

THOMAS COLE

NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITE



Thomas Cole's Voice Narrative in the Sitting Room, Second Floor

TABLE IN MIDDLE OF ROOM

I have scarcely done anything — not finished a single picture. Indeed my mind has been occupied with so many cares + anxieties.¹ Last evening I took a walk + dark masses of cloud moved across the sky like the heralds of an approaching storm. I reflected that the south wind would still blow + bring up its gloomy clouds for ages and ages after I am gone.²

I have of late felt a presentiment that the Institutions of the United States will ere long undergo a change, that there will be a separation of the States. Every newspaper brings accounts of the laws violated. It appears to me that the moral principle of the nation is much lower than formerly. It is with sorrow that I anticipate the downfall of pure government. Its destruction will be a death blow to Freedom. If the Free government of the United States cannot exist a century where shall we turn? Scenes of tyranny + oppression such as have been acted since the world was created, will be again performed as long as man exists. May my fears be foolish, a few years will tell—³

DESK NEAR WINDOW

I long for the time when I can paint whatever my imagination would dictate without fear of running into pecuniary difficulties. But I am about to venture; I have determined to commence a series of pictures for which I have no commission.⁴ I have conceived a subject which I think is capable of having an influence on the community + affect it with a love for something in Art beyond the commonplace subjects of the day.⁵

Painting is capable of imparting knowledge, and awakening the soul to the refining influences of beauty and sublimity.⁶ But The American does not seem to have time for Art; he embarks on the great stream of business, in which there are few eddies and places of anchorage. Accustomed to all things in haste his habits are averse to quiet and study and contemplation. Let us endeavor then to make a stand against this headlong Utilitarianism which prevails. Let us try to convince our fellow Citizens that the pursuit of the beautiful is as essential to our well-being as that of Gain. Without Art Man would scarce be human.⁷

SOURCES:

¹ Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry April 17, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.

² Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry May 31, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.

³ Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry August 21, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.

⁴ Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry January 1, 1846, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.

⁵ Thomas Cole to Jonathan Sturges, June 11, 1845, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Letters by Thomas Cole, Box 1, Folder 5.

⁶ Thomas Cole, "A Letter to Critics on the Art of Painting" in *The Knickerbocker* 16 (September 1840): 230-233.

⁷ Thomas Cole, *Lecture [on Art]*, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Essays, Box 5, Folder 2.