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Archives of American Art

Celebrating 175: Eastman Johnson, Letter to Charlotte [Child], March 25, 1851

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there and indulge their propensity of coming together, for they do not, like us, seek their walks in retired places and where fewest are to be met, but where they can see the greatest numbers - The Germans are essentially gregarious, with none of the cold shyness of one another that with out people almost forbids the exchange of necessary civility till doubts and suspicions are removed by the ceremony of a formal introduction - When they find themselves together their only natural impulse is to talk together, and to make themselves quite as comfortable and happy as the circumstances will admit whether they have never seen one another before in their whole lives or not. The men all belong to clubs and a great many to half a dozen. Their word Gesellschaft designates Germans as essentially a robeef does Englishmen - Everyone of any standing has his Gesellschaft where he can chat away his evening over his wine or beer and pipe, and the lower orders their beer-houses - I limit myself to two one of which is the painters Club, and the smartest in town - The other, of quite an opposite character composed chiefly of the King's best friends and a great number of his military servants, and Lovers of their country as it is, where republicanism cant be mentioned above a whisper.

I belong to this because they have the only two good billiard tables in town and take an English newspaper - My acquaintance with Society generally is very slight, I divide my leisure time between the clubs, fumbling in German dictionaries, dominoes, riding horseback Galignani's Messenger, and a few other promiscuous exercises, rather hard pushed for amusement any how - They have an opera here but I go seldom - The women are not handsome - Pretty girls are rare and I've not been in Love once for the year and a half - Up to the present time I've not felt a pang since I left America, and you may think this evidence of a great poverty of charms in the fair sex of Düsseldorf.

I've had to be sure no fair sitters to spend my hours with when they were trying to look lovely - I am painting away with men companions and very diligently, trying to get the hang of it, which I find I assure you no easy matter - I sent a couple of things to the Art Union sometime ago, and shall presently send them something more, an Italian girl, and a monk - very bad - I do nothing in my old way of crayons.

I am delighted you find the portrait of your Mother so satisfactory, and assure you am doubly paid for my pains in the pleasure it gives you - I desire to be remembered in the kindest manner with best wishes for her health and happiness - Since the first of January I've been with Leutze - our studio is a large hall where six of us paint with Convenience, and three on large pictures. The chief, is Leutze's of "Washington crossing the Delaware" 20 feet by 16, figures size of Life - It is already perhaps two thirds finished, and I am making a copy on a reduced scale from which an engraving is to be made - It is sold to the owners of the International A. Union of N. York, and will be exhibited thro. the States in the fall - With six in a room, a cask of the best "Laurish Beer" always behind the great canvass and a disposition to be jolly you may be sure it does not want for animation - Leutze is an energetic and talkative fellow, generous and full of spirits - He is (paper damaged) artists, and in an atelier a vast deal of company, as he paints, talks, sings and (indecipherable) altogether.

To give a more decided tone to the place three cannons wre recently brot. and a battery constructed with the stars and stripes waiting on one side and the black and white of Prussia on the other - Nothing could exceed the enjoyment produced.

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