

A ROMANCE OF AMERICAN ART.

Continued from last month.

Success smiled upon him, and in two years he was able to marry Elizabeth Shewell, to whom he had plighted his troth before leaving America. One of the most romantic of the stories told about West is concerned with his courtship. Whether it has little or any foundation in fact is disputed, its authenticity is extremely doubtful, but it is worth relating here, partly for the reason that a portrait of Benjamin West and also a portrait of his wife both hang in the permanent galleries of the Academy of the Fine Arts, and because Matthew Pratt, the man who accompanied the father of Benjamin West and West's future wife to London in 1764, and took part in West's wedding, was the man who painted the portraits.

If we are to believe the story, Benjamin West and Elizabeth Shewell were deeply attached to each other, but the young woman's relatives were strenuously opposed to her marriage with the young artist. They locked her in her room until he had sailed away. Five years she waited. When West was finally established in London as a successful artist he sent for his betrothed, but her relatives, learning of her proposed departure for England, again locked her in her room, from which she was rescued at night by means of a rope ladder, through the assistance of a triumvirate no less distinguished than Benjamin Franklin, William White, afterwards first Bishop of Pennsylvania, and Francis Hopkinson; was hurried into a carriage, driven to the wharf, where the ship was ready to sail.

If West's history prior to his arrival in England is remarkable, still more so is his history after his arrival. His career in England covers fifty-seven years, during which he won the favor of the king and commanded it for thirty-five years, succeeded Sir Joshua

Reynolds as president of the Royal Academy, holding the office nearly twenty years; painting hundreds of historical and religious pictures and portraits and earning enormous sums thereby.

His picture of "Agrippina Landing With the Ashes of Germanicus" first gained him the favorable notice of the king, but it was his "Death of Wolfe" that created the great sensation when exhibited at the Royal Academy. The public, we are told, "acknowledged its excellence at once; but the lovers of old art—called classical—complained of the barbarism of boots, buttons and blunderbusses, and cried out for naked warriors, with bows, buckles and battering rams." Reynolds and the Archbishop of York called on West to remonstrate against so bold an innovation; whereupon West replied that "the event to be commemorated happened in the year 1758, in a region of the world unknown to Greeks and Romans, and at a period when no warrior who wore classic costume existed. The same rule which gives law to the historian should rule the painter."

"West has conquered," Reynolds admitted. "I foresee that this picture will not only become one of the most popular, but will occasion a revolution in art."

The patronage of the king necessarily brought West riches and power; and one of the most pleasing features which presents itself from the evidence of the encouragement he gave young painters who came from America to study. West's presence and position in London naturally drew to England numerous of his countrymen, who strove under his tutelage to perfect themselves in technique, and to enjoy the advantages of larger intellectual resources. Among those who studied with West were Gilbert Stuart, the acknowledged master of portrait painting in America of the past; Washington Allston, whose "Dead Man Re-