

STATUE MAKING.

Some great sculptors, Michael Angelo among them, have occasionally, themselves, hewn their statues straight out of the block of marble, without going through the preliminary courses of modeling in clay, and casting in plaster; but this is very rarely done, for in the first place the work would be too long for any artist who has any regard for his time, and in the second, the hewing of the marble demands a special practical experience, which makes it an art apart. A sculptor would probably spoil a hundred blocks of marble before making so much as a statuette a foot high, were he to trust himself only in the matter. Even Michael Angelo, when he tried to dispense with the "statuary," or "practitioner," succeeded only in making fragments of figures. Not being an adept in judging of the size of the block he needed, he was constantly finding that he had miscalculated, and that an arm, a leg or a head must remain unfinished in consequence.

The "statuary," who is often an artist of great merit, and possessed of as much talent in his way as the sculptor in his, sets the plaster model on a platform, measures it, and places it side by side with a block of marble of the requisite height and breadth. This done, he applies to the model an instrument of mathematical precision, by which he obtains the detailed measures of every part and angle of the statue. He then returns to the marble, and roughly sketches on the outside of it, by means of points, a sort of outline of the figure or group. Upon each of the spots where he has set a point with his pencil, a workman bores a hole with an awl, taking great care, however, not to bore a fraction of an inch deeper than he is told. When the statuary has inspected all the sides of the block, and when the holes have been bored according to his directions, the marble looks as though it had been riddled with bullets. A second workman now appears, with a chisel and hammer to hew away the fragments of marble between the different holes, and along the pencil lines drawn as guide marks. This work is more or less easy, according as the attitude of the statue is simple or fanciful. If the figure be one of a modern personage standing placidly with his arms by his sides, attired in the clothes of our days, and with nothing eccentric in the posture of his legs, the task offers no difficulties, and may be intrusted to a very ordinary workman; but if the subject be a group or a figure in an attitude—for instance, like that of Ajax defying the lightning—the chisel cannot be intrusted to any but a practiced hand, and every blow of the hammer must be struck with the greatest caution.

The appearance presented by the marble when the preparatory hewing has ended is that of some person or persons thickly wrapped up in a shroud. The outlines of head and body can be vaguely detected under the white covering, but nothing more; and it is not until the statuary himself has set to work with his finer chisel and more delicate hand, that a tangible form begins to emerge from the hard mass. First the head, then the shoulders and trunk, then the legs, and then the arms and hands appear. The arms and hands, if outstretched, are reserved to the last; if detached first from the block, the oscillations caused by the chisel in hewing the other parts of the marble might shake and crack them. This is a very necessary precaution, and it is even usual to keep the arms, the fingers and other projecting parts of marble statues continually supported by props of wood, until the moment when the work is set upon its pedestal and uncovered.

When the statue is handed over again to the sculptor, that he may give the final touches to it, there sometimes remains scarcely anything to do. This is the case when the "statuary" is himself a first rate artist, and can trust himself to a nicety, the slightest details of form and expression in the plaster model. But such examples are rare; less because of the incapacity of statuary, than by reason of the natural desire which every artist has, to terminate in person the work he has conceived and begun. The statue is usually returned to the sculptor in a half-finished state, the fine touches which will constitute the special beauty of the work yet remaining to be done. The most delicate of tools are then employed; slender chisels with the finest points; toy hammers, with scarcely a weight to them, little graters that fit on, something like thumbnails, to the top of the forefinger. And to polish the marble and smooth it, tripoli, lead, chamols leather, sand paper, sponges steeped in oil, and the palm of the hand are used. When the statue represents a naked figure, the amount of care needed for the correct modelling of the limbs and muscles is inconceivable. Works like the "Laocoon," the "Dying Gladiator," the "Venus of Medici," the "Apollo Belvedere," must have cost the makers more trouble and anxiety than any sum of money could repay. And it is common generosity on the part of the critic, even when he pauses before what he considers a faulty statue, to be very lenient in his judgment of it.

THE LOVE OF CHILDREN.—I am fond of children. I think them the poetry of the world, the fresh flowers of our hearts and homes; little conjurers, with their "natural magic," evoking by their spells what delights and sorrows rankle, and equates the different classes of society. Often as they bring with them anxieties and care, and live to occasion sorrow and grief, we should get on very badly without them. Only think, if there was never anything anywhere to be seen but great grown-up men and women, how we should long for the sight of a little child! Every infant comes into the world like a delegated prophet, the harbinger and herald of good tidings, whose office it is to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and to draw "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." A child softens and purifies the heart, and warming and melting it by its gentle presence, it enriches the soul by new feelings, and awakens within it what is favorable to virtue. It is a beam of life, a fountain of love, a teacher whose lessons few can resist. Infants recall us from much that engenders and encourages selfishness, that freezes the affections, roughens the manners, indurates the heart; they brighten the home, deepen love,

invigorate exertion, infuse courage, vivify and sustain the charities of life. It would be a terrible world I do think, if it was not embellished by little children.—Binney.

[What kind of a world would it be if all its inhabitants were children and there were no grown-up men and women?]

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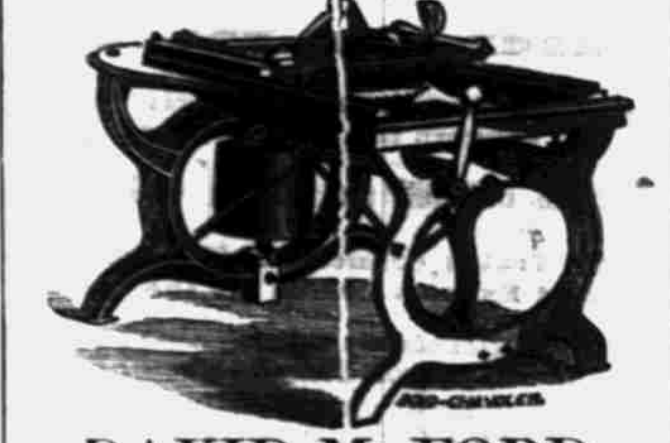
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