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ISSUED QUARTERLY BY THE ESSEX INSTITUTE  
Salem, Massachusetts

...of Mrs. Mary B. Mellon. Following are the major ... of Sterling, Massachusetts, her parents, ... and Sally Blood. She was taught to use watercolors in ... at a boarding school conducted by Miss Thayer. She attended afterward the Fryville Seminary in Bolton, Massachusetts. This lady married the Reverend C. W. Mellon. She was instructed by the late Fitz-Henry (an error, for he was Fitz Hugh) Lane of Gloucester, Mass.; and as he was unquestionably one of the best marine painters in the country, it is no wonder the pupil received a high level of praise for her original and copies. Her copy of Lane's "On The Lee Shore" has elicited warm encomiums of the press. Mrs. Mellon is so faithful in the copies of her master, that even an expert might take them for originals. Indeed, an anecdote is related of her, which will exemplify her power in this direction. She had just completed a copy of one of Mr. Lane's pictures when he called at her residence to see it. The copy and the original were brought down from the studio together, and the master, much to the amusement of those present, was unable to tell which was his own, and which was the pupil's.

I have been greatly interested in Lane's work, owned some of it myself, helped gather the Cape Ann Historical Association's collection of it, and watched the increasing importance ascribed to his art, and the rise in prices paid for it. While he lived, he was known mainly as a marine painter, which he was, though landscapes now bulk large in the total of his work. His knowledge of ships, boats, craft of every kind was remarkable—sails, rigging, spars, the minutest details and his rendering of these details photographically true. Did Mrs. Mellon copy Lane's ships and boats as accurately as she did the shores and seas in the fine paintings named "After Lane by M. B. Mellon"? Only finding more examples of her work will settle this important question. That there must be some of it somewhere would seem almost certain. But where?

Alfred Mansfield Brooks  
Gloucester, Mass.  
September 2, 1959

detailed account of Mrs. Mary B. Mellen. Following are the major points of interest: "born in Sterling, Massachusetts; her parents, Reuben and Sally Blood. She was taught to use watercolors in her native place, at a boarding school conducted by Miss Thayer. She attended afterward the Fryville Seminary in Bolton, Massachusetts. This lady married the Reverend C. W. Mellen. She was instructed by the late Fitz-Henry (an error, for he was Fitz Hugh) Lane of Gloucester, Mass.; and as he was unquestionably one of the best marine painters in the country, it is no wonder the pupil received a large meed of praise for her originals and copies. Her copy of Lane's "On The Lee Shore" has elicited warm encomiums of the press. Mrs. Mellen is so faithful in the copies of her master, that even an expert might take them for originals. Indeed, an anecdote is related of her, which will exemplify her power in this direction. She had just completed a copy of one of Mr. Lane's pictures when he called at her residence to see it. The copy and the original were brought down from the studio together, and the master, much to the amusement of those present, was unable to tell which was his own, and which was the pupil's."

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## FITZ HUGH LANE RE-CONSIDERED

By FREDERIC A. SHARF

MR. BROOKS' SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERY will undoubtedly heighten the interest in Lane's art, and stimulate the re-assessment of Lane which has been going on over the past two decades. Beginning with the Metropolitan Art Museum's large exhibit in 1939, "Life In America,"—put on as a Worlds Fair attraction—Lane's paintings have come to assume an ever greater place in the mainstream of American art. The Lane canvas included in the Metropolitan's show was valued primarily in connection with the exhibit's aim of showing "life as it has been lived in our country," though a review of the exhibit did acknowledge Lane's particular artistic importance, "his classic serenity and dignity."<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, the scholarly interest of Mr. John I. H. Baur in the 1940's was instrumental in rediscovering Lane. In 1947, Baur wrote that Americans were "only beginning to comprehend the extent of his [Lane's] talent," and went on to say that biographical material had been recently collected which enabled the scholar to "see at least the outline of the artist's career."<sup>2</sup> Baur placed Lane, along with Martin J. Heade, at the head of a small group of mid-nineteenth-century landscape painters who first experimented with effects of light and atmosphere. It was Baur who brought Lane to the attention of Maxim Karolik, and it was Karolik's collection, catalogued in 1949, and first exhibited in Boston in October, 1951, which firmly established Lane's position as "the peer of the best native landscape painters from Thomas Cole to George Inness."<sup>3</sup> For the first time, a selected group of choice Lane paintings was included in a major collection.

The Winter, 1952, issue of *The Art Quarterly* carried the first full-scale biographical treatment of Lane, based on a careful study of local Gloucester sources, as well as of the available Lane paintings. The known facts of Lane's obscure life were set together in sequence: the early attack of infantile paralysis that left him

1. Forbes Watson, "My Country 'Tis of Thee," *Magazine of Art* XXXII (June 1939), 334.

2. John I. H. Baur, "Unknown 19th Century American Painters," *College Arts Journal*, IV (June 1947), 277-282.

3. James T. Soby, "Introduction," *American Painting, 1815-1865*, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1956.

a cripple; his apprenticeship to Pendleton's lithography firm in Boston during the 1830's; the formation of his own lithography firm with John W. A. Scott in the 1840's; his return to Gloucester by 1849, and the various trips he made from Gloucester to the coast of Maine in the 1850's. By May, 1954, when the special exhibition of Lane and Heade opened in New York at Knoedlers, Lane was no longer an unknown, and attention could be concentrated on the finer points of Lane's art: the mood of his paintings, his skill in handling meticulous detail, his sensitivity to light and atmosphere.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Brooks' discovery has brought us back to the need for probing the obscurity which has always surrounded Lane's life. Old assumptions often conflict with one another. Was Lane in Gloucester during the 1840's, as local Gloucester legend would have it, or was Lane living in Boston until 1849? Beginning in 1841, the *Boston Business Directory*<sup>5</sup> listed Lane at various addresses, prime evidence for the latter assumption. In 1841, 1842, and 1843, he was listed as having his residence at 7 Summer Street; from 1844 to 1849, his only listing was at Tremont Temple. Certain fresh evidence points more conclusively to his close participation in the Boston art world during these years.

In 1841, Lane was a charter member of a unique organization, the Boston Artists Association.<sup>6</sup> Under the leadership of the well-known portrait painter, Chester Harding, the Boston artists revolted against the artistic domination of the aristocratic Boston Athenaeum. They needed an organization which would better provide for their needs.<sup>7</sup> Primarily, they wanted an exhibition in Boston for their own works, one not so conservative as that which the Athenaeum annually sponsored. In 1841, Lane had had his first canvas hung at an Athenaeum exhibit. At the first exhibit

4. John I. H. Baur, "Introduction," *Martin J. Heade and Fitz Hugh Lane Commemorative Exhibition Catalogue*, M. Knoedler & Co. (New York, 1954).

5. cf. *Boston Business Directory*, 1841-1849.

6. cf. *Constitution of the Boston Artists Association* (Boston Athenaeum).

7. *Ibid.* "The artists of Boston, deeply impressed with the importance of their profession, and with the necessity of a systematic course of study for its successful cultivation; also with the advantages to be derived from mutual cooperation and support; resolve to form themselves into an Association for the furtherance of these objects."

of the Association in 1842, Lane was represented by three paintings. In 1843, Lane exhibited one, and in 1844, he exhibited five paintings. During these years, Lane's work, like that of other Boston painters, was absent from the Athenaeum Exhibition.

The 1844 exhibit was the last held independently by the Boston Artists Association. In that year, the Athenaeum accepted the artists' suggestion that they take over the management of the Athenaeum Exhibition and divide the proceeds with the Athenaeum. Evidently, the Athenaeum feared the loss of its long leadership in the Boston art world, while the Association probably found running its own show too expensive. In 1845, Lane once again exhibited at the Athenaeum Exhibition, as he was to do frequently for the rest of his life. His participation in the Association was indicative of his close bonds with Boston artistic life.

Further indications point to Lane's ready response to artistic opportunities in Boston. On May 6, 1841, the Boston newspapers announced that the Royal Mail Steamship *Britannia* had arrived twelve days late, because of an unprecedented storm.<sup>8</sup> By August 28, a large painting of the *Britannia*, tossed by the storm, was on view in the window of a Boston music store. It had been done by Lane on commission from the ship's captain.<sup>9</sup> A similar sequence occurred in 1846: in February a new captain was appointed to command the United States revenue steamer *McLane*;<sup>10</sup> on April 6 the vessel sailed from Boston,<sup>11</sup> and on June 9th Lane's "View of a Steam Vessel (The Cutter *McLane*)" was exhibited at the opening of the annual Athenaeum Exhibition. The painting was owned by the ship's captain, who had allowed Lane to exhibit it at the Athenaeum. The brief time spans involved show that Lane was in Boston when the opportunities arose. He must have been well known in the field of ship portraiture, and undoubtedly derived much of his living from such paintings.

During those years Lane continued his interest in lithography, and formed a partnership with Scott. The *Boston Business Directory* does not list their firm until 1846, but certainly it was in business by 1845, when Lane and Scott issued their fine print of Bowdoin College. Their business address was Tremont Temple

8. *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 6, 1841.

9. *Ibid.*, August 28, 1841.

10. *Ibid.*, February 26, 1846.

11. *Ibid.*, April 6, 1846.

a common spot for artists' studios. Scott was listed at the Tremont Temple address in 1844, while his residence was listed at a different address. In 1844, Lane abandoned his Summer Street residence, and was listed only at a Tremont Temple address. It is reasonable to conclude that 1844 marked the formation of Lane's partnership with Scott. Since Lane's only Boston address was listed as Tremont Temple, undoubtedly the studio and business headquarters he shared with Scott, it is possible that Lane might have commenced living part of the year in Gloucester, maintaining temporary quarters at a Boston rooming house, for he was never again listed as having a Boston residence.

That Lane, a cripple, might have divided his time between Boston and Gloucester would at first seem improbable. Yet, in the summer or fall of 1840, he apparently returned to Gloucester, for he is known to have painted a large political banner for the Whig campaign of that year.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in 1848, he exhibited a painting at the Athenaeum entitled "View of Little Good Harbor Beach, Cape Ann," indicating that at some previous time he had been back in Gloucester, though he was still listed at Tremont Temple. Thus, while Lane unquestionably maintained close artistic ties with Boston, where he had financial roots, it would seem that during the 1840's he began to spend more and more time in Gloucester, the source of his artistic inspiration. It was not strange that he returned there permanently in 1849, where his art blossomed forth into full flower.

Lane seems to have participated fully in Gloucester life. He was in charge of floral decorations for the annual July 4th parade in 1849, and painted numerous banners to further brighten the parade. His efforts were rewarded by the privilege of riding in the parade marshal's carriage.<sup>13</sup> Some time during the following months, Lane built the stone house on Duncan Point in which he resided for the rest of his life.<sup>14</sup> Here he interested himself in gardening, and evidently became well known for the quality of fruit he grew; when Boston newspapers bragged about a Brighton

12. James R. Pringle, *History of the Town and City of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Massachusetts* (Gloucester, 1892), pp. 108-110.

13. Gene E. McCormick, "Fitz Hugh Lane, Gloucester Artist, 1804-1865," *The Art Quarterly*, XV (Winter, 1952), 291-306.

14. Alfred Mansfield Brooks, "The Fitz Lane House in Gloucester," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, LXXVIII (July 1942), pp. 281-283.

gentleman who had taken 162 strawberries from a single plant, the Gloucester *Telegraph* was quick to reply that "Mr. Fitz H. Lane of this town has plants in his garden on some of which over 200 berries have been counted. He counted 207 on one plant."<sup>15</sup>

Lane served on the Board of Directors of the Gloucester Lyceum during a crucial period in its history. Interest in the Lyceum movement had begun to wane, and funds to continue its support were scarce.<sup>16</sup> Lane was active in fairs sponsored to raise money for the Lyceum: in 1858, he was publicly thanked for his efforts in cooperation was John Trask, a local ship's painter, in painting tableaux for a fair that had been held in February.<sup>17</sup> Lane and Trask were apparently friendly, for in 1857 Lane had painted a handsome canvas to serve as a sign for Trask's store; the scene represented Railway Wharf, where Trask dealt in paints and oils.<sup>18</sup> Apparently Lane saw no inconsistency between his role as an artist and his role as artisan. He frequently permitted his artistic talents to serve commercial ends, even to the extent of cooperating on an equal basis with a pure artisan such as Trask: this, at a period when his art was reaching for more subtle effects of light and atmosphere.

Lane's paintings were very much in evidence in Gloucester, where he frequently exhibited at the reading room of the Marine Insurance Company and in the reading room of the Gloucester Bank. Some of the works so exhibited were for sale, while others were exhibited there prior to being sent elsewhere. The Gloucester *Telegraph* kept the local citizens informed of Lane's latest work, never quite concealing in its articles a combined excitement and amazement that such works could be produced under their very noses.<sup>19</sup>

Gloucestermen's appreciation of Lane's art touched various levels. His accurate handling of ships impressed them,<sup>20</sup> and their own keen eye for weather, so important a factor in their daily lives and fortunes, made them particularly conscious of

15. Gloucester *Telegraph & News*, July 1, 1857.

16. *Ibid.*, December 13, 1856, also December 4, 1861.

17. *Ibid.*, February 24, 1858, March 3, 1858.

18. *Ibid.*, July 22, 1857.

19. *Ibid.*, April 25, 1856.

20. *Ibid.*, September 16, 1857. A correspondent described a Lane painting of New York Harbor: "All sorts of vessels were represented in the foreground, with every particular rope in its proper place."

Lane's ability to capture the mood of a becalmed sea or a stormy ocean, a bright or a hazy day.<sup>21</sup> Primarily, however, Lane's art was valued for its historical importance, for the way in which it captured the look and feel of Gloucester at a particular moment, a moment that would pass, taking with it the old landmarks, the old types of ships; only Lane's paintings would be left to remind posterity of what Gloucester had been in former days.

Like so many New England towns, Gloucester had a certain native pride, and enjoyed seeing frequent topographical views, in which landmarks and indigenous scenery were carefully delineated. Lane had always been aware of this vanity, and catered to it on several occasions by producing large lithographic views of the town which were sold by subscription. Of his third effort, in 1859, the Gloucester *Telegraph* commented, "Of course all modern improvements visible . . . . are represented with the artists' usual accuracy of drawing,"<sup>22</sup> summing up the principal satisfaction which Gloucester derived from the lithograph.<sup>23</sup>

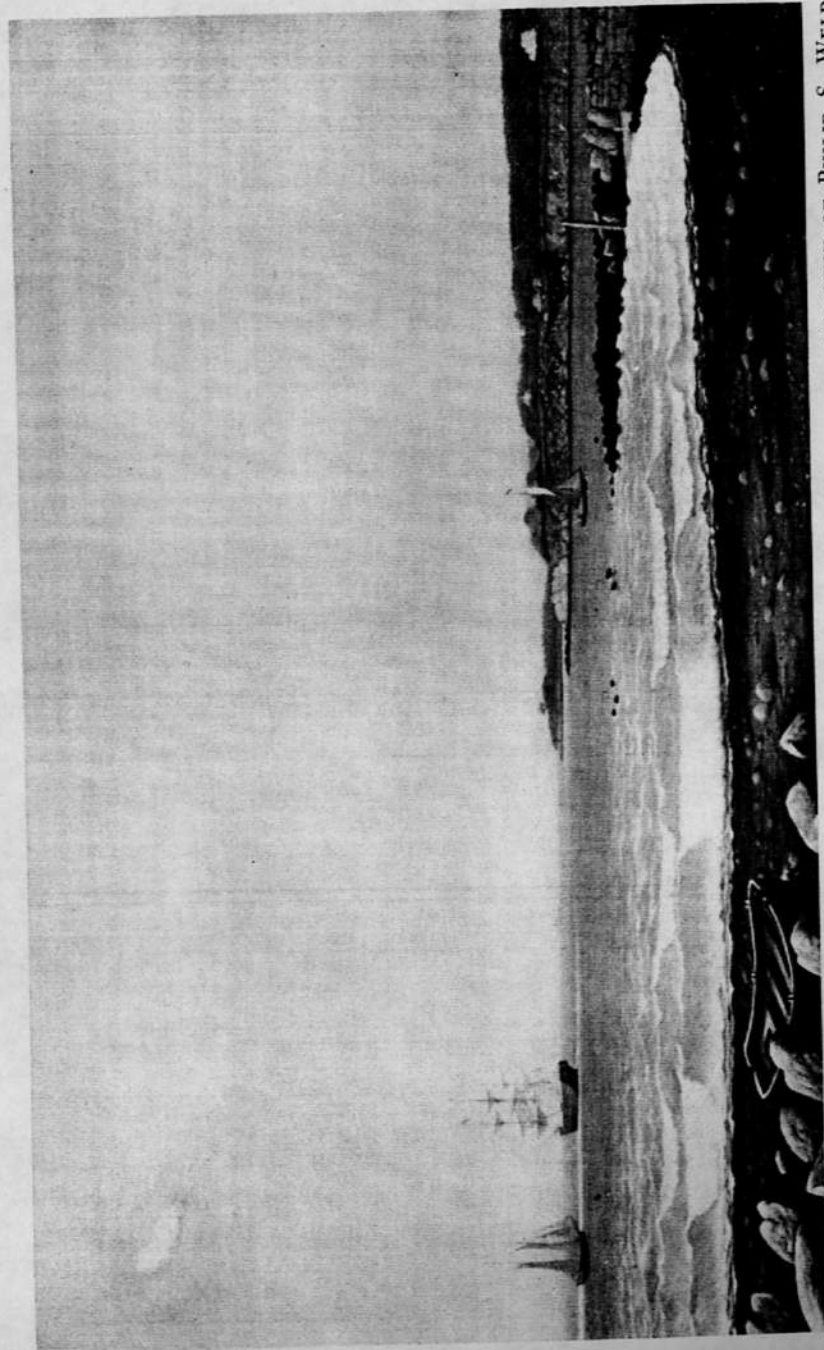
Of all the scenic and historic aspects of the Gloucester shore, the Old Fort, overlooking the harbor, was most dear to Gloucester hearts. Formerly, it had protected the harbor, but a fire had made ruins of the garrison house, and modern buildings had further defiled the original site. In June, 1860, a large canvas by Lane, showing the Old Fort before "the changes of late years," was hung in the reading room of the Gloucester Bank. The Gloucester *Telegraph* hailed Lane, "our distinguished artist and fellow citizen," for having recorded the scene "with a distinctiveness and completeness which brings former times at once to the memory. . . ."<sup>24</sup> "This picture is chiefly of interest," said the *Telegraph* correspondent, "on account of its preserving so accurately the features of a view so familiar to many of our citizens and which can never exist

21. *Ibid.*, April 25, 1856. A correspondent described a view of Boston Harbor by Lane: "The picture represent a beautiful calm day, with many fine craft all ready for sea, with their graceful shadows reflected so life-like in the waters. . . ."

22. *Ibid.*, February 9, 1859.

23. Interestingly enough, Lane used this lithograph as a means to dispose of other paintings. Five original Lane paintings were given free to the lucky holder of lots which were drawn in September, 1859. Four paintings went to Gloucester residents, while the fifth went to a Bostonian. cf. Gloucester *Telegraph and News*, September 21, 1859.

24. *Ibid.*, April 7, 1860, July 18, 1860.



COURTESY OF PHILIP S. WELD

"PAINTED BY M. B. MELLEEN AFTER F. H. LANE, 1870"

in reality."<sup>25</sup> It was hoped that the picture would be purchased by some Gloucester group, so that it would not be allowed to leave town. Lane was conscious of Gloucester's interest in the canvas—such a consciousness had undoubtedly had motivated him to record the scene—for the painting remained in the reading room of the Bank, and in Lane's will, he left the painting to "the inhabitants of Gloucester."<sup>26</sup> In a sense, this painting summarized both aspects of Lane's life in Gloucester during the 1850's: on the one hand, his interest in town affairs, and his readiness to participate in community causes; on the other, his continued interest in pursuing his own artistic ends.<sup>27</sup>

From an artistic point of view, Lane's Gloucester period must surely have been a lonely one. His Boston years had been characterized by the close comradeship which existed among Boston artists, evidenced in their formation of the Boston Artists Association and in accounts of Boston art life during this period.<sup>28</sup> It would not have been strange for Lane, when he returned to Gloucester, to have sought out pupils, or to have become friendly with artistically-inclined people. Indeed, we know that he offered to instruct Harriet Mason, daughter of the Gloucester trader Sidney Mason, in drawing,<sup>29</sup> and Mr. Brooks' discovery points to Lane having had at least one definite pupil, Mrs. Mary B. Mellen. Together, these facts indicate Lane's desire to share his artistic knowledge, perhaps for monetary reasons, more probably for sociability.

It is difficult to find much information about Mrs. Mellen. Her husband, Reverend Charles W. Mellen, was a well-liked, but apparently not too important figure in the Universalist Church. Born in 1818, he held several parishes for brief intervals during the 1840's; he dropped out of sight in the 1850's, and he reappeared in Dorchester and Taunton, Massachusetts, from 1860 until his

25. *Ibid.*, June 30, 1860.

26. *Essex County Probate Records*, Volume 424, Leaves 34 & 35.

27. It is interesting to note that Lane's role as town historian was seriously jeopardized in 1860, with the arrival of several photographers in Gloucester, who specialized in photographing scenic and historic sites. For a small sum, anyone might obtain accurate views of the very subjects Lane painted. cf. *Gloucester Telegraph and News*, August 15, 1860, September 22, 1860, April 6, 1861.

28. cf. Thomas Ball, *My Threescore Years and Ten* (Boston, 1892); E. D. Cheney, *Memoire of Seth Cheney* (Boston, 1881); T. H. Bartlett, *The Art Life of William Rimmer* (Boston, 1890).

29. Gene E. McCormick, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

death in 1866.<sup>30</sup> He could have been in Gloucester only during the decade of the 1850's, but the sole evidence of this is a copy of J. G. Adams *Fifty Notable Years*, now in the archives of the Universalist Convention in Boston: beside the brief biographical sketch of Charles W. Mellen, somebody has pencilled "Gloucester" in the margin, apparently to indicate that he served there, though it is not mentioned in the text.<sup>31</sup>

Lane's will provides the only other lead on Mrs. Mellen: here he bequeathed a "beautiful wreath of wax flowers (wrought by Mrs. Mary B. Mellen) to Mrs. Caroline Stevens," wife of his chief executor, Joseph L. Stevens, Junior. Such wax pieces were among the many familiar outlets for feminine creativity in this period. A whole tradition of feminine artisanship developed, ranging from homely water colors to fancy embroidered pieces, from charming theorem paintings to crude oil paintings. This was as much of art as many nineteenth-century American women ever knew, but a few who were either more talented or more persevering might attain the exalted plateau of a copyist—the highest respectable role which a woman might have in the arts until the last quarter of the century. Nathaniel Hawthorne immortalized this role, which his wife Sophia had also achieved, in the figure of Hilda in *The Marble Faun*. The task of the devoted copyist, wrote Hawthorne, was as high and as difficult as that of the original artist, for it involved a complete immersion in the spirit of the original, a recognition of "the highest excellence in art," and a willingness to sacrifice one's personal aspirations to this excellence.<sup>32</sup>

Mrs. Mellen, apparently, was a part of this tradition. As a girl she had an aptitude for sketching, which she continued to cultivate at the seminary she attended near her home.<sup>33</sup> Such seminaries were a familiar breeding ground for all the popular art forms in which it was fashionable for a woman to indulge. Mrs.

30. *Universalist Historical Records Survey*, Boston, 1942.

31. There were three Universalist Churches in Gloucester during this period. The Independent Christian Church was served by William Roland Grenville Mellen from 1855 to 1861. The West Gloucester Church was without a church building during the 1850's and met at irregular intervals. The Annisquam Church has no record of Mellen serving them. The mystery remains—where did Charles W. Mellen serve?

32. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (Boston, 1890), I, 79-80.

33. Phebe A. Hanaford, *Daughters of America or Women of the Century* (Augusta, Maine, 1882).

Mellen seems to have run the gamut of such forms, culminating in her ability to copy her master, Fitz Hugh Lane. Within the framework of her period, the copies of Lane discovered by Mr. Brooks may be explained, but certainly all sorts of questions, not only about Mrs. Mellen, but, more important, about Lane himself, present themselves for the consideration of anyone interested in American painting. Though Lane has achieved his deserved place in the history of our art, there is still much to be learned of his personal life, much that will undoubtedly illuminate the paintings which are so admired.