Ward, of Ohio, whose splendid statute of Gen. Thomas is the saving grace of this city.

Miss Field read the letter as follows:

NEW YORK, May 10, 1892.

There is no reason, revenue, common sense, or *even* statesmanship in the present tariff, although it is only half as bad as the 30 per cent duty.

I am also quite in sympathy with your art congress or any other congress that will impress our people, our legislative bodies, and our executive officers with the idea that there are artists in the country and that they have brought their art with them, and that it is at the service of the Government and the people. Some malicious persons may call this art demonstration an advertising dodge. Let them. Why should the professions of painting and sculpture be, in this respect, such a gentle exception to every other art and enterprise, especially at the capital of the nation?

Congress has little knowledge of any art or enterprise except as it blows in upon them through the lobby. So organize, and parade, keep pushing and shouting, and by and by someone will begin to think that there is an "art atmosphere" in the country; when you get an atmosphere the cyclone is possible. It is too late for me to join your association. All the offices are filled, but I can help your cause better as an outsider, and will do so. Politically I am not a free trader, but my protection admits of adjustment to the conditions, and I believe the conditions are for "free art!"

Very sincerely yours,

J. Q. A. WARD.

This letter was succeeded by those which follow:

137 WEST SEVENTY-EIGHTH STREET,
New York, April 23, 1892.

I had quite resolved to attend the art convention. I now regret to say that my affairs compel me to be absent from the country until the latter part of May. Success to the cause of free art. I am a believer in what is called the American system in the protection of our home industries. That has nothing to do with the cause you are so brilliantly and patriotically advocating. A duty on works of art does not protect our native artists; it simply retards their education and checks the development of a masterly home school. Books are cheap. The masterpieces of literature, ancient and modern, are found in our remotest villages. Hence our writers have their masters and models close at hand, and some of our best and most national authors are found in the provincial districts of the country. But our artists can only study the masterpieces of painting, sculpture, design in the centers of wealth and population, and there only through the readiness of amateurs to buy and import the beautiful and costly productions which show how skilled artists do their work.

The more plentiful these noble objects become, the more we shall produce canvasses and plastic art that will enhance not only the honor but also the commercial resources of our country. On the score, then, of both ideal and material progress, art should be free. Who demands that it should be otherwise? I firmly believe that nothing but the *vis inertiae* of a barbarous usage keeps the art tariff upon our statute books.

Very faithfully yours,

EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN.

WEST HOUSE,
Camden Hill Road, London.

How good of you to give the absent ones a vicarious voice—more persuasive and musical than their very own, perhaps—among the many that will be raised in protest, when your convention meets, against the iniquitous, and what is more, foolish tax on art which still blots the national reputation for common, clear intelligence. The tax is so silly, to say the least, that it not only should be abolished but apologized for to the other more or less enlightened nations of the earth. That one of the most important elements of a people's perfect education and refinement should be fined and discouraged from its peaceful mission is so narrow-minded that I almost wonder if America is really in step with the world's march of intellect. It seems monstrous that the well-wishing public benefactor—for such he is who nobly seeks to restore the best of the world's lost treasures in an almost artless land for the public and professional good and enjoyment—should be made by his ungrateful country to pay a most depressing penalty in the shape of custom-house duties for his excellent but unappreciated intentions. The very opportunities for getting good works fit to adorn the public galleries of the nation will soon pass by—or if they do come, will make the private or public purse gasp again in agony of disbursement.

Yours ever faithfully,

GEORGE H. BOUGHTON.

NEW YORK, April 14, 1892.

I am in hearty sympathy with you in every move toward free art and a truly national art association. We want no protection. To levy a tax on fine arts is to acknowledge to the world our inferiority. What we do want is a "national art association." I shall be proud to be a member of such an organization. Kindly have my name enrolled. I will do my best to attend the congress in Washington. Wishing you every success in this noble undertaking for the proper encouragement of American art and artists, believe me,

Very truly yours,

EDWARD MORAN.

NEW YORK, May 12, 1892.

I hope that we may be able to secure some good; in any case I feel that a formal protest against our Hottentot tax on art by an organized body of artists will be



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