In 1950 the Museum received as a gift from the late Courtlandt Palmer a large and handsome portrait of a young girl. This interesting old family portrait was painted about 1829, and the subject is Miss Amelia Palmer, a daughter of Mr. Courtlandt Palmer's great-uncle, Amos Palmer. It had been, at some time in the recent past before it came to the Museum, attributed to the British-American painter John T. Peele (1822-1897). However, on examining the picture more carefully on its arrival here it soon became clear that it was the work of a much better artist than Peele, and it now turns out that Peele was only eight years old—an infant British immigrant residing in Buffalo at the time this painting was first exhibited in New York.

The portrait of Amelia Palmer can without hesitation be called the work of Charles Cromwell Ingham, even though it is unsigned and undated, and a comparison of this with other paintings by Ingham reveals it as completely characteristic of his work painted in his best style at the time when he was enjoying his greatest popularity as the most fashionable portrait painter of ladies in Manhattan. A brief foray into the records of paintings exhibited in New York in the early nineteenth century soon brought to light a painting by Ingham exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1830 (and again in 1831) with the title "Full Length Portrait of a Little Girl with Flowers," and an Ingham painting with the same title was lent for exhibition in 1838 by Mr. A. Palmer to the Dunlap Benefit Exhibition in the Stuyvesant Institute.

The gift of this painting and its identification as a work by Charles Cromwell Ingham draws our attention to the three other portraits by Ingham owned by the Museum and affords an opportunity to consider them all anew. It brings the artist himself to our attention after a very long period of neglect.

Ingham came to New York in 1816 from Dublin, Ireland, a promising young painter, and he remained here in Manhattan for the rest of his life. Within a few years after his arrival he had established himself as one of the leading figures in the artistic and social life of the town.

Ingham’s successful business as a portrait painter, as well as his agreeable social manner, won him a position of importance in the little art world of New York. At first he was a stockholder and Academician in the American Academy of Fine Arts. Later he became a founding member of the National Academy of Design. For many years he was an active member of the Academy’s council, and from 1845 to 1850 he served as its vice-president, and again in 1860 he served in the same capacity. When the National Academy purchased Browere’s Stables on Broadway in 1849 and remodeled them into a commodious picture gallery, Ingham was chairman of the building committee; he was one of the principal designers of the entrance stair-
way. Cummings’ Annals of the National Academy records that “the stairway (for easy access to the gallery) was a feature; in fact it had been Mr. Ingham’s hobby, and was ever known as Ingham’s Stairs. It was a very beautifully designed piece of work. The rooms were the handsomest the Academy ever had—lighted by three hundred gas burners—the finest art gallery in the country.”

Ingham’s life in New York, however, was not merely a succession of portrait commissions and concern with the running of the National Academy. Although he is said to have worked in his studio daily as long as the sunlight lasted, he soon earned himself a prominent place in the social life of the town. Dunlap, who spent many a happy hour gossiping with Ingham, describes him as he was in 1834: “With great frankness of manner, and some of the peculiarities of his country, Mr. Ingham is a most pleasant companion, and his virtues render him an inestimable friend. He is among that large class of our present artists who are looked up to, and sought for, in the most enlightened society.”

To be sought for and looked up to by the most enlightened society in New York in 1834 meant that Ingham was a member of the Sketch Club. In point of fact we have it on the reliable authority of Cummings that Ingham not only originated the idea for the Sketch Club but was also its first president. This club, first organized in 1829, was an exclusive little group of the leading artists, writers, legal wits, and good fellows, whatever their calling. When it was expanded and reorganized in 1847 into the famous Century Club, Ingham was naturally among the founding members of this latter organization. Both of these clubs were of the utmost importance to artists, for in them the professional painters and writers were brought into convivial social contact with the gentleman amateurs of art and literature and with prominent men of affairs, and at the club these men of wealth and influence were made acquainted with the economic as well as the artistic problems of the artists and writers. Ingham’s friends and associates in the Sketch Club and later in the Century Club included most of the prominent New Yorkers of his time.

Ingham should have won by the invention and promotion of this happy idea the eternal gratitude of his fellow artists because of the many benefits to them which resulted from contacts established at the Sketch Club and the Century Club. However, memories of such things are short, and in a recently published centennial history of the Century Club the name of Ingham is mentioned only casually, though it would seem that he was in fact responsible for the whole idea.

Ingham’s manner of painting—quite different from that of most American portrait painters of his time—consisted in laborious glazings and minute attention to textures and details. It is a way of painting which only the most superbly skilled draughtsmen can handle with complete success. Though Ingham made marked progress in his early years, working always for an almost impossible perfection, he never quite attained full mastery in drawing, his painting of flesh often looked hard, like polished ivory, and his color schemes sometimes got out of hand. Many of the portraits produced after his prime are perfunctory and uninspired performances. His best works, however, have a most curious charm, the result of his talent for expending endless care in giving them their “high finish.”

A full-dress Ingham portrait, done in his most finished style, when hung in a gallery of portraits by his contemporaries, stands out from among them in a most peculiar way. The contrast makes it easy to understand why his paintings attracted so much attention in the National Academy shows. His style is apparently the product of two provincialisms: first, the academic provincialism of the Dublin art schools, where he was trained to admire the work of the most famous Irish portrait painter of the early nineteenth century, Sir Martin Archer Shee; and second, the provincialism of his patrons in New York, whose aesthetic interests began and ended in realism.

His portraits, with their painstaking attention to details of dress, appealed particularly to the ladies, who liked his faithful recording of their velvets and satins and their feathery finery quite as much as they found self-satisfaction in his smooth flattery of their faces. Ingham was
Amelia Palmer, by Charles Cromwell Ingham (1796-1863), about 1829. This portrait was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1830 and 1831. Gift of Courtlandt Palmer, 1950

famous for his carefully painted millinery and yard goods, and any Pearl Street dry-goods merchant could (and probably would) quote prices on them. When these merchants bought an Ingham portrait they felt they were getting their money's worth. Ingham's reputation was established upon his portraits of women and children. Of course he painted many gentlemen
too, but their limited posing time and their drab clothing did not give him sufficient scope for his peculiarly laborious talents. The elegant belles and young matrons of New York, on the other hand, with plenty of time at their disposal and wardrobes of Parisian splendor; their elaborate coiffures, their rich shawls and silks, their snowy, domed brows, their limpid orbs, their rosy cheeks, the sweet, subtle, melting plumpitude of their arms, wrists, throats, and bosoms; the imperious air of the highborn Federalist lady, the grave flowerlike innocence of childhood; all these things tempted Ingham's brush and kept him steadily at work, happily chained to his easel, for almost fifty years.

Considering his tortoise-like speed and fussy method of working, the two hundred or so finished paintings he exhibited in New York between 1816 and 1863 are a monument to his industry, his patience, and his popularity. In the years of his greatest output, 1826-1845, he sometimes exhibited as many as nine portraits in one year, and in 1829 his contribution to the exhibition of the National Academy of Design was an overpowering display of eleven portraits! The newspaper critics complained that the Academy shows seemed to be nothing but portraits, and about that time one writer remarked sourly, "Portraits of ladies and gentlemen meet the eye in every direction and not even the splendid talents of Inman and Ingham . . . can reconcile us to the undue preponderance of the human face divine."

Ingham's style of painting, which differed so markedly from that of most of his contemporaries in New York, may have pleased the ladies, but he was not without his critics. One of the most outspoken of them, and certainly the most widely read, was the redoubtable Mrs. Trollope, who, in her caustic Domestic Manners of the Americans, published in 1832, remarked, "We visited the 19th annual exhibition of the Pennsylvanian Academy of Fine Arts. . . . There was a portrait of a lady, which in the catalogue is designated as 'The White Plume,' which had the reputation of being the most admired in the collection, and the artist Mr. Ingham is said to rank highest among the portrait painters of America. This picture is of very high finish, particularly the drapery, which is most elaborately worked, even to the pile of the velvet; the management of the light is much in the manner of Good; but the drawing is very defective, and the contour, though the face is a lovely one, hard and unfleshy. From all the conversations on painting, which I listened to in America, I found that the finish of the drapery was considered the highest excellence, and next to this, the resemblance in a portrait; I do not remember ever to have heard the words drawing or composition used in any conversation on the subject."

In 1830 the Museum's portrait of Amelia Palmer and another full-length portrait of a lady also by Ingham were first exhibited at the National Academy. This exhibition furnished some anonymous scribbler with an opportunity to rake Ingham over the coals in a review of the show written in doggerel verse. The poem was printed for the author as an eight-page pamphlet with a title page misleadingly designed to look like an Academy exhibition catalogue. It is titled The National Academy of Arts and Design, Fifth Annual Exhibition, May 1830, and it purports to be a review of the whole show, but, though padded out with verses on other pictures, the entire central section of the poem is an attack on Ingham's paintings in general and on the portrait of Amelia Palmer in particular. The poem begins:

"The other day as chance my steps directed,
I found where living artists are inspected;
A galaxy of beauties there are seen,
Suspended in gilt frames, with some in green,
The young aspiring genius here displays,
His first attempt—nor shuns meridian blaze,
That glows from many a canvas story,
Where speaks the finished artist's glory."

After mentioning Dunlap's "sweet touches" and a few other paintings in the show the attack on Ingham's Full Length Portrait of a Lady begins:

"There is a thing upon a seat,
Satin and silk from head to feet,
With twisted neck, and eyes awry,
In awful beauty's mimicry.

There are two arms, one twice the length
Of t’other, short’nd without strength.
Flesh hard as Iv’ry, or as bone,
Polished as fine as any hone,
Marble complete in ev’ry motion
With smiles, as placid as the ocean;
It lags its hands, and with surprise
Finds from the seat it cannot rise,
The face turns pale as any cheese,
Or chalk, or any white you please,
It rich deserves and well may claim,
Some praise for him, who made the frame.”

Next our critic attacks the portrait of Amelia Palmer, which, in the catalogue of the exhibition was titled “Full Length Portrait of a Little Girl with Flowers.”

“Standing in opposition mated,
Sunlight, as some have stated;
Comes forth a little girl with flowers
From out the cool and shady bowers,
Why washed she not her face and arms
Before she thus exposed her charms?
Bricky lights and shadows dun,
Are but a libel on the sun;
He never throws such dingy ray,
When beauty meets him in the way.”
But this is not the end; the tirade continues against Ingham’s style of painting in general, and in the most derogatory terms:

“Pardon, young artist, and forgive,
If I place here my negative,
Nor bend on me, thy acrid bile,
When I denounce a niggard style.—

“If polish and pumice, now the trade is,
Go on, try hard to please the ladies;
Velvet and plush thy motto be,
Like copal teaboards let us see
Thy pictures glazed with mulish power,
And waste a life, to paint a flower.

“Birmingham artists to outvie,
Paint with a microscopic eye,
Perhaps some pedlar then may choose,
Thy works, the natives to amuse,
Or mantua makers may in time
Hang up thy satins for a sign.

“But, if divinest Raphael lead thee on,
I beg you all minutiae mongers shun,
The cits may praise, it shows a want of taste,
To prize a block because it’s finely drest.”

Passing on to other pictures in the show our poet brings his review to a close. The references to “copal teaboards” and “mantua makers’” signboards—the unflattering references to Birmingham, then the source of all the cheap and flashy stock in trade of pedlars—exaggerate the characteristics of Ingham’s portraits to ridiculousness. This “poetic” attack on two of the most ambitious paintings Ingham had turned out up to that time must have given the artist many a bad hour, and undoubtedly the whole poem set the New York art world on its ear.

Mr. Amos Palmer, owner of both of the paintings by Ingham, must have been furious. Perhaps the authorship of this poem can never be definitely settled, but it is most probably the work of MacDonald Clarke, a familiar street character and rather pathetic eccentric of the time, who was known as the “mad poet.” He was given to writing poems criticizing current events in New York and having them published at his own expense.

In 1831 the National Academy, hard pressed to find new pictures for their annual show, put on their first “Retrospective Exhibition,” made up of paintings that had been shown in the

Frances Wilkes (Mrs. Colden), by Ingham, about 1831. Bequest of Grace Wilkes, 1922
five preceding years. This ingenious device was thought up by Thomas Seir Cummings.

In this show, Ingham again tempted the critics by a second display of the portrait of Amelia Palmer and its companion piece, the Full Length Portrait of a Lady. But this year the criticism was less severe. The New York Mirror remarked on the portrait of Amelia: “A fair fresh sweet face, and the form beautiful with the soft light shed down through the branches. The surrounding scenery is too sombre, and seems to have received little attention. It is to be regretted that the landscape could not be filled up and finished. The figure is charming. Look at her hat filled with flowers. How light, fresh and full of summer associations. . . . we do not pretend to judge whether these bright and very highly finished portraits by Ingham are precisely what they ought to be; but as a colorist, he has no superior within our knowledge. His faces are not only perfectly soft and brilliant but animated and expressive.”

The New York Post for the same day contains a letter to the Editor complaining that the newspapers have not given proper notice to the exhibition and stating: “The ladies especially have visited it in the morning and during the evening, and indeed, there is as much pleasure in seeing these lovely originals, as their glowing counterparts produced by the painter’s art, which surrounds the admiring visitors—Ingham and Inman seem to have the most admirers and in particular the full length portraits . . . by the former artist, as also his ‘White Plume’ . . . have drawn forth the admiration of all.”

So it appears that Ingham, though he suffered from critical barbs, knew how to please the ladies, and the ladies, when it came to ordering portraits, held a much more influential place than any newspaper critic or mad poet. The fond papas of reigning belles and the proud husbands of the leading beauties were usually so busy with business affairs that they were quite content to leave artistic problems, such as the choice of a portrait painter, to be settled by feminine intuition and the dictates of fashion.

The portrait of Amelia Palmer has a great deal of charm. She appears to be, like the little girls in the nursery rhyme, made of sugar and spice and everything nice. In spite of the elaborate sentimentality of the picture there is something more than a hint of mischievous spice in her bright glance. Amelia Palmer would seem to be just what Fenimore Cooper had in mind when he wrote of American girls—“The fair creatures are extremely graceful. . . . In general they are delicate; a certain feminine air, tone of voice, size and grace being remarkably frequent. . . . Indeed it is difficult to imagine any creature more attractive than the American beauty between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. There is something in the bloom, delicacy and innocence of one of these young things, that reminds you of the conceptions which poets and painters have taken of the angels. I think delicacy of air and appearance at that age, though perhaps scarcely more enchanting than what one sees in England, is even more common here than in the mother country.”

Amelia’s portrait was exhibited once again in New York, in 1838, when it was shown in the Dunlap Benefit Exhibition at the Stuyvesant
Institution, but after that it disappeared into the Palmer family parlors. What happened to Amelia herself no one knows and the family tradition is that this portrait is the sole remaining record of her life and her beauty. Her father, Amos Palmer, was one of the most successful hardware importers in New York, a member of the Palmer family of Stonington, Connecticut.

The Museum's two portraits of members of the Wilkes family, painted by Ingham, are not so imposing or so ambitious either in size or pictorially as the large canvas of Amelia Palmer, and they lack the charm of her picture; but what they lack in period prettiness is more than made up by their interesting history and many associations with the cultural and social life of New York. It might be said that Amelia Palmer has no history except what Ingham recorded in his portrait of her, whereas the Wilkes family portraits are loaded with historical associations though they have little of personal beauty or pictorial grandeur to recommend them.

The Wilkes family portraits by Ingham came to the Museum in 1922 with a most interesting group of other paintings, also heirlooms of the Wilkes family, as the bequest of the Misses Harriet and Grace Wilkes. Miss Grace and Miss Harriet, their father, Dr. George Wilkes, their maiden aunt, Miss Ann Wilkes, and their widowed aunt Frances (Mrs. David Cadwallader Colden), all lived together in the old house of Charles Wilkes in St. John's Park until about 1866, when they moved "uptown" to 16 Washington Square. Miss Grace Wilkes outlived all of her near relatives—some of them by as much as forty years—and lived solitary, like a Henry James heiress, in the Washington Square mansion. By her will she distributed among distant cousins and charitable organizations her portion of the substantial fortune founded by her grandfather, the banker Charles Wilkes. The family art treasures were for the most part given to the Museum.

Among these were two family portraits by Ingham; Mrs. David C. Colden and her cousin, Charles Wilkes. The Ingham portrait of Mrs. Colden was painted about 1831. It shows us a proud, bold-faced young woman in full bloom. She looks the epitome of the cold, hard-eyed, high-nosed blue-blood, conscious of her social eminence and important family connections. Her husband was noted for his interest in cultural matters, and his name figures prominently in the annals of the Sketch Club, the Century Club, etc. He was the friend and patron of many New York artists and writers.

The second Ingham portrait in the Wilkes collection is a small portrait of a man, painted about 1842 and here identified as a portrait of Commodore Charles Wilkes (1798-1877) of the United States Navy (a nephew of Charles Wilkes, the banker). Commodore Wilkes is a most interesting if somewhat neglected figure in American life in the nineteenth century. Even the briefest outline of his career makes one wonder why no modern biographer or naval historian has written at length about him. The portrait shows us a man of some plainness—none of the Wilkes men were famous for their good looks, and some of them were marked to a degree of downright ugliness. In 1838 Charles Wilkes was appointed to lead the United States Exploring Expedition to the Antarctic and
The Flower Girl, a portrait of Marie Perkins of New Orleans, by Ingham, signed and dated 1846. Gift of William Church Osborn, 1902

Pacific Oceans, and from that time until his death he was a storm center. His appointment as leader of the expedition was violently opposed by his seniors and superiors in the Navy, and on his return the reports of his discoveries in the Antarctic were declared a fraud—the controversy over the location of Wilkes Land was not finally settled until about 1909. When Wilkes got back to New York he was immediately court-marshaled for illegally punishing the men of his squadron and sternly reprimanded. During the Civil War he was in command of the ship San Jacinto and his reckless impetuosity in the famous “Trent Affair” nearly plunged the United States into war with Great Britain. Though Wilkes’s action in this case was applauded and he was considered by many to be a hero, he was again court-marshaled and deprived of rank. After the Civil War he was reinstated as rear admiral.

From 1844 until 1861 Wilkes wrote and edited scientific reports on his expedition—nineteen volumes were published. The five-volume first edition of his Narrative, issued in 1844-45, was considered at that time, aside from its scientific value, to be the most sumptuous set of books ever issued by an American press. It was elaborately illustrated with maps, charts, diagrams, and sketches prepared by the artist of the expedition, the New Yorker Alfred T. Agate. We have in the Museum one small souvenir of this publication—an original pencil drawing made by Agate in the South Seas—a vignette portrait of a man, inscribed with his name, O tore.

In describing the visit of the expedition to Tahiti in 1838 Wilkes gives a brief and amusing account of this man when telling about the expedition’s distribution of bundles of gifts to the native officials of Papeete. On receiving their gifts the natives immediately began to bargain and exchange gifts among themselves, and Wilkes reports, “This was particularly the case with an old acquaintance Taua, and his friend O tore, the ex-minister and former favorite of the queen. . . . O tore . . . is only a petty chief, but he had been the queen’s favorite and minister, until he was dismissed in consequence of his frequent indulgence in intoxication. He is considered as the greatest orator on the island. He and Taua are boon companions and were continually on board the vessels, where they so timed their visits that the hour of breakfast was sure to find them either actually seated at table or awaiting an invitation. Although at first welcome, the habitual intrusion of these and others upon the messes finally became an annoyance, and on board the Peacock they had at last recourse to ‘clearing the ship of strangers’ during meal times.”

The name O tore written in such childish script on the drawing may be an actual autograph of this hungry orator of Tahiti. The drawing is also inscribed “for text vignette” and “wood” in another hand, but apparently it was never engraved and published as an illustration in the Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition—at least I could not discover it in the two editions I examined.

The fourth Ingham portrait in the Museum’s collection has a double interest in that it brings us back to a consideration of the artist himself and introduces us to the collector and art patron Jonathan Sturges. In the patronage of the
arts in New York Jonathan Sturges and his friend Luman Reed appear on the scene as the earlier art patrons begin to withdraw from it. Sturges and Reed were of a later generation, and most of their patronage was given to the younger New York artists of the 1840’s and 1850’s. These two men played a very important part in making the collecting of modern American paintings popular in the mid-nineteenth century. Sturges’s private collection contained paintings by Durand, Cole, William H. Beard, and other painters of the Hudson River School. There was in the collection but one representative of the painters of an earlier generation—Ingham. His picture was always called The Flower Girl, but it has recently been identified as a portrait of Miss Marie Perkins of New Orleans.

It is an excellent example of Ingham’s mature work. It was painted in 1846 and the following year shown by Mr. Sturges at the National Academy. It remained in the collection of the Sturges family until 1902, when it was presented to the Museum by William Church Osborn. The Flower Girl represents Ingham in his highest style, and it was always considered one of the chef d’oeuvres of the Sturges collection. It is rather heavily sentimental, in the best romantic Victorian manner. Miss Perkins’ beauty is of that delicate blond type that lends itself to the large-eyed and mournful sweetness which Ingham has emphasized, perhaps just one degree too much. Her face is “idealized” in the style of the faces found in neoclassic drawing books. Her features are framed by a simple black widow’s bonnet, which, with the heavy basket of flowers on her arm, is dramatically aimed at the trembling heartstrings of the susceptible sentimentalist who, with no further assistance, can construct a delicious tragic tale—the beautiful and gentle widow, reduced by the death of her protector to the humble lot of a flower girl. How sad! how brave! how beautiful! and the flowers so “real” you want to touch them.

In examining the picture, aside from the subject, one feels that the artist has here tried to outdo himself; here are all his painfully acquired tricks laid out with the most finicking care. The flowers are improbably real, the half-shadow falling across the eyes is theatrically arresting in effect. The foreshortened arm and hand with which she offers a potted plant are very tricky. There is an air of artificiality about the whole picture which grows more and more insistent as it is examined. Suddenly one realizes that this girl is not a poor flower girl at all, she is “play-acting,” she is not really holding up that basket. Her wistful expression flickers perilously near to boredom, and the beautiful Miss Perkins’ mind seems to wander from her tedious posing. But these criticisms fade to slight importance when the picture is considered as a period piece. As a fanciful mid-nineteenth-century work it can hardly be surpassed, and as a portrait by Ingham it stands with the portrait of Amelia Palmer among his very best and most characteristic paintings.

Most probably Ingham will never be restored to the artistic prominence he enjoyed as one of the foremost American portrait painters of his time, but this brief sketch of his life and description of the four portraits in the Museum collection gives some indication of his secure place in the history of the arts in Manhattan.