

The Chicago Record Feb. 14, 1901

A year ago to-day Chicago lost one of her most gifted daughters and Western art was robbed of its choicest spirit. The death of Alice Kellogg Tyler was mourned by all who had ever known her, and by a multitude who knew her only through her works.

The writer was out of the city at the time of her death, and did not hear the sad news until some days later. He has always wished to add his tribute to what was written regarding Mrs. Tyler last February.

I heard of Alice Kellogg almost from the first day of my arrival in Chicago fifteen years ago. She was then the leader in local art, as she remained while her hand had strength to hold the brush. Supremacy was not a mere generous concession on the part of gallant brother painters, but a position which she had earned by the intrinsic value of her work. It was hers by divine right of genius, and her title was loyally defended by all members sincere and as hearty as it was reverent.

She lived in a serene upland far above the jealousies and bickerings with which we of the rival clubs were wont to beguile the tedium of life. While we picked each other's work to pieces and railed against fate and the unappreciative Chicago public she painted and thanked God for a world of beauty.

Some of my pupils in those days were also studying with her. I envied her the hold that she had on them. They were faithful and industrious with me; with her they were enthusiastic, inspired. She was their friend and companion. A sketching trip with Alice Kellogg was something more to be desired than party or theater. They counted on it for days ahead. They talked about it for days after. She seemed to hypnotize those young girls into seeing and doing. While they were with her they produced admirable work and did it themselves. Her hand was not in it, but her heart was. She made the children love her, and for the moment they saw everything through her eyes, and strove to the utmost of their powers to please her. It was no fault of hers that she was unable to supply them with persistency and energy for all time.

An incident told me by Mr. Carpenter of the Art Institute illustrates her sympathetic relations with her students. One of her colleagues in the early days of the school attracted his attention to her on a certain occasion as she was correcting the work of a not overbrilliant pupil. Unconsciously she had put her arm around the child, who nestled close, apparently drinking in the helpful, kindly criticism. "That's the secret of it," said the other, "if I felt that way I might be able to teach as well."

A little party of friends, including Alice Kellogg, wandered through the Art Palace one day of that wonderful summer of 1893. She was the soul of the group, an ideal companion in such a place- keenly appreciative, just in her estimates, sure of her own mind, but deferential to the opinion of others. Those were the most illuminating and profitable hours that I ever spent among pictures. There was only one drawback- our progress was constantly impeded by greetings. Everybody seemed to be a particular friend of hers, and no sooner had we rescued her from one group than, to our amused vexation, she would be surrounded by another admiring band. I believe I never knew any one so much beloved by so many different kinds of people.

Mrs. Tyler's works are scattered through out many homes; some of her best have been seen at Hull House, a spot very dear to her, and where she fairly radiated light and helpful cheer. It was in 1892, I think, that "The Mother", sent to the exhibition of the Society of American Artists in New York, though quite unheralded, met with instant appreciation. She was elected a member of the society upon the strength of the one work, an unusual honor. Indeed, no other resident Chicagoan has ever won this distinction; hers was the only Western name upon the list. This charming picture, as refined and tender in sentiment as it is true and masterful in execution, was illustrated in the January number of the Century of 1893. Some time later, when the then active Central Art Association was sending out paintings to the smaller cities of the West, I asked Mrs. Tyler if she would be willing to loan us this valuable canvas for the "grand tour." We could promise only gratitude- and wear and tear. We should not have been surprised if she had declined, but she promptly answered: "You are welcome to the picture, keep it as long as you want it."

Mrs. Tyler's art was distinctly up to the best sense of the term. She had an intelligent appreciation of what the scientists of the brush were doing at home and abroad, and she used effectively the most valuable of their discoveries. She could paint sunlight with the best of them- which is not strange, considering that she carried it with her. A close student of nature, her portraits were instinct with life and with the very character of her subjects, understood and sympathetically translated. They are not imitations of old masters; they are not painful topographical maps of faces and clothing, neither are they related to the flippant generalizations which the overclever painters of to-day are wont to offer us. Hers was a proud, high-minded humility in the presence of nature. She seemed to approach all subjects with a reverence which gave her strength. There was power in it. In her tender baby pictures she was inimitable. They are a perennial joy. Her color sense was exquisite, one of the most delightful memories that I cherish was of unselfish enthusiasm over some dainty color studies made by her husband. She vowed that they were finer in tone than anything that she had ever done. They gave her a pleasure akin to that of music. Her own work showed this intuitive delicacy united with a masculine strength of draughtsmanship and of technique. Enfeebled by long protracted illness, Mrs. Tyler produced little during the last years of her all-too-short life, yet a small sketch which she painted the very week of her death shows no failing; it is one of her best. Like the gentle Corot, she seemed to pass away, murmuring: "How beautiful it all is!".

She was greater than any of her works. To me she seemed almost an ideal artist- the soul of art personified. In her frank, zestful love of her work, of nature, of life, there was something rare and exalted. It was a breath of the divine, a glimpse of our normal estate, from which we have wandered far. I have a picture of her where she stands like some fair virgin of the annunciation, with sweet face uplifted toward the light. I never look at this picture without thinking of a flower opening its chalice to the dews of heaven and the glad sunshine, drinking in eagerly and naturally all that is pure and joyous, and smiling back its gratitude.

Her life was an inspiration.

Lorado Taft (Sculptor)