

Artist and Public eBook

Artist and Public by Kenyon Cox

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ARTIST AND PUBLIC

I

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In the history of art, as in the history of politics and in the history of economics, our modern epoch is marked off from all preceding epochs by one great event, the French Revolution. Fragonard, who survived that Revolution to lose himself in a new and strange world, is the last at the old masters; David, some sixteen years his junior, is the first of the moderns. Now if we look for the most fundamental distinction between our modern art and the art of past times, I believe we shall find it to be this: the art of the past was produced for a public that wanted it and understood it, by artists who understood and sympathized with their public; the art of our time has been, for the most part, produced for a public that did not want it and misunderstood it, by artists who disliked and despised the public for which they worked. When artist and public were united, art was homogeneous and continuous. Since the divorce of artist and public art has been chaotic and convulsive.

That this divorce between the artist and his public—this dislocation of the right and natural relations between them—has taken place is certain. The causes of it are many and deep-lying in our modern civilization, and I can point out only a few of the more obvious ones.

The first of these is the emergence of a new public. The art of past ages had been distinctively an aristocratic art, created for kings and princes, for the free citizens of slave-holding republics, for the spiritual and intellectual aristocracy of the church, or for a luxurious and frivolous nobility. As the aim of the Revolution was the destruction of aristocratic privilege, it is not surprising that a revolutionary like David should have felt it necessary to destroy the traditions of an art created for the aristocracy. In his own art of painting he succeeded so thoroughly that the painters of the next generation found themselves with no traditions at all. They had not only to work for a public of enriched bourgeois or proletarians who had never cared for art, but they had to create over again the art with which they endeavored to interest this public. How could they succeed? The rift between artist and public had begun, and it has been widening ever since.

If the people had had little to do with the major arts of painting and sculpture, there had yet been, all through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a truly popular art—an art of furniture making, of wood-carving, of forging, of pottery. Every craftsman was an artist in his degree, and every artist was but a craftsman of a superior sort. Our machine-making, industrial civilization, intent upon material progress and the satisfaction of material wants, has destroyed this popular art; and at the same time that the artist lost his patronage from above he lost his support from below. He has become a superior person, a sort of demi-gentleman, but he has no longer a splendid nobility to employ him or a world of artist artisans to surround him and understand him.



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And to the modern artist, so isolated, with no tradition behind him, no direction from above and no support from below, the art of all times and all countries has become familiar through modern means of communication and modern processes of reproduction. Having no compelling reason for doing one thing rather than another, or for choosing one or another way of doing things, he is shown a thousand things that he may do and a thousand ways of doing them. Not clearly knowing his own mind he hears the clash and reverberation of a thousand other minds, and having no certainties he must listen to countless theories.

Mr. Vedder has spoken of a certain “home-made” character which he considers the greatest defect of his art, the character of an art belonging to no distinctive school and having no definite relation to the time and country in which it is produced. But it is not Mr. Vedder’s art alone that is home-made. It is precisely the characteristic note of our modern art that all of it that is good for anything is home-made or self-made. Each artist has had to create his art as best he could out of his own temperament and his own experience—has sat in his corner like a spider, spinning his web from his own bowels. If the art so created was essentially fine and noble the public has at last found it out, but only after years of neglect have embittered the existence and partially crippled the powers of its creator. And so, to our modern imagination, the neglected and misunderstood genius has become the very type of the great artist, and we have allowed our belief in him to color and distort our vision of the history of art. We have come to look upon the great artists of all times as an unhappy race struggling against the inappreciation of a stupid public, starving in garrets and waiting long for tardy recognition.

The very reverse of this is true. With the exception of Rembrandt, who himself lived in a time of political revolution and of the emergence to power of a burgher class, you will scarce find an unappreciated genius in the whole history of art until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The great masters of the Renaissance, from Giotto to Veronese, were men of their time, sharing and interpreting the ideals of those around them, and were recognized and patronized as such. Rembrandt’s greatest contemporary, Rubens, was painter in ordinary to half the courts of Europe, and Velazquez was the friend and companion of his king. Watteau and Boucher and Fragonard painted for the frivolous nobility of the eighteenth century just what that nobility wanted, and even the precursors of the Revolution, sober and honest Chardin, Greuze the sentimental, had no difficulty in making themselves understood, until the revolutionist David became dictator to the art of Europe and swept them into the rubbish heap with the rest.

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It is not until the beginning of what is known as the Romantic movement, under the Restoration, that the misunderstood painter of genius definitely appears. Millet, Corot, Rousseau were trying, with magnificent powers and perfect single-mindedness, to restore the art of painting which the Revolution had destroyed. They were men of the utmost nobility and simplicity of character, as far as possible from the gloomy, fantastic, vain, and egotistical person that we have come to accept as the type of unappreciated genius; they were classically minded and conservative, worshippers of the great art of the past; but they were without a public and they suffered bitter discouragement and long neglect. Upon their experience is founded that legend of the unpopularity of all great artists which has grown to astonishing proportions. Accepting this legend, and believing that all great artists are misunderstood, the artist has come to cherish a scorn of the public for which he works and to pretend a greater scorn than he feels. He cannot believe himself great *unless* he is misunderstood, and he hugs his unpopularity to himself as a sign of genius and arrives at that sublime affectation which answers praise of his work with an exclamation of dismay: "Is it as bad as that?" He invents new excesses and eccentricities to insure misunderstanding, and proclaims the doctrine that, as anything great must be incomprehensible, so anything incomprehensible must be great. And the public has taken him, at least partly, at his word. He may or may not be great, but he is certainly incomprehensible and probably a little mad. Until he succeeds the public looks upon the artist as a more or less harmless lunatic. When he succeeds it is willing to exalt him into a kind of god and to worship his eccentricities as a part of his divinity. So we arrive at a belief in the insanity of genius. What would Raphael have thought of such a notion, or that consummate man of the world, Titian? What would the serene and mighty Veronese have thought of it, or the cool, clear-seeing Velazquez? How his Excellency the Ambassador of his Most Catholic Majesty, glorious Peter Paul Rubens, would have laughed!

It is this lack of sympathy and understanding between the artist and his public—this fatal isolation of the artist—that is the cause of nearly all the shortcomings of modern art; of the weakness of what is known as official or academic art no less than of the extravagance of the art of opposition. The artist, being no longer a craftsman, working to order, but a kind of poet, expressing in loneliness his personal emotions, has lost his natural means of support. Governments, feeling a responsibility for the cultivation of art which was quite unnecessary in the days when art was spontaneously produced in answer to a natural demand, have tried to put an artificial support in its place. That the artist may show his wares and make himself known, they have created exhibitions; that he may be encouraged they have instituted

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medals and prizes; that he may not starve they have made government purchases. And these well-meant efforts have resulted in the creation of pictures which have no other purpose than to hang in exhibitions, to win medals, and to be purchased by the government and hung in those more permanent exhibitions which we call museums. For this purpose it is not necessary that a picture should have great beauty or great sincerity. It is necessary that it should be large in order to attract attention and sufficiently well drawn and executed to seem to deserve recognition. And so was evolved the salon picture, a thing created for no man's pleasure, not even the artist's; a thing which is neither the decoration of a public building nor the possible ornament of a private house; a thing which, after it has served its temporary purpose, is rolled up and stored in a loft or placed in a gallery where its essential emptiness becomes more and more evident as time goes on. Such government-encouraged art had at least the merit of a well-sustained and fairly high level of accomplishment in the more obvious elements of painting. But as exhibitions became larger and larger and the competition engendered by them grew fiercer, it became increasingly difficult to attract attention by mere academic merit. So the painters began to search for sensationalism of subject, and the typical salon picture, no longer decorously pompous, began to deal in blood and horror and sensuality. It was Regnault who began this sensation hunt, but it has been carried much further since his day than he can have dreamed of, and the modern salon picture is not only tiresome but detestable.

The salon picture, in its merits and its faults, is peculiarly French, but the modern exhibition has sins to answer for in other countries than France. In England it has been responsible for a great deal of sentimentality and anecdotage which has served to attract the attention of a public that could not be roused to interest in mere painting. Everywhere, even in this country, where exhibitions are relatively small and ill-attended, it has caused a certain stridency and blatancy, a keying up to exhibition pitch, a neglect of finer qualities for the sake of immediate effectiveness.

Under our modern conditions the exhibition has become a necessity, and it would be impossible for our artists to live or to attain a reputation without it. The giving of medals and prizes and the purchase of works of art by the state may be of more doubtful utility, though such efforts at the encouragement of art probably do more good than harm. But there is one form of government patronage that is almost wholly beneficial, and that the only form of it which we have in this country—the awarding of commissions for the decoration of public buildings. The painter of mural decorations is in the old historical position, in sound and natural relations to the public. He is doing something which is wanted and, if he continues

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to receive commissions, he may fairly assume that he is doing it in a way that is satisfactory. With the decorative or monumental sculptor he is almost alone among modern artists in being relieved of the necessity of producing something in the isolation of his studio and waiting to see if any one will care for it; of trying, against the grain, to produce something that he thinks may appeal to the public because it does not appeal to himself; or of attempting to bamboozle the public into buying what neither he nor the public really cares for. If he does his best he may feel that he is as fairly earning his livelihood as his fellow workmen, the blacksmith and the stonecutter, and is as little dependent as they upon either charity or humbug. The best that government has done for art in France is the commissioning of the great decorative paintings of Baudry and Puvis. In this country, also, governments, national, State, or municipal, are patronizing art in the best possible way, and in making buildings splendid for the people are affording opportunity for the creation of a truly popular art.

Without any artificial aid from the government the illustrator has a wide popular support and works for the public in a normal way; and, therefore, illustration has been one of the healthiest and most vigorous forms of modern art. The portrait-painter, too, is producing something he knows to be wanted, and, though his art has had to fight against the competition of the photograph and has been partially vulgarized by the struggle of the exhibitions, it has yet remained, upon the whole, comprehensible and human; so that much of the soundest art of the past century has gone into portraiture. It is the painters of pictures, landscape or genre, who have most suffered from the misunderstanding between artist and public. Without guidance some of them have hewed a path to deserved success. Others have wandered into strange byways and no-thoroughfares.

The nineteenth century is strewn with the wrecks of such misunderstood and misunderstanding artists, but it was about the sixties when their searching for a way began to lead them in certain clearly marked directions. There are three paths, in especial, which have been followed since then by adventurous spirits: the paths of aestheticism, of scientific naturalism, and of pure self-expression; the paths of Whistler, of Monet, and of Cezanne.

Whistler was an artist of refined and delicate talent with great weaknesses both in temperament and training; being also a very clever man and a brilliant controversialist, he proceeded to erect a theory which should prove his weaknesses to be so many virtues, and he nearly succeeded in convincing the world of its validity. Finding the representation of nature very difficult, he decided that art should not concern itself with representation but only with the creation of "arrangements" and "symphonies." Having no interest in the subject of pictures, he proclaimed that pictures

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should have no subjects and that any interest in the subject is vulgar. As he was a cosmopolitan with no local ties, he maintained that art had never been national; and as he was out of sympathy with his time, he taught that “art happens” and that “there never was an artistic period.” According to the Whistlerian gospel, the artist not only has now no point of contact with the public, but he should not have and never has had any. He has never been a man among other men, but has been a dreamer “who sat at home with the women” and made pretty patterns of line and color because they pleased him. And the only business of the public is to accept “in silence” what he chooses to give them.

This kind of rootless art he practised. Some of the patterns he produced are delightful, but they are without imagination, without passion, without joy in the material and visible world—the dainty diversions of a dilettante. One is glad that so gracefully slender an art should exist, but if it has seemed great art to us it is because our age is so poor in anything better. To rank its creator with the abounding masters of the past is an absurdity.

In their efforts to escape from the dead-alive art of the salon picture, Monet and the Impressionists took an entirely different course. The gallery painter’s perfunctory treatment of subject bored them, and they abandoned subject almost as entirely as Whistler had done. The sound if tame drawing and the mediocre painting of what they called official art revolted them as it revolted Whistler; but while he nearly suppressed representation they could see in art nothing but representation. They wanted to make that representation truer, and they tried to work a revolution in art by the scientific analysis of light and the invention of a new method of laying on paint. Instead of joining in Whistler’s search for pure pattern they fixed their attention on facts alone, or rather on one aspect of the facts, and in their occupation with light and the manner of representing it they abandoned form almost as completely as they had abandoned significance and beauty.

So it happened that Monet could devote some twenty canvases to the study of the effects of light, at different hours of the day, upon two straw stacks in his farmyard. It was admirable practice, no doubt, and neither scientific analysis nor the study of technical methods is to be despised; but the interest of the public, after all, is in what an artist does, not in how he learns to do it. The twenty canvases together formed a sort of demonstration of the possibilities of different kinds of lighting. Any one of them, taken singly, is but a portrait of two straw stacks, and the world will not permanently or deeply care about those straw stacks. The study of light is, in itself, no more an exercise of the artistic faculties than the study of anatomy or the study of perspective; and while Impressionism has put a keener edge upon some of the tools of the artist, it has inevitably failed to produce a school of art.



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After Impressionism, what? We have no name for it but Post-Impressionism. Such men as Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh recognized the sterility of Impressionism and of a narrow aestheticism, while they shared the hatred of the aesthetes and the Impressionists for the current art of the salons. No more than the aesthetes or the Impressionists were they conscious of any social or universal ideals that demanded expression. The aesthetes had a doctrine; the Impressionists had a method and a technic. The Post-Impressionists had nothing, and were driven to the attempt at pure self-expression—to the exaltation of the great god Whim. They had no training, they recognized no traditions, they spoke to no public. Each was to express, as he thought best, whatever he happened to feel or to think, and to invent, as he went along, the language in which he should express it. I think some of these men had the elements of genius in them and might have done good work; but their task was a heart-breaking and a hopeless one. An art cannot be improvised, and an artist must have some other guide than unregulated emotion. The path they entered upon had been immemorially marked “no passing”; for many of them the end of it was suicide or the madhouse.

But whatever the aberrations of these, the true Post-Impressionists—whatever the ugliness, the eccentricity, or the moral dinginess into which they were betrayed—I believe them to have been, in the main, honest if unbalanced and ill-regulated minds. Whatever their errors, they paid the price of them in poverty, in neglect, in death. With those who pretend to be their descendants to-day the case is different; they are not paying for their eccentricity or their madness, they are making it pay.

The enormous engine of modern publicity has been discovered by these men. They have learned to advertise, and they have found that morbidity, eccentricity, indecency, extremes of every kind and of any degree are capital advertisement. If one cannot create a sound and living art, one can at least make something odd enough to be talked about; if one cannot achieve enduring fame, one may make sure of a flaming notoriety. And, as a money-maker, present notoriety is worth more than future fame, for the speculative dealer is at hand. His interest is in “quick returns” and he has no wish to wait until you are famous—or dead—before he can sell anything you do. His process is to buy anything he thinks he can “boom,” to “boom” it as furiously as possible, and to sell it before the “boom” collapses. Then he will exploit something else, and there’s the rub. Once you have entered this mad race for notoriety, there is no drawing out of it. The same sensation will not attract attention a second time; you must be novel at any cost. You must exaggerate your exaggerations and out-Herod Herod, for others have learned how easy the game is to play, and are at your heels. It is no longer a matter of misunderstanding and being misunderstood by the public; it is a matter of deliberately flouting and outraging the public—of assuming incomprehensibility and antagonism to popular feeling as signs of greatness. And so is founded what Frederic Harrison has called the “shock-your-grandmother school.”

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It is with profound regret that one must name as one of the founders of this school an artist of real power, who has produced much admirable work—Auguste Rodin. At the age of thirty-seven he attained a sudden and resounding notoriety, and from that time he has been the most talked-of artist in Europe. He was a consummate modeller, a magnificent workman, but he had always grave faults and striking mannerisms. These faults and mannerisms he has latterly pushed to greater and greater extremes while neglecting his great gift, each work being more chaotic and fragmentary in composition, more hideous in type, more affected and emptier in execution, until he has produced marvels of mushiness and incoherence hitherto undreamed of and has set up as public monuments fantastically mutilated figures with broken legs or heads knocked off. Now, in his old age, he is producing shoals of drawings the most extraordinary of which few are permitted to see. Some selected specimens of them hang in a long row in the Metropolitan Museum, and I assure you, upon my word as a lifelong student of drawing, they are quite as ugly and as silly as they look. There is not a touch in them that has any truth to nature, not a line that has real beauty or expressiveness. They represent the human figure with the structure of a jellyfish and the movement of a Dutch doll; the human face with an expression I prefer not to characterize. If they be not the symptoms of mental decay, they can be nothing but the means of a gigantic mystification.

With Henri Matisse we have not to deplore the deliquescence of a great talent, for we have no reason to suppose he ever had any. It is true that his admirers will assure you he could once draw and paint as everybody does; what he could *not* do was to paint enough better than everybody does to make his mark in the world; and he was a quite undistinguished person until he found a way to produce some effect upon his grandmother the public by shocking her into attention. His method is to choose the ugliest models to be found; to put them into the most grotesque and indecent postures imaginable; to draw them in the manner of a savage, or a depraved child, or a worse manner if that be possible; to surround his figures with blue outlines half an inch wide; and to paint them in crude and staring colors, brutally laid on in flat masses. Then, when his grandmother begins to “sit up,” she is told with a grave face that this is a reaction from naturalism, a revival of abstract line and color, a subjective art which is not the representation of nature but the expression of the artist’s soul. No wonder she gasps and stares!

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It seemed, two or three years ago, that the limit of mystification had been reached—that this comedy of errors could not be carried further; but human ingenuity is inexhaustible, and we now have whole schools, Cubists, Futurists, and the like, who joyously vie with each other in the creation of incredible pictures and of irreconcilable and incomprehensible theories. The public is inclined to lump them all together and, so far as their work is concerned, the public is not far wrong; yet in theory Cubism and Futurism are diametrically opposed to each other. It is not easy to get any clear conception of the doctrines of these schools, but, so far as I am able to understand them—and I have taken some pains to do so—they are something like this:

Cubism is static; Futurism is kinetic. Cubism deals with bulk; Futurism deals with motion. The Cubist, by a kind of extension of Mr. Berenson's doctrine of "tactile values," assumes that the only character of objects which is of importance to the artist is their bulk and solidity—what he calls their "volumes." Now the form in which volume is most easily apprehended is the cube; do we not measure by it and speak of the cubic contents of anything? The inference is easy: reduce all objects to forms which can be bounded by planes and defined by straight lines and angles; make their cubic contents measurable to the eye; transform drawing into a burlesque of solid geometry; and you have, at once, attained to the highest art. The Futurist, on the other hand, maintains that we know nothing but that things are in flux. Form, solidity, weight are illusions. Nothing exists but motion. Everything is changing every moment, and if anything were still we ourselves are changing. It is, therefore, absurd to give fixed boundaries to anything or to admit of any fixed relations in space. If you are trying to record your impression of a face it is certain that by the time you have done one eye the other eye will no longer be where it was—it may be at the other side of the room. You must cut nature into small bits and shuffle them about wildly if you are to reproduce what we really see.

Whatever its extravagance, Cubism remains a form of graphic art. However pedantic and ridiculous its transformation of drawing, it yet recognizes the existence of drawing. Therefore, to the Futurist, Cubism is reactionary. What difference does it make, he asks, whether you draw a head round or square? Why draw a head at all? The Futurist denies the fundamental postulates of the art of painting. Painting has always, and by definition, represented upon a surface objects supposed to lie beyond it and to be seen through it. Futurism pretends to place the spectator inside the picture and to represent things around him or behind him as well as those in front of him. Painting has always assumed the single moment of vision, and, though it has sometimes placed more than one picture on the same canvas, it

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has treated each picture as seen at a specific instant of time. Futurism attempts systematically to combine the past and the future with the present, as if all the pictures in a cinematograph film were to be printed one over the other; to paint no instant but to represent the movement of time. It aims at nothing less than the abrogation of all recognized laws, the total destruction of all that has hitherto passed for art.

Do you recall the story of the man who tried to count a litter of pigs, but gave it up because one little pig ran about so fast that he could not be counted? One finds oneself in somewhat the same predicament when one tries to describe these “new movements” in art. The movement is so rapid and the men shift their ground so quickly that there is no telling where to find them. You have no sooner arrived at some notion of the difference between Cubism and Futurism than you find your Cubist doing things that are both Cubist and Futurist, or neither Cubist nor Futurist, according as you look at them. You find things made up of geometrical figures to give volume, yet with all the parts many times repeated to give motion. You find things that have neither bulk nor motion but look like nothing so much as a box of Chinese tangrams scattered on a table. Finally, you have assemblages of lines that do not draw anything, even cubes or triangles; and we are assured that there is now a newest school of all, called Orphism, which, finding still some vestiges of intelligibility in any assemblage of lines, reduces everything to shapeless blotches. Probably the first of Orphic pictures was that produced by the quite authentic donkey who was induced to smear a canvas by lashing a tail duly dipped in paint. It was given a title as Orphic as the painting, was accepted by a jury anxious to find new forms of talent, and was hung in the *Salon d’Automne*.

In all this welter of preposterous theories there is but one thing constant—one thing on which all these theorists are agreed. It is that all this strange stuff is symbolic and shadows forth the impressions and emotions of the artist: represents not nature but his feeling about nature; is the expression of his mind or, as they prefer to call it, his soul. It may be so. All art is symbolic; images are symbols; words are symbols; all communication is by symbols. But if a symbol is to serve any purpose of communication between one mind and another it must be a symbol accepted and understood by both minds. If an artist is to choose his symbols to suit himself, and to make them mean anything he chooses, who is to say what he means or whether he means anything? If a man were to rise and recite, with a solemn voice, words like “Ajakan maradak tecor sosthendi,” would you know what he meant? If he wished you to believe that these symbols express the feeling of awe caused by the contemplation of the starry heavens, he would have to tell you so *in your own language*;

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and even then you would have only his word for it. He may have meant them to express that, but do they? The apologists of the new schools are continually telling us that we must give the necessary time and thought to learn the language of these men before we condemn them. Why should we? Why should not they learn the universal language of art? It is they who are trying to say something. When they have learned to speak that language and have convinced us that they have something to say in it which is worth listening to, then, and not till then, we may consent to such slight modification of it as may fit it more closely to their thought.

If these gentlemen really believe that their capriciously chosen symbols are fit vehicles for communication with others, why do they fall back on that old, old symbol, the written word? Why do they introduce, in the very midst of a design in which everything else is dislocated, a name or a word in clear Roman letters? Or why do they give their pictures titles and, lest you should neglect to look in the catalogue, print the title quite carefully and legibly in the corner of the picture itself? They know that they must set you to hunting for their announced subject or you would not look twice at their puzzles.

Now, there is only one word for this denial of all law, this insurrection against all custom and tradition, this assertion of individual license without discipline and without restraint; and that word is "anarchy." And, as we know, theoretic anarchy, though it may not always lead to actual violence, is a doctrine of destruction. It is so in art, and these artistic anarchists are found proclaiming that the public will never understand or accept their art while anything remains of the art of the past, and demanding that therefore the art of the past shall be destroyed. It is actual, physical destruction of pictures and statues that they call for, and in Italy, that great treasury of the world's art, has been raised the sinister cry: "Burn the museums!" They have not yet taken to the torch, but if they were sincere they would do it; for their doctrine calls for nothing less than the reduction of mankind to a state of primitive savagery that it may begin again at the beginning.

Fortunately, they are not sincere. There may be among them those who honestly believe in that exaltation of the individual and that revolt against all law which is the danger of our age. But, for the most part, if they have broken from the fold and "like sheep have gone astray," they have shown a very sheep-like disposition to follow the bell-wether. They are fond of quoting a saying of Gauguin's that "one must be either a revolutionist or a plagiarist"; but can any one tell these revolutionists apart? Can any one distinguish among them such definite and logically developed personalities as mark even schoolmen and "plagiarists" like Meissonier and Gerome? If any one of these men stood alone, one might believe his eccentricities to be the mark of an extreme individuality; one cannot believe it when one finds the same eccentricities in twenty of them.



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No, it is not for the sake of unhampered personal development that young artists are joining these new schools; it is because they are offered a short cut to a kind of success. As there are no more laws and no more standards, there is nothing to learn. The merest student is at once set upon a level with the most experienced of his instructors, and boys and girls in their teens are hailed as masters. Art is at last made easy, and there are no longer any pupils, for all have become teachers. To borrow Doctor Johnson's phrase, "many men, many women, and many children" could produce art after this fashion; and they do.

So right are the practitioners of this puerile art in their proclaimed belief that the public will never accept it while anything else exists, that one might be willing to treat it with the silent contempt it deserves were it not for the efforts of certain critics and writers for the press to convince us that it ought to be accepted. Some of these men seem to be intimidated by the blunders of the past. Knowing that contemporary criticism has damned almost every true artist of the nineteenth century, they are determined not to be caught napping; and they join in shouts of applause as each new harlequin steps upon the stage. They forget that it is as dangerous to praise ignorantly as to blame unjustly, and that the railer at genius, though he may seem more malevolent, will scarce appear so ridiculous to posterity as the dupe of the mountebank. Others of them are, no doubt, honest victims of that illusion of progress to which we are all more or less subject—to that ingrained belief that all evolution is upward and that the latest thing must necessarily be the best. They forget that the same process which has relieved man of his tail has deprived the snake of his legs and the kiwi of his wings. They forget that art has never been and cannot be continuously progressive; that it is only the sciences connected with art that are capable of progress; and that the "Henriade" is not a greater poem than the "Divine Comedy" because Voltaire has learned the falsity of the Ptolemaic astronomy. Finally, these writers, like other people, desire to seem knowing and clever; and if you appear to admire vastly what no one else understands you pass for a clever man.

I have looked through a good deal of the writings of these "up-to-date" critics in the effort to find something like an intelligible argument or a definite statement of belief. I have found nothing but the continually repeated assumption that these new movements, in all their varieties, are "living" and "vital." I can find no grounds stated for this assumption and can suppose only that what is changing with great rapidity is conceived to be alive; yet I know nothing more productive of rapid changes than putrefaction.



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Do not be deceived. This is not vital art, it is decadent and corrupt. True art has always been the expression by the artist of the ideals of his time and of the world in which he lived—ideals which were his own because he was a part of that world. A living and healthy art never has existed and never can exist except through the mutual understanding and co-operation of the artist and his public. Art is made for man and has a social function to perform. We have a right to demand that it shall be both human and humane; that it shall show some sympathy in the artist with our thoughts and our feelings; that it shall interpret our ideals to us in that universal language which has grown up in the course of ages. We have a right to reject with pity or with scorn the stammerings of incompetence, the babble of lunacy, or the vamping of imposture. But mutual understanding implies a duty on the part of the public as well as on the part of the artist, and we must give as well as take. We must be at the pains to learn something of the language of art in which we bid the artist speak. If we would have beauty from him we must sympathize with his aspiration for beauty. Above all, if we would have him interpret for us our ideals we must have ideals worthy of such interpretation. Without this co-operation on our part we may have a better art than we deserve, for noble artists will be born, and they will give us an art noble in its essence however mutilated and shorn of its effectiveness by our neglect. It is only by being worthy of it that we can hope to have an art we may be proud of—an art lofty in its inspiration, consummate in its achievement, disciplined in its strength.

II

JEAN FRANCOIS MILLET

Jean Francois Millet, who lived hard and died poor, is now perhaps the most famous artist of the nineteenth century. His slightest work is fought for by dealers and collectors, and his more important pictures, if they chance to change hands, bring colossal and almost incredible prices. And of all modern reputations his, so far as we can see, seems most likely to be enduring. If any painter of the immediate past is definitively numbered with the great masters, it is he. Yet the popular admiration for his art is based on a misapprehension almost as profound as that of those contemporaries who decried and opposed him. They thought him violent, rude, ill-educated, a “man of the woods,” a revolutionist, almost a communist. We are apt to think of him as a gentle sentimentalist, a soul full of compassion for the hard lot of the poor, a man whose art achieves greatness by sheer feeling rather than by knowledge and intellect. In spite of his own letters, in spite of the testimony of many who knew him well, in spite of more than one piece of illuminating criticism, these two misconceptions endure; and, for the many, Millet is still either the painter of “The Man with the Hoe,” a powerful but somewhat exceptional work, or the painter of “L’Angelus,” precisely the least characteristic picture he ever produced. There is a legendary Millet, in many ways a very different man from the real one, and, while the facts of his life are well known and

undisputed, the interpretation of them is colored by preconceptions and strained to make them fit the legend.

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Altogether too much, for instance, has been made of the fact that Millet was born a peasant. He was so, but so were half the artists and poets who come up to Paris and fill the schools and the cafes of the student quarters. To any one who has known these young *rapins*, and wondered at the grave and distinguished members of the Institute into which many of them have afterward developed, it is evident that this studious youth—who read Virgil in the original and Homer and Shakespeare and Goethe in translations—probably had a much more cultivated mind and a much sounder education than most of his fellow students under Delaroche. Seven years after this Norman farmer's son came to Paris, with a pension of 600 francs voted by the town council of Cherbourg, the son of a Breton sabot-maker followed him there with a precisely similar pension voted by the town council of Roche-sur-Yon; and the pupil of Langlois had had at least equal opportunities with the pupil of Sartoris. Both cases were entirely typical of French methods of encouraging the fine arts, and the peasant origin of Millet is precisely as significant as the peasant origin of Baudry.

[Illustration: Plate 2.—Millet. "The Sower." In the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Vanderbilt collection.]

Baudry persevered in the course marked out for him and, after failing three times, received the *Prix de Rome* and became the pensioner of the state. Millet took umbrage at Delaroche's explanation that his support was already pledged to another candidate for the prize, and left the *atelier* of that master after little more than a year's work. But that he had already acquired most of what was to be learned there is shown, if by nothing else, by the master's promise to push him for the prize the year following. This was in 1838, and for a year or two longer Millet worked in the life classes of Suisse and Boudin without a master. His pension was first cut down and then withdrawn altogether, and he was thrown upon his own resources. His struggles and his poverty during the next few years were those of many a young artist, aggravated, in his case, by two imprudent marriages. But during all the time that he was painting portraits in Cherbourg or little nudes in Paris he was steadily gaining reputation and making friends. If we had not the pictures themselves to show us how able and how well-trained a workman he was, the story told us by Wyatt Eaton, in "Modern French Masters," would convince us. It was in the last year of Millet's life that he told the young American how, in his early days, a dealer would come to him for a picture and, "having nothing painted, he would offer the dealer a book and ask him to wait for a little while that he might add a few touches to the picture." He would then go into his studio and take a fresh canvas, or a panel, and in two hours bring out a little nude figure, which he had painted during that time, and for which he would receive twenty or twenty-five francs. It was the work of this time that Diaz admired for its color and its "immortal flesh painting"; that caused Guichard, a pupil of Ingres, to tell his master that Millet was the finest draughtsman of the new school; that earned for its author the title of "master of the nude."

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He did all kinds of work in these days, even painting signs and illustrating sheet music, and it was all capital practice for a young man, but it was not what he wanted to do. A great deal has been made of the story of his overhearing some one speak of him as “a fellow who never paints anything but naked women,” and he is represented as undergoing something like a sudden conversion and as resolving to “do no more of the devil’s work.” As a matter of fact, he had, from the first, wanted to paint “men at work in the fields,” with their “fine attitudes,” and he only tried his hand at other things because he had his living to earn. Sensier saw what seems to have been the first sketch for “The Sower” as early as 1847, and it existed long before that, while “The Winnower” was exhibited in 1848; and the overheard conversation is said to have taken place in 1849. There was nothing indecent or immoral in Millet’s early work, and the best proof that he felt no moral reprobation for the painting of the nude—as what true painter, especially in France, ever did?—is that he returned to it in the height of his power and, in the picture of the little “Goose Girl” (Pl. 1) by the brook side, her slim, young body bared for the bath, produced the loveliest of his works. No, what happened to Millet in 1849 was simply that he resolved to do no more pot-boiling, to consult no one’s taste but his own, to paint what he pleased and as he pleased, if he starved for it. He went to Barbizon for a summer’s holiday and to escape the cholera. He stayed there because living was cheap and the place was healthful, and because he could find there the models and the subjects on which he built his highly abstract and ideal art.

[Illustration: Plate 3.—Millet. “The Gleaners.” In the Louvre.]

At Barbizon he neither resumed the costume nor led the life of a peasant. He wore sabots, as hundreds of other artists have done, before and since, when living in the country in France. Sabots are very cheap and very dry and not uncomfortable when you have acquired the knack of wearing them. In other respects he dressed and lived like a small bourgeois, and was *monsieur* to the people about him. Barbizon was already a summer resort for artists before he came there, and the inn was full of painters; while others, of whom Rousseau was one, were settled there more or less permanently. It is but a short distance from Paris, and the exhibitions and museums were readily accessible. The life that Millet lived there was that of many poor, self-respecting, hard-working artists, and if he had been a landscape painter that life would never have seemed in any way exceptional. It is only because he was a painter of the figure that it seems odd he should have lived in the country; only because he painted peasants that he has been thought of as a peasant himself. If he accepted the name, with a kind of pride, it was in protest against the frivolity and artificiality of the fashionable art

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of the day. But if too much has been made of Millet's peasant origin, perhaps hardly enough has been made of his race. It is at least interesting that the two Frenchmen whose art has most in common with his, Nicolas Poussin and Pierre Corneille, should have been Normans like himself. In the severely restrained, grandly simple, profoundly classical work of these three men, that hard-headed, strong-handed, austere, and manly race has found its artistic expression.

For Millet is neither a revolutionary nor a sentimentalist, nor even a romanticist; he is essentially a classicist of the classicists, a conservative of the conservatives, the one modern exemplar of the grand style. It is because his art is so old that it was "too new" for even Corot to understand it; because he harked back beyond the pseudoclassicism of his time to the great art of the past, and was classic as Phidias and Giotto and Michelangelo were classic, that he seemed strange to his contemporaries. In everything he was conservative. He hated change; he wanted things to remain as they had always been. He did not especially pity the hard lot of the peasant; he considered it the natural and inevitable lot of man who "eats bread in the sweat of his brow." He wanted the people he painted "to look as if they belonged to their place—as if it would be impossible for them ever to think of being anything else but what they are." In the herdsman and the shepherd, the sower and the reaper, he saw the immemorial types of humanity whose labors have endured since the world began and were essentially what they now are when Virgil wrote his "Georgics" and when Jacob kept the flocks of Laban. This is the note of all his work. It is the permanent, the essential, the eternally significant that he paints. The apparent localization of his subjects in time and place is an illusion. He is not concerned with the nineteenth century or with Barbizon but with mankind. At the very moment when the English Pre-raphaelites were trying to found a great art on the exhaustive imitation of natural detail, he eliminated detail as much as possible. At the very beginning of our modern preoccupation with the direct representation of facts, he abandoned study from the model almost entirely and could say that he "had never painted from nature." His subjects would have struck the amiable Sir Joshua as trivial, yet no one has ever more completely followed that writer's precepts. His confession of faith is in the words, "One must be able to make use of the trivial for the expression of the sublime"; and this painter of "rustic genre" is the world's greatest master of the sublime after Michelangelo.

[Illustration: Plate 4.—Millet. "The Spaders."]

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The comparison with Michelangelo is inevitable and has been made again and again by those who have felt the elemental grandeur of Millet's work. As a recent writer has remarked: "An art highly intellectualized, so as to convey a great idea with the lucidity of language, must needs be controlled by genius akin to that which inspired the ceiling paintings of the Sistine Chapel." [A] This was written of the Trajanic sculptors, whose works both Michelangelo and Millet studied and admired, and indeed it is to this old Roman art, or to the still older art of Greece, that one must go for the truest parallel of Millet's temper and his manner of working. He was less impatient, less romantic and emotional than Michelangelo; he was graver, quieter, more serene; and if he had little of the Greek sensuousness and the Greek love of physical beauty, he had much of the antique clarity and simplicity. To express his idea clearly, logically, and forcibly; to make a work of art that should be "all of a piece" and in which "things should be where they are for a purpose"; to admit nothing for display, for ornament, even for beauty, that did not necessarily and inevitably grow out of his central theme, and to suppress with an iron rigidity everything useless or superfluous—this was his constant and conscious effort. It is an ideal eminently austere and intellectual—an ideal, above all, especially and eternally classic.

[A] Eugenie Strong, "Roman Sculpture," p. 224.

Take, for an instance, the earliest of his masterpieces, the first great picture by which he marked his emancipation and his determination henceforth to produce art as he understood it without regard to the preferences of others. Many of his preliminary drawings and studies exist and we can trace, more or less clearly, the process by which the final result was arrived at. At first we have merely a peasant sowing grain; an everyday incident, truly enough observed but nothing more. Gradually the background is cut down, the space restricted, the figure enlarged until it fills its frame as a metope of the Parthenon is filled. The gesture is ever enlarged and given more sweep and majesty, the silhouette is simplified and divested of all accidental or insignificant detail. A thousand previous observations are compared and resumed in one general and comprehensive formula, and the typical has been evolved from the actual. What generations of Greek sculptors did in their slow perfecting of certain fixed types he has done almost at once. We have no longer a man sowing, but "The Sower" (Pl. 2), justifying the title he instinctively gave it by its air of permanence, of inevitability, of universality. All the significance which there is or ever has been for mankind in that primaevial action of sowing the seed is crystallized into its necessary expression. The thing is done once for all, and need never—can never be done again. Has any one else had this power since Michelangelo created his "Adam"?

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[Illustration: Plate 5.—Millet. “The Potato Planters.” In the Quincy A. Shaw Collection.]

If even Millet never again attained quite the august impressiveness of this picture it is because no other action of rustic man has so wide or so deep a meaning for us as this of sowing. All the meaning there is in an action he could make us feel with entire certainty, and always he proceeds by this method of elimination, concentration, simplification, insistence on the essential and the essential only. One of the most perfect of all his pictures—more perfect than “The Sower” on account of qualities of mere painting, of color, and of the rendering of landscape, of which I shall speak later—is “The Gleaners” (Pl. 3). Here one figure is not enough to express the continuousness of the movement; the utmost simplification will not make you feel, as powerfully as he wishes you to feel it, the crawling progress, the bending together of back and thighs, the groping of worn fingers in the stubble. The line must be reinforced and reduplicated, and a second figure, almost a facsimile of the first, is added. Even this is not enough. He adds a third figure, not gathering the ear, but about to do so, standing, but stooped forward and bounded by one great, almost uninterrupted curve from the peak of the cap over her eyes to the heel which half slips out of the sabot, and the thing is done. The whole day’s work is resumed in that one moment. The task has endured for hours and will endure till sunset, with only an occasional break while the back is half-straightened—there is not time to straighten it wholly. It is the triumph of significant composition, as “The Sower” is the triumph of significant draughtsmanship.

Or, when an action is more complicated and difficult of suggestion, as is that, for instance, of digging, he takes it at the beginning and at the end, as in “The Spaders” (Pl. 4), and makes you understand everything between. One man is doubled over his spade, his whole weight brought to bear on the pressing foot which drives the blade into the ground. The other, with arms outstretched, gives the twisting motion which lets the loosened earth fall where it is to lie. Each of these positions is so thoroughly understood and so definitely expressed that all the other positions of the action are implied in them. You feel the recurrent rhythm of the movement and could almost count the falling of the clods.

So far did Millet push the elimination of non-essentials that his heads have often scarcely any features, his hands, one might say, are without fingers, and his draperies are so simplified as to suggest the witty remark that his peasants are too poor to afford any folds in their garments. The setting of the great, bony planes of jaw and cheek and temple, the bulk and solidity of the skull, and the direction of the face—these were, often enough, all he wanted of a head. Look at the hand of the woman in “The Potato Planters” (Pl. 5), or at those of the

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man in the same picture, and see how little detail there is in them, yet how surely the master's sovereign draughtsmanship has made you feel their actual structure and function! And how inevitably the garments, with their few and simple folds, mould and accent the figures beneath them, "becoming, as it were, a part of the body and expressing, even more than the nude, the larger and simpler forms of nature"! How explicitly the action of the bodies is registered, how perfectly the amount of effort apparent is proportioned to the end to be attained! One can feel, to an ounce, it seems, the strain upon the muscles implied by that hoe-full of earth. Or look at the easier attitude of "The Grafter" (Pl. 6), engaged upon his gentler task, and at the monumental silhouette of the wife, standing there, babe in arms, a type of eternal motherhood and of the fruitfulness to come.

[Illustration: Plate 6.—Millet. "The Grafter." In the collection of William Rockefeller.]

Often than anything, perhaps, it was the sense of weight that interested Millet. It is the adjustment of her body to the weight of the child she carries that gives her statuesque pose to the wife of the grafter. It is the drag of the buckets upon the arms that gives her whole character to the magnificent "Woman Carrying Water," in the Vanderbilt collection. It is the erect carriage, the cautious, rhythmic walk, keeping step together, forced upon them by the sense of weight, which gives that gravity and solemnity to the bearers of "The New-Born Calf" (Pl. 7), which was ridiculed by Millet's critics as more befitting the bearers of the bull Apis or the Holy Sacrament. The artist himself was explicit in this instance as in that of the "Woman Carrying Water." "The expression of two men carrying a load on a litter," he says, "naturally depends on the weight which rests upon their arms. Thus, if the weight is equal, their expression will be the same, whether they bear the Ark of the Covenant or a calf, an ingot of gold or a stone." Find that expression, whether in face or figure, render it clearly, "with largeness and simplicity," and you have a great, a grave, a classic work of art. "We are never so truly Greek," he said, "as when we are simply painting our own impressions." Certainly his own way of painting his impressions was more Greek than anything else in the whole range of modern art.

In the epic grandeur of such pictures as these there is something akin to sadness, though assuredly Millet did not mean them to be sad. Did he not say of the "Woman Carrying Water": "I have avoided, as I always do, with a sort of horror, everything that might verge on the sentimental"? He wished her to seem "to do her work simply and cheerfully ... as a part of her daily task and the habit of her life." And he was not always in the austere and epical mood. He could be idyllic as well, and if he could not see "the joyous side" of life or nature he could feel and make

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us feel the charm of tranquillity. Indeed, this remark of his about the joyous side of things was made in the dark, early days when life was hardest for him. He broadened in his view as he grew older and conditions became more tolerable, and he has painted a whole series of little pictures of family life and of childhood that, in their smiling seriousness, are endlessly delightful. The same science, the same thoughtfulness, the same concentration and intellectual grasp that defined for us the superb gesture of "The Sower" have gone to the depiction of the adorable uncertainty, between walking and falling, of those "First Steps" (Pl. 8) from the mother's lap to the outstretched arms of the father; and the result, in this case as in the other, is a thing perfectly and permanently expressed. Whatever Millet has done is done. He has "characterized the type," as it was his dream to do, and written "hands off" across his subject for all future adventurers.

Finally, he rises to an almost lyric fervor in that picture of the little "Goose Girl" bathing, which is one of the most purely and exquisitely beautiful things in art. In this smooth, young body quivering with anticipation of the coolness of the water; in these rounded, slender limbs with their long, firm, supple lines; in the unconscious, half-awkward grace of attitude and in the glory of sunlight splashing through the shadow of the willows, there is a whole song of joy and youth and the goodness of the world. The picture exists in a drawing or pastel, which has been photographed by Braun, as well as in the oil-painting, and Millet's habit of returning again and again to a favorite subject renders it difficult to be certain which is the earlier of the two; but I imagine this drawing to be a study for the picture. At first sight the figure in it is more obviously beautiful than in the other version, and it is only after a time that one begins to understand the changes that the artist was impelled to make. It is almost too graceful, too much like an antique nymph. No one could find any fault with it, but by an almost imperceptible stiffening of the line here and there, a little greater turn of the foot upon the ankle and of the hand upon the wrist, the figure in the painting has been given an accent of rusticity that makes it more human, more natural, and more appealing. She is no longer a possible Galatea or Arethusa, she is only a goose girl, and we feel but the more strongly on that account the eternal poem of the healthy human form.

[Illustration: Plate 7.—Millet. "The New-Born Calf." In the Art Institute, Chicago.]

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The especial study of the nineteenth century was landscape, and Millet was so far a man of his time that he was a great landscape painter; but his treatment of landscape was unlike any other, and, like his own treatment of the figure, in its insistence on essentials, its elimination of the accidental, its austere and grand simplicity. I have heard, somewhere, a story of his saying, in answer to praise of his work or inquiry as to his meaning: "I was trying to express the difference between the things that lie flat and the things that stand upright." That is the real motive of one of his masterpieces—one that in some moods seems the greatest of them all—"The Shepherdess" (Pl. 9), that is, or used to be, in the Chauchard collection. In this nobly tranquil work, in which there is no hint of sadness or revolt, are to be found all his usual inevitableness of composition and perfection of draughtsmanship—note the effect of repetition in the sheep, "forty feeding like one"—but the glory of the picture is in the infinite recession of the plain that lies flat, the exact notation of the successive positions upon it of the things that stand upright, from the trees and the hay wain in the extreme distance, almost lost in sky, through the sheep and the sheep-dog and the shepherdess herself, knitting so quietly, to the dandelions in the foreground, each with its "aureole" of light. Of these simple, geometrical relations, and of the enveloping light and air by which they are expressed, he has made a hymn of praise.

The background of "The Gleaners," with its baking stubble-field under the midday sun, its grain stacks and laborers and distant farmstead, all tremulous in the reflected waves of heat, indistinct and almost indecipherable yet unmistakable, is nearly as wonderful; and no one has ever so rendered the solemnity and the mystery of night as has he in the marvellous "Sheepfold" of the Walters collection. But the greatest of all his landscapes—one of the greatest landscapes ever painted—is his "Spring" (Pl. 10), of the Louvre, a pure landscape this time, containing no figure. In the intense green of the sunlit woods against the black rain-clouds that are passing away, in the jewel-like brilliancy of the blossoming apple-trees, and the wet grass in that clear air after the shower; in the glorious rainbow drawn in dancing light across the sky, we may see, if anywhere in art, some reflection of the "infinite splendors" which Millet tells us he saw in nature.

[Illustration: Plate 8.—Millet. "The First Steps."]

In the face of such results as these it seems absurd to discuss the question whether or not Millet was technically a master of his trade, as if the methods that produced them could possibly be anything but good methods for the purpose; but it is still too much the fashion to say and think that the great artist was a poor painter—to speak slightly of his accomplishment in oil-painting and to seem to prefer

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his drawings and pastels to his pictures. We have seen that he was a supremely able technician in his pot-boiling days and that the color and handling of his early pictures were greatly admired by so brilliant a virtuoso as Diaz. But this “flowery manner” would not lend itself to the expression of his new aims and he had to invent another. He did so stumblingly at first, and the earliest pictures of his grand style have a certain harshness and ruggedness of surface and heaviness of color which his critics could not forgive any more than the Impressionists, who have outdone that ruggedness, can forgive him his frequent use of a warm general tone inclining to brownness. His ideal of form and of composition he possessed complete from the beginning; his mastery of light and color and the handling of materials was slower of acquirement; but he did acquire it, and in the end he is as absolute a master of painting as of drawing. He did not see nature in blue and violet, as Monet has taught us to see it, and little felicities and facilities of rendering, and anything approaching cleverness or the parade of virtuosity he hated; but he knew just what could be done with thick or thin painting, with opaque or transparent pigment, and he could make his few and simple colors say anything he chose. In his mature work there is a profound knowledge of the means to be employed and a great economy in their use, and there is no approach to indiscriminate or meaningless loading. “Things are where they are for a purpose,” and if the surface of a picture is rough in any place it is because just that degree of roughness was necessary to attain the desired effect. He could make mere paint express light as few artists have been able to do—“The Shepherdess” is flooded with it—and he could do this without any sacrifice of the sense of substance in the things on which the light falls. If some of his canvases are brown it is because brown seemed to him the appropriate note to express what he had to say; “The Gleaners” glows with almost the richness of a Giorgione, and other pictures are honey-toned or cool and silvery or splendidly brilliant. And in whatever key he painted, the harmony of his tones and colors is as large, as simple, and as perfect as the harmony of his lines and masses.

[Illustration: Plate 9.—Millet. “The Shepherdess.” In the Chauchard collection, Louvre.]

But if we cannot admit that Millet’s drawings are better than his paintings, we may be very glad he did them. His great epic of the soil must have lacked many episodes, perhaps whole books and cantos, if it had been written only in the slower and more elaborate method. The comparative slowness and rapidity of execution of his drawings and pastels enabled him to register many inventions and observations that we must otherwise have missed, and many of these are of the highest value. His long training in seizing the essential in anything he saw enabled him, often, to put more meaning into a single rapid line

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than another could put into a day's painful labor, and some of his slightest sketches are astonishingly and commandingly expressive. Other of his drawings were worked out and pondered over almost as lovingly as his completest pictures. But so instinctively and inevitably was he a composer that everything he touched is a complete whole—his merest sketch or his most elaborated design is a unit. He has left no fragments. His paintings, his countless drawings, his few etchings and woodcuts are all of a piece. About everything there is that air of finality which marks the work destined to become permanently a classic.

[Illustration: Plate 10.—Millet. "Spring." In the Louvre.]

Here and there, by one or another writer, most or all of what I have been trying to say has been said already. It is the more likely to be true. And if these true things have been said, many other things have been said also which seem to me not so true, or little to the purpose, so that the image I have been trying to create must differ, for better or for worse, from that which another might have made. At least I may have looked at the truth from a slightly different angle and so have shown it in a new perspective. And, at any rate, it is well that true things should be said again from time to time. It can do no harm that one more person should endeavor to give a reason for his admiration of a great and true artist and should express his conviction that among the world's great masters the final place of Jean Francois Millet is not destined to be the lowest.

III

THE ILLUSION OF PROGRESS[B]

[B] Read before the joint meeting of The American Academy of Arts and Letters and The National Institute of Arts and Letters, December 13, 1912.

In these days all of us, even Academicians, are to some extent believers in progress. Our golden age is no longer in the past, but in the future. We know that our early ancestors were a race of wretched cave-dwellers, and we believe that our still earlier ancestors were possessed of tails and pointed ears. Having come so far, we are sometimes inclined to forget that not every step has been an advance and to entertain an illogical confidence that each future step must carry us still further forward; having indubitably progressed in many things, we think of ourselves as progressing in all. And as the pace of progress in science and in material things has become more and more rapid, we have come to expect a similar pace in art and letters, to imagine that the art of the future must be far finer than the art of the present or than that of the past, and that the art of one decade, or even of one year, must supersede that of the preceding decade or the preceding year, as the 1913 model in automobiles supersedes the model



of 1912. More than ever before "To have done is to hang quite out of fashion," and the only title to consideration is to do something quite obviously new or to proclaim one's intention of doing something newer. The race grows madder and madder. It was scarce two years since we first heard of "Cubism" when the "Futurists" were calling the "Cubists" reactionary. Even the gasping critics, pounding manfully in the rear, have thrown away all impedimenta of traditional standards in the desperate effort to keep up with what seems less a march than a stampede.

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But while we talk so loudly of progress in the arts we have an uneasy feeling that we are not really progressing. If our belief in our own art were as full-blooded as was that of the great creative epochs, we should scarce be so reverent of the art of the past. It is, perhaps, a sign of anaemia that we have become founders of museums and conservers of old buildings. If we are so careful of our heritage, it is surely from some doubt of our ability to replace it. When art has been vigorously alive it has been ruthless in its treatment of what has gone before. No cathedral builder thought of reconciling his own work to that of the builder who preceded him; he built in his own way, confident of its superiority. And when the Renaissance builder came, in his turn, he contemptuously dismissed all mediaeval art as "Gothic" and barbarous, and was as ready to tear down an old facade as to build a new one. Even the most cock-sure of our moderns might hesitate to emulate Michelangelo in his calm destruction of three frescoes by Perugino to make room for his own "Last Judgment." He, at least, had the full courage of his convictions, and his opinion of Perugino is of record.

Not all of us would consider even Michelangelo's arrogance entirely justified, but it is not only the Michelangelos who have had this belief in themselves. Apparently the confidence of progress has been as great in times that now seem to us decadent as in times that we think of as truly progressive. The past, or at least the immediate past, has always seemed "out of date," and each generation, as it made its entrance on the stage, has plumed itself upon its superiority to that which was leaving it. The architect of the most debased baroque grafted his "improvements" upon the buildings of the high Renaissance with an assurance not less than that with which David and his contemporaries banished the whole charming art of the eighteenth century. Van Orley and Frans Floris were as sure of their advance upon the ancient Flemish painting of the Van Eycks and of Memling as Rubens himself must have been of his advance upon them.

We can see plainly enough that in at least some of these cases the sense of progress was an illusion. There was movement, but it was not always forward movement. And if progress was illusory in some instances, may it not, possibly, have been so in all? It is at least worth inquiry how far the fine arts have ever been in a state of true progress, going forward regularly from good to better, each generation building on the work of its predecessors and surpassing that work, in the way in which science has normally progressed when material conditions were favorable.

If, with a view to answering this question, we examine, however cursorily, the history of the five great arts, we shall find a somewhat different state of affairs in the case of each. In the end it may be possible to formulate something like a general rule that shall accord with all the facts. Let us begin with the greatest and simplest of the arts, the art of poetry.



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In the history of poetry we shall find less evidence of progress than anywhere else, for it will be seen that its acknowledged masterpieces are almost invariably near the beginning of a series rather than near the end. Almost as soon as a clear and flexible language has been formed by any people, a great poem has been composed in that language, which has remained not only unsurpassed, but unequalled, by any subsequent work. Homer is for us, as he was for the Greeks, the greatest of their poets; and if the opinion could be taken of all cultivated readers in those nations that have inherited the Greek tradition, it is doubtful whether he would not be acclaimed the greatest poet of the ages. Dante has remained the first of Italian poets, as he was one of the earliest. Chaucer, who wrote when our language was transforming itself from Anglo-Saxon into English, has still lovers who are willing for his sake to master what is to them almost a foreign tongue, and yet other lovers who ask for new translations of his works into our modern idiom; while Shakespeare, who wrote almost as soon as that transformation had been accomplished, is universally reckoned one of the greatest of world poets. There have, indeed, been true poets at almost all stages of the world's history, but the pre-eminence of such masters as these can hardly be questioned, and if we looked to poetry alone for a type of the arts, we should almost be forced to conclude that art is the reverse of progressive. We should think of it as gushing forth in full splendor when the world is ready for it, and as unable ever again to rise to the level of its fount.

The art of architecture is later in its beginning than that of poetry, for it can exist only when men have learned to build solidly and permanently. A nomad may be a poet, but he cannot be an architect; a herdsman might have written the Book of Job, but the great builders are dwellers in cities. But since men first learned to build they have never quite forgotten how to do so. At all times there have been somewhere peoples who knew enough of building to mould its utility into forms of beauty, and the history of architecture may be read more continuously than that of any other art. It is a history of constant change and of continuous development, each people and each age forming out of the old elements a new style which should express its mind, and each style reaching its point of greatest distinctiveness only to begin a further transformation into something else; but is it a history of progress? Building, indeed, has progressed at one time or another. The Romans, with their domes and arches, were more scientific builders than the Greeks, with their simple post and lintel, but were they better architects? We of today, with our steel construction, can scrape the sky with erections that would have amazed the boldest of mediaeval craftsmen; can we equal his art? If we ask where in the history of architecture do its masterpieces appear, the answer must be: "Almost

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anywhere.” Wherever men have had the wealth and the energy to build greatly, they have builded beautifully, and the distinctions are less between style and style or epoch and epoch than between building and building: The masterpieces of one time are as the masterpieces of another, and no man may say that the nave of Amiens is finer than the Parthenon or that the Parthenon is nobler than the nave of Amiens. One may say only that each is perfect in its kind, a supreme expression of the human spirit.

Of the art of music I must speak with the diffidence becoming to the ignorant; but it seems to me to consist of two elements and to contain an inspirational art as direct and as simple as that of poetry, and a science so difficult that its fullest mastery is of very recent achievement. In melodic invention it is so far from progressive that its most brilliant masters are often content to elaborate and to decorate a theme old enough to have no history—a theme the inventor of which has been so entirely forgotten that we think of it as sprung not from the mind of one man, but from that of a whole people, and call it a folk-song. The song is almost as old as the race, but the symphony has had to wait for the invention of many instruments and for a mastery of the laws of harmony, and so symphonic music is a modern art. We are still adding new instruments to the orchestra and admitting to our compositions new combinations of sounds, but have we in a hundred years made any essential progress even in this part of the art? Have we produced anything, I will not say greater, but anything as great as the noblest works of Bach and Beethoven?

Already, and before considering the arts of painting and sculpture, we are coming within sight of our general law. This law seems to be that, so far as an art is dependent upon any form of exact knowledge, so far it partakes of the nature of science and is capable of progress. So far as it is expressive of a mind and soul, its greatness is dependent upon the greatness of that mind and soul, and it is incapable of progress. It may even be the reverse of progressive, because as an art becomes more complicated and makes ever greater demands upon technical mastery, it becomes more difficult as a medium of expression, while the mind to be expressed becomes more sophisticated and less easy of expression in any medium. It would take a greater mind than Homer’s to express modern ideas in modern verse with Homer’s serene perfection; it would take, perhaps, a greater mind than Bach’s to employ all the resources of modern music with his glorious ease and directness. And greater minds than those of Bach and Homer the world has not often the felicity to possess.

The arts of painting and sculpture are imitative arts above all others, and therefore more dependent than any others upon exact knowledge, more tinged with the quality of science. Let us see how they illustrate our supposed law.

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Sculpture depends, as does architecture, upon certain laws of proportion in space which are analogous to the laws of proportion in time and in pitch upon which music is founded. But as sculpture represents the human figure, whereas architecture and music represent nothing, sculpture requires for its perfection the mastery of an additional science, which is the knowledge of the structure and movement of the human body. This knowledge may be acquired with some rapidity, especially in times and countries where man is often seen unclothed. So, in the history of civilizations, sculpture developed early, after poetry, but with architecture, and before painting and polyphonic music. It reached the greatest perfection of which it is capable in the age of Pericles, and from that time progress was impossible to it, and for a thousand years its movement was one of decline. After the dark ages sculpture was one of the first arts to revive; and again it develops rapidly—though not so rapidly as before, conditions of custom and climate being less favorable to it—until it reaches, in the first half of the sixteenth century, something near its former perfection. Again it can go no further; and since then it has changed but has not progressed. In Phidias, by which name I would signify the sculptor of the pediments of the Parthenon, we have the coincidence of a superlatively great artist with the moment of technical and scientific perfection in the art, and a similar coincidence crowns the work of Michelangelo with a peculiar glory. But, apart from the work of these two men, the essential value of a work of sculpture is by no means always equal to its technical and scientific completeness. There are archaic statues that are almost as nobly beautiful as any work by Phidias and more beautiful than almost any work that has been done since his time. There are bits of Gothic sculpture that are more valuable expressions of human feeling than anything produced by the contemporaries of Buonarroti. Even in times of decadence a great artist has created finer things than could be accomplished by a mediocre talent of the great epochs, and the world could ill spare the Victory of Samothrace or the portrait busts of Houdon.

As sculpture is one of the simplest of the arts, painting is one of the most complicated. The harmonies it constructs are composed of almost innumerable elements of lines and forms and colors and degrees of light and dark, and the science it professes is no less than that of the visible aspect of the whole of nature—a science so vast that it never has been and perhaps never can be mastered in its totality. Anything approaching a complete art of painting can exist only in an advanced stage of civilization. An entirely complete art of painting never has existed and probably never will exist. The history of painting, after its early stages, is a history of loss here balancing gain there, of a new means of expression acquired at the cost of an old one.

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We know comparatively little of the painting of antiquity, but we have no reason to suppose that that art, however admirable, ever attained to ripeness, and we know that the painting of the Orient has stopped short at a comparatively early stage of development. For our purpose the art to be studied is the painting of modern times in Europe from its origin in the Middle Ages. Even in the beginning, or before the beginning, while painting is a decadent reminiscence of the past rather than a prophecy of the new birth, there are decorative splendors in the Byzantine mosaics hardly to be recaptured. Then comes primitive painting, an art of the line and of pure color with little modulation and no attempt at the rendering of solid form. It gradually attains to some sense of relief by the use of degrees of light and less light; but the instant it admits the true shadow the old brightness and purity of color have become impossible. The line remains dominant for a time and is carried to the pitch of refinement and beauty, but the love for solid form gradually overcomes it, and in the art of the high Renaissance it takes a second place. Then light-and-shade begins to be studied for its own sake; color, no longer pure and bright, but deep and resonant, comes in again; the line vanishes altogether, and even form becomes secondary. The last step is taken by Rembrandt, and even color is subordinated to light-and-shade, which exists alone in a world of brownness. At every step there has been progress, but there has also been regress. Perhaps the greatest balance of gain against loss and the nearest approach to a complete art of painting were with the great Venetians. The transformation is still going on, and in our own day we have conquered some corners of the science of visible aspects which were unexplored by our ancestors. But the balance has turned against us; our loss has been greater than our gain; and our art, even in its scientific aspect, is inferior to that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

And just because there never has been a complete art of painting, entirely rounded and perfected, it is the clearer to us that the final value of a work in that art never has depended on its approach to such completion. There is no one supreme master of painting but a long succession of masters of different yet equal glory. If the masterpieces of architecture are everywhere because there has often been a complete art of architecture, the masterpieces of painting are everywhere for the opposite reason. And if we do not always value a master the more as his art is more nearly complete, neither do we always value him especially who has placed new scientific conquests at the disposal of art. Palma Vecchio painted by the side of Titian, but he is only a minor master; Botticelli remained of the generation before Leonardo, but he is one of the immortal great. Paolo Ucello, by his study of perspective, made a distinct advance in pictorial science, but his interest for us is purely historic; Fra Angelico made no advance whatever, but he practised consummately the current art as he found it, and his work is eternally delightful. At every stage of its development the art of painting has been a sufficient medium for the expression of a great man's mind; and wherever and whenever a great man has practised it, the result has been a great and permanently valuable work of art.



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For this seems, finally, to be the law of all the arts—the one essential prerequisite to the production of a great work of art is a great man. You cannot have the art without the man, and when you have the man you have the art. His time and his surroundings will color him; his art will not be at one time or place precisely what it might be at another; but at bottom the art is the man and at all times and in all countries is just as great as the man.

Let us clear our minds, then, of the illusion that there is in any important sense such a thing as progress in the fine arts. We may with a clear conscience judge every new work for what it appears in itself to be, asking of it that it be noble and beautiful and reasonable, not that it be novel or progressive. If it be great art it will always be novel enough, for there will be a great mind behind it, and no two great minds are alike. And if it be novel without being great, how shall we be the better off? There are enough forms of mediocre or evil art in the world already. Being no longer intimidated by the fetish of progress, when a thing calling itself a work of art seems to us hideous and degraded, indecent and insane, we shall have the courage to say so and shall not care to investigate it further. Detestable things have been produced in the past, and they are none the less detestable because we are able to see how they came to be produced. Detestable things are produced now, and they will be no more admirable if we learn to understand the minds that create them. Even should such things prove to be not the mere freaks of a diseased intellect that they seem but a necessary outgrowth of the conditions of the age and a true prophecy of “the art of the future,” they are not necessarily the better for that. It is only that the future will be very unlucky in its art.

IV

RAPHAEL

There used to be on the cover of the “Portfolio Monographs” little medallions of Raphael and Rembrandt, placed there, as the editor, Mr. Hamerton, has somewhere explained, as portraits of the two most widely influential artists that ever lived. In the eighteenth century, one imagines, Rembrandt’s presence by the side of Raphael would have been thought little less than a scandal. To-day it is Raphael’s place that would be contested, and he would be superseded, likely enough, by Velazquez.

There is no more striking instance of the vicissitudes of critical opinion than the sudden fall of Raphael from his conceded rank as “the prince of painters.” Up to the middle of the nineteenth century his right to that title was so uncontested that it alone was a sufficient identification of him—only one man could possibly be meant. That he should ever need defending or re-explaining to a generation grown cold to him would have seemed incredible. Then came the rediscovery of an earlier art that seemed more frank and simple than his; still later the discovery

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of Rembrandt and Velazquez—the romanticist and the naturalist—and Raphael, as a living influence, almost ceased to exist. It was but a few years ago that the author of a volume of essays on art was gravely praised by a reviewer for the purely accidental circumstance that that volume contained no essay on Raphael; and a little later the writer of a book on the pictures in Rome “had to confess unutterable boredom” in the presence of the Stanze of the Vatican.

It is not probable that any critic who greatly valued his reputation, or who had any serious reputation to value, would take quite this tone; but, leaving out of consideration the impressionistic and ultra-modern criticism which ignores Raphael altogether, it is instructive to note the way in which a critic so steeped in Italian art as Mr. Berenson approaches the fallen prince. The artist who used to be considered the greatest of draughtsmen he will hardly admit to be a draughtsman at all, ranking him far below Pollaiuolo and positively speaking of him as “a poor creature, most docile and patient.” As a colorist and a manipulator of paint, he places him with Sebastiano del Piombo—that is, among the mediocrities. Almost the only serious merit, from his point of view, which he will allow him is a mastery in the rendering of space, shared in nearly equal measure by Perugino, as, to some extent, by nearly all the painters of the Umbrian school. For, while he admits that Raphael was the greatest master of composition that Europe has produced, he evidently thinks of composition, as do so many other moderns, as a matter of relatively little importance.

It is not Raphael’s popularity that is in question; that is, perhaps, as great as ever it was. His works, in one form or another of reproduction, from the finest carbon print to the cheapest lithograph, are still to be found, in the humblest homes as in the most splendid, in nearly every quarter of the globe. That popularity was always based on what Berenson calls the “illustrative” qualities of Raphael’s work, on the beauty of his women, the majesty of his men; on his ability to tell a story as we like it told and to picture a world that we wish might be real. One may not be prepared to consider these illustrative qualities so negligible as do many modern critics, or to echo Mr. Berenson’s phrase about “that which in art ... is so unimportant as what ... we call beauty.” One might point out that the greatest artists, from Phidias to Rembrandt, have occupied themselves with illustration, and that to formulate the ideals of a race and an epoch is no mean task. But, for the moment, we may neglect all that, our present inquiry being why an artist, once counted the greatest of all, is no longer considered very significant by those who measure by purely artistic standards rather than by that of illustrative success and consequent popularity.



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We may also leave out of our present consideration Raphael's achievement in the suggestion of space. It is a very real quality and a high one. It has doubtless always been an important element in the enjoyability of Raphael's art, as it is almost the only enjoyable element, for many of us, in the art of Perugino. But it is an element that has only very recently been clearly perceived to exist. If it was enjoyed by the artists and critics, from Raphael's day almost to our own, they were unconscious of the fact, and the probability is that we enjoy it more than they did. It will not account for the estimation in which they held Raphael, and still less will it account for the relative lack of interest in him to-day.

In truth the reason why many modern critics and painters almost dislike Raphael is the very reason for which he was so greatly revered. Coming in the nick of time, at the close of an epoch of investigation, himself a man of wide culture and quick intellect but of no special originality or emotional power, he learned from all his predecessors what they had to teach and, choosing from the elements of their art those which were suited to his purpose, formed a perfectly balanced and noble style which was immediately accepted as the only style suitable to the expression of lofty ideas in monumental form. He became the lawgiver, the founder of classicism, the formulator of the academic ideal. Not to admire him was to confess oneself a barbarian, and even those who did not really care for his art hardly dared to say so. As long as the academic ideal retained any validity his supremacy endured, and it was only with the definitive turning of modern art into the paths of romanticism and naturalism that revolt became possible.

But when the world became tired of Raphaelism it inevitably became unjust to Raphael. It forgot that it was not he who had made his art the test of that of others—who had erected what, with him, was a spontaneous and original creation into a rigid system of laws. It confounded him with his followers and imitators, and, being bored by them, began to find the master himself a bore.

For, eclectic as he was by nature, and founder as he was of the academic regime, the "grand style" of Raphael was yet a new and personal contribution to art. He drew from many sources, but the principle of combination was his own. His originality was in that mastery of composition which no one has ever denied him, but which is very differently rated as a quality of art by different temperaments. Almost everything specifically Raphaelian in his work is the offspring of that power of design in which he is still the unapproached master. Modern criticism is right in denying that he was a draughtsman, if by draughtsman is meant one deeply preoccupied with form and structure for its own sake. His distinction was to invest the human figure with such forms as should best fit it to play its part in a scheme of



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monumental composition. The “style” of his draperies, so much and so justly admired, is composition of draperies. He was not a colorist as Titian was a colorist, or a painter as Velazquez was a painter—he was just so much of a colorist and a painter as is compatible with being the greatest of decorative designers. Everything in his finest works is entirely subordinated to the beauty and expressiveness of composition, and nothing is allowed to have too great an individual interest for its predestined part in the final result. Probably he could not have drawn like Michelangelo or painted like Hals—certainly, when he once understood himself, he would not have desired to do so.

Even in his early work he showed his gifts as a composer, and some of the small pictures of his Florentine period are quite perfect in design. Nothing could be better composed within their restricted field than the “Madonna del Cardellino” or the “Belle Jardiniere.” Nearly at the end of the period he made his greatest failure, the “Entombment” of the Borghese Gallery. It was his most ambitious effort up to this time and he wanted to put everything that he had learned into it, to draw like Michelangelo and to express emotion like Mantegna. He made a host of studies for it, tried it this way and that, lost all spontaneity and all grasp of the ensemble. What he finally produced is a thing of fragments, falling far below his models in the qualities he was attempting to rival and redeemed by little or nothing of the quality proper to himself. But, apparently, it answered its purpose. It freed him from preoccupation with the work of others. When his great opportunity came to him, in the commission to decorate the Camera della Segnatura, his painfully acquired knowledge was sufficiently at his command to give him no further trouble. He could concentrate himself on the essential part of his problem, the creation of an entirely appropriate, dignified, and beautiful decorative design. It was the work for which he was born, and he succeeded so immediately and so admirably in it that neither he nor any one else has ever been able to fill such spaces so perfectly again.

There are fourteen important compositions in the room. The decoration of the ceiling had already been begun by Sodoma, and Sodoma’s decorative framework Raphael allowed to remain; partly, perhaps, from courtesy, more probably because its general disposition was admirable and not to be improved on. If Sodoma had begun any of the larger paintings which were to fill his frames they were removed to make way for the new work. There has always been a great deal of discussion as to whether Raphael himself invented the admirable scheme of subjects by which the room was made to illustrate the Renaissance ideal of culture with its division into the four great fields of learning: divinity, philosophy (including science), poetry, and law. In reality, the question is of little importance. There seems to be at least one bit of internal evidence,

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to be mentioned presently, that even here the artist did not have a perfectly free hand, as we know he did not later. Whoever thought of the subjects, it was Raphael who discovered how to treat them in such a way as to make of this room the most perfectly planned piece of decoration in the world. Sodoma had left, on the vaulting, four circular medallions and four rectangular spaces which were to be filled with figure compositions. In the circles, each directly above one of the great wall spaces, Raphael placed figures personifying Theology, Philosophy, Poetry and Justice; in the rectangles he illustrated these subjects with the stories of "The Fall of Man," "Apollo and Marsyas," and "The Judgment of Solomon," and with that figure, leaning over a celestial globe, which must be meant for Science. All of these panels are on curved surfaces, and Raphael's decorative instinct led him, on this account and to preserve the supremacy of the great wall spaces below, to suppress all distance, placing his figures against a background of simulated gold mosaic and arranging them, virtually, upon one plane. There is, therefore, no possible question of "space composition" here. These panels depend for their effect entirely upon composition in two dimensions—upon the perfect balancing of filled and empty spaces, the invention of interesting shapes, and the arrangement of beautiful lines. It is the pattern that counts, and the pattern is perfect.

The "Poetry" (Pl. 11) is the most beautiful of the medallions, but they are all much alike: a draped female figure in the middle, seated to give it scale, large enough to fill the height of the circle amply but without crowding, and winged *putti*, bearing inscribed tablets, on either side. There are other ways of filling a circle acceptably, as Botticelli had shown and as Raphael was to show again in more than one *tondo*, but for their situation, marking the principal axes of the room, there is no way so adequate as this. As Mr. Blashfield has said, speaking from experience: "When a modern painter has a medallion to fill and has tried one arrangement after another, he inevitably realizes that it is Raphael who has found the best ordering that could be found; and the modern painter builds upon his lines, laid down so distinctly that the greater the practice of the artist the more complete becomes his realization of Raphael's comprehension of essentials in composition." Not only so, but the modern painter finds as inevitably that, accepting this ordering as the best, even then he cannot add another figure to these four. He may, perhaps, draw it better in detail or give more character to the head, but he cannot capture that felicity of spacing, that absoluteness of balance, that variety and vivacity combined with monumental repose. The more his nature and training have made him a designer the more certainly he feels, before that single medallion of Poetry, that he is in the presence of the inimitable master of design.

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[Illustration: Plate 11.—Raphael. “Poetry.” In the Vatican.]

If the composition of the rectangles is less inevitable it is only because the variety of ways in which such simple rectangles may be filled is almost infinite. Composition more masterly than that of the “Judgment of Solomon” (Pl. 12), for instance, you will find nowhere; so much is told in a restricted space, yet with no confusion, the space is so admirably filled and its shape so marked by the very lines that enrich and relieve it. It is as if the design had determined the space rather than the space the design. If you had a tracing of the figures in the midst of an immensity of white paper you could not bound them by any other line than that of the actual frame. One of the most remarkable things about it is the way in which the angles, which artists usually avoid and disguise, are here sharply accented. A great part of the dignity and importance given to the king is due to the fact that his head fills one of these angles, and the opposite one contains the hand of the executioner and the foot by which the living child is held aloft, and to this point the longest lines of the picture lead. The dead child and the indifferent mother fill the lower corners. In the middle, herself only half seen and occupying little space, is the true mother, and it seems that her explosive energy, as she rushes to the rescue of her child, has forced all these other figures back to the confines of the picture. Compare this restless yet subtly balanced composition, full of oblique lines and violent movement, with the gracious, placid formality of the “Adam and Eve,” and you will have some notion of the meaning of this gift of design.

[Illustration: Plate 12.—Raphael. “The Judgment of Solomon.” In the Vatican.]

But it is the frescoes on the four walls of this room which are Raphael’s greatest triumphs—the most perfect pieces of monumental decoration in the world. On the two longer walls, nearly unbroken lunettes of something over a semicircle, he painted the two great compositions of Theology and Philosophy known as the “Disputa” and the “School of Athens.” The “Disputa” (Pl. 13), the earlier of the two, has the more connection with the art of the past. The use of gilded relief in the upper part recalls the methods of Pintoricchio, and the hint of the whole arrangement was doubtless taken from those semidomes which existed in many churches. But what an original idea it was to transform the flat wall of a room into the apse of a cathedral, and what a solemnity it imparts to the discussion that is going on! The upper part is formal in the extreme, as it need be for the treatment of such a theme, but even here there is variety as well as stateliness in the attitudes and the spacing. In the lower part the variety becomes almost infinite, yet there is never a jar—not a line or a fold of drapery that mars the supreme order of the whole. Besides the uncounted cherubs which float among the rays of glory or support the cloudy thrones of the saints and prophets, there are between seventy and eighty figures in the picture; yet the hosts of heaven and the church on earth seem gathered about the altar with its sacred wafer—the tiny circle which is the focus of the great composition and the inevitable goal of all regards, as it is the central mystery of Catholic dogma.

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[Illustration: Plate 13.—Raphael. The “Disputa.” In the Vatican.]

Opposite, in the “School of Athens” (Pl. 14), the treatment is different but equally successful. The hieratic majesty of the “Disputa” was here unnecessary, but a tranquil and spacious dignity was to be attained, and it is attained through the use of vertical and horizontal lines—the lines of stability and repose, while the bounding curve is echoed again and again in the diminishing arches of the imagined vaulting. The figures, fewer in number than in the “Disputa” and confined to the lower half of the composition, are ranged in two long lines across the picture; but the nearer line is broken in the centre and the two figures on the steps, serving as connecting-links between the two ranks, give to the whole something of that semicircular grouping so noticeable in the companion picture. The bas-reliefs upon the architecture and the great statues of Apollo and Minerva above them draw the eye upward at the sides, and this movement is intensified by the arrangement of the lateral groups of figures. By these means the counter curve to the arch above, the one fixed necessity, apparently, of the lunette, is established. It is more evident in the perspective curve of the painted dome. Cover this line with a bit of paper, or substitute for it a straight lintel like that seen beyond, and you will be surprised to find how much of the beauty of the picture has disappeared. The grouping of the figures themselves, the way they are played about into clumps or separated to give greater importance, by isolation, to a particular head, is even more beyond praise than in the “Disputa.” The whole design has but one fault, and that is an afterthought. In the cartoon the disproportioned bulk of Heraclitus, thrust into the foreground and writing in an impossible attitude on a desk in impossible perspective, is not to be found. It is such a blot upon the picture that one cannot believe that Raphael added it of his own motion; rather it must have been placed there at the dictation of some meddling cardinal or learned humanist who, knowing nothing of art, could not see why any vacant space should not be filled with any figure whose presence seemed to him historically desirable. One is tempted to suspect even, so clumsy is the figure and so out of scale with its neighbors, that the master refused to disfigure his work himself and left the task to one of his apprentices. If it had been done by one of them, say Giulio Romano, after the picture was entirely completed and at the time of the “Incendio del’ Borgo,” it could not be more out of keeping.

[Illustration: Plate 14.—Raphael. “The School of Athens.” In the Vatican.]

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Each of these walls has a doorway at one end, and the way in which these openings are dissimulated and utilized is most ingenious, particularly in the “Disputa,” where the bits of parapet which play an important part at either side of the composition, one pierced, the other solid, were suggested solely by the presence of this door. In the end walls the openings, large windows much higher than the doors, become of such importance that the whole nature of the problem is changed. It is the pierced lunette that is to be dealt with, and Raphael has dealt with it in two entirely different ways. One wall is symmetrical, the window in the middle, and on that wall he painted the “Parnassus” (Pl. 15), Apollo and the Muses in the centre with groups of poets a little lower on either side and other groups filling the spaces to right and left of the window head. At first sight the design seems less symmetrical and formal than the others, with a lyrical freedom befitting the subject, but in reality it is no less perfect in its ponderation. The group of trees above Apollo and the reclining figures either side of him accent the centrality of his position. From this point the line of heads rises in either direction to the figures of Homer and of the Muse whose back is turned to the spectator, and the perpendicularity of these two figures carries upward into the arch the vertical lines of the window. From this point the lateral masses of foliage take up the drooping curve and unite it to the arch, and this curve is strongly reinforced by the building up toward either side of the foreground groups and by the disposition of the arms of Sappho and of the poets immediately behind her, while, to disguise its formality, it is contradicted by the long line of Sappho’s body, which echoes that of the bearded poet immediately to the right of the window and gives a sweep to the left to the whole lower part of the composition. It is the immediate and absolute solution of the problem, and so small a thing as the scarf of the back-turned Muse plays its necessary part in it, balancing, as it does, the arm of the Muse who stands highest on the left and establishing one of a number of subsidiary garlands that play through and bind together the wonderful design.

[Illustration: Plate 15.—Raphael. “Parnassus.” In the Vatican.]

The window in the opposite wall is to one side of the middle, and here Raphael meets the new problem with a new solution. He places a separate picture in each of the unequal rectangles, carries a simulated cornice across at the level of the window head, and paints, in the segmental lunette thus left, the so-called “Jurisprudence” (Pl. 16), which seems to many decorators the most perfect piece of decorative design that even Raphael ever created—the most perfect piece of design, therefore, in the world. Its subtlety of spacing, its exquisiteness of line, its monumental simplicity, rippled through with a melody of falling curves from end to end, are beyond description—the

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reader must study them for himself in the illustration. One thing he might miss were not his attention called to it—the ingenious way in which the whole composition is adjusted to a diagonal axis that the asymmetry of the wall may be minimized. Draw an imaginary straight line from the boss in the soffit of the arch through the middle of the Janus-head of Prudence. It will accurately bisect the central group, composed of this figure and her two attendant genii, will pass through her elevated left knee, the centre of a system of curves, and the other end of it will strike the top of the post or mullion that divides the window opening into two parts.

[Illustration: Plate 16.—Raphael. “Jurisprudence.” In the Vatican.]

This single room, the Camera della Segnatura, marks the brief blossoming time of Raphael's art, an art consummate in science yet full of a freshness and spontaneity—the dew still upon it—as wonderful as its learning. The master himself could not duplicate it. He tried for Venetian warmth of color in the “Mass of Bolsena” (Pl. 17) and experimented with tricks of illumination in the “Deliverance of Peter” (Pl. 18), and in these two compositions, struck out new and admirable ways of filling pierced lunettes. The balancing, in the one, of the solitary figure of the pope against the compact group of seven figures—a group that has to be carried up above the curved screen in order to counteract the importance given to Julius by his isolation and by the greater mass of his supporting group below—is a triumph of arrangement; and here, again, it is notable that the bleeding wafer, the necessary centre of interest, is situated on a straight line drawn diagonally from the keystone of the arch to the centre of the window head, and almost exactly half-way between these two points, while the great curve of the screen leads to it from either side. In the symmetrically pierced lunette opposite, the distribution of the space into three distinct but united pictures, the central one seen through the grating of the prison, is a highly ingenious and, on the whole, an acceptable variant on previous inventions. But these two are the last of the Vatican frescoes that show Raphael's infallible instinct as a composer. He grows tired, exaggerates his mannerisms, gives a greater and greater share of the work to his pupils. The later Stanze are either pompous or confused, or both, until we reach the higgledy-piggledy of the “Burning of the Borgo” or that inextricable tangle, suggestive of nothing so much as of a dish of macaroni, the “Battle of Constantine,” a picture painted after the master's death, but for which he probably left something in the way of sketches.

[Illustration: Plate 17.—Raphael. “The Mass of Bolsena.” In the Vatican.]

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Yet even in what seems this decadence of his talent Raphael only needed a new problem to revive his admirable powers in their full splendor. In 1514 he painted the “Sibyls” (Pl. 19) of Santa Maria della Pace, in a frieze-shaped panel cut by a semicircular arch, and the new shape given him to fill inspired a composition as perfect in itself and as indisputably the only right one for the place as anything he ever did. Among his latest works were the pendentives of the Farnesina, with the story of Cupid and Psyche—works painted and even drawn by his pupils, coarse in types and heavy in color but altogether astonishing in freedom and variety of design. The earlier painters covered their vaulting with ornamental patterns in which spaces were reserved for independent pictures, like the rectangles of the Stanza della Segnatura. It was a bold innovation when Michelangelo discarded this system and placed in the pendentives of the Sistine his colossal figures of the Prophets and the Sibyls, each on its architectural throne. It was reserved for Raphael to take a step that no earlier painter could have dreamed of and to fill these triangular spaces with free groups relieved against a clear sky which is the continuous background of the whole series. One may easily think the earlier system more architecturally fitting, but the skill with which these groups are composed, their perfect naturalness, their exhaustless variety, the perfection with which they fill these awkward shapes, as it were inevitably and without effort, is nothing short of amazing. It is decoration of a festal and informal order—the decoration of a kind of summer house, fitted for pleasure, rather than of a stately chamber—but it is decoration the most consummate, the fitting last word of the greatest master of decorative design that the world has seen.

[Illustration: Plate 18.—Raphael. “The Deliverance of Peter.” In the Vatican.]

It is this master designer that is the real Raphael, and, but for the element of design always present in the least of his works, the charming illustrator, the mere “painter of Madonnas,” might be allowed to sink comfortably into artistic oblivion without cause for protest. But there is another Raphael we could spare less easily, Raphael the portrait-painter. The great decorators have nearly always been great portrait-painters as well, although—perhaps because—there is little resemblance between the manner of feeling and working necessary for success in the two arts. The decorator, constantly occupied with relations of line and space which have little to do with imitation, finds in the submissive attention to external fact necessary to success in portraiture a source of refreshment and of that renewed contact with nature which is constantly necessary to art if it is not to become too arid an abstraction. Certainly it was so with Raphael, and the master of design has left us a series of portraits comparable only to those of that other great designer whose fate

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was to leave little but portraits behind him, Hans Holbein. Allowing for the necessary variation of type and costume in their models and for the difference between an Italian and a northern education, their methods are singularly alike. Raphael has greater elegance and feeling for style, Holbein a richer color sense and, above all, a finer craftsmanship, an unapproachable material perfection. They have the same quiet, intense observation, the same impeccable accuracy, the same preoccupation with the person before them and with nothing else—an individuality to be presented with all it contains, neither more nor less—to be rendered entirely, and without flattery as without caricature. There have been portrait-painters who were greater painters, in the more limited sense of the word, than these two, and there has been at least one painter whose imaginative sympathy gave an inner life to his portraits absent from theirs, but in the essential qualities of portraiture, as distinguished from all other forms of art, perhaps no one else has quite equalled them. One can give no greater praise to the “Castiglione” or the “Donna Velata” than to say that they are fit to hang beside the “Georg Gyze” or the “Christina of Milan”; and at least one portrait by Raphael, the “Tommaso Inghirami,” in the collection of Mrs. Gardner (Pl. 20)—the original of which the picture in the Pitti Palace is a replica—has a beauty of surface and of workmanship almost worthy of Holbein himself.

[Illustration: Plate 19.—Raphael. “The Sibyls.” Santa Maria della Pace, Rome.]

[Illustration: Plate 20.—Raphael. “Portrait of Tommaso Inghirami.” In the collection of Mrs. Gardner.]

Raphael’s portraits alone, had he done nothing else, would justify a great reputation, but they form so relatively small a part of his work that they may almost be neglected in examining his claims to the rank that used to be assigned him among the world’s greatest artists. It is, after all, his unique mastery of composition that is his chief title to fame, and his glory must always be in proportion to the estimation in which that quality is held. It was because composition was to him a comparatively unimportant part of painting that Velazquez thought little of Raphael. It is because, for them, composition, as a distinct element of art, has almost ceased to exist that so many modern painters and critics decry Raphael altogether. The decorators have always known that design is the essence of their art, and therefore they have always appreciated the greatest of designers. That is why Paul Baudry, in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, idolized Raphael and based his own art upon that of the great Umbrian. To-day, in our own country, mural decoration is again becoming a living art, and the desire for the appropriate decoration of important buildings with monumental works of painting is more wide-spread, perhaps, than it has been anywhere at any time since the Italian Renaissance. So surely as the interest in decorative painting and the knowledge of its true principles become more widely spread, so surely will the name of Raphael begin to shine again with something of its ancient splendor.



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But design is something more than the essential quality of mural decoration—it is the common basis of all the arts, the essential thing in art itself. Each of the arts has its qualities proper to it alone, and it may be right to estimate the painter, the sculptor, the architect, or the musician according to his eminence in those qualities which are distinctive of his particular art and which separate it most sharply from the other arts. In that sense we are right to call Frans Hals a greater painter than Raphael. But if we estimate a man's artistry by the same standard, whatever the form of art in which it expresses itself, rating him by his power of co-ordinating and composing notes or forms or colors into a harmonious and beautiful unity, then must we place Raphael pretty near where he used to be placed, admitting but a choice few of the very greatest to any equality with him. If we no longer call him "the prince of painters" we must call him one of the greatest artists among those who have practised the art of painting.

V

TWO WAYS OF PAINTING

Among the modern paintings in the Metropolitan Museum is a brilliant and altogether remarkable little picture by John Sargent, entitled "The Hermit" (Pl. 21). Mr. Sargent is a portrait-painter by vocation, and the public knows him best as a penetrating and sometimes cruel reader of human character. He is a mural painter by avocation and capable, on occasion, of a monumental formality. In this picture, as in the wonderful collection of watercolors in the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, one fancies one sees the essential John Sargent, working for himself alone without regard to external demands, and doing what he really cares most to do. In such work he is a modern of the moderns and, in the broadest sense of the word, a thorough Impressionist. Not that he shows himself a disciple of Monet or occupies himself with the broken touch or the division of tones—his method is as direct as that of Sorolla and his impressionism is of the same kind—a bending of all his energies to the vivid realization of the effect of the scene rendered as one might perceive it in the first flash of vision if one came upon it unexpectedly. This picture is better than Sorolla—it is better than almost any one. It is perhaps the most astonishing realization of the modern ideal, the most accomplished transcript of the actual appearance of nature, that has yet been produced. It is because of its great merit, because of its extraordinary success in what it attempts, that it leads one to the serious consideration of the nature of the attempt and of the gain and loss involved in the choice that modern art has made.

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The picture is exactly square—the choice of this form is, of itself, typically modern in its unexpectedness—and represents a bit of rough wood interior under intense sunlight. The light is studied for its brilliancy rather than for its warmth, and if the picture has a fault, granted the point of view of the painter, it is in a certain coldness of color; but such conditions of glaring and almost colorless light do exist in nature. One sees a few straight trunks of some kind of pine or larch, a network of branches and needles, a tumble of moss-spotted and lichened rocks, a confusion of floating lights and shadows, and that is all. The conviction of truth is instantaneous—it is an actual bit of nature, just as the painter found it. One is there on that ragged hillside, half dazzled by the moving spots of light, as if set down there suddenly, with no time to adjust one's vision. Gradually one's eyes clear and one is aware, first of a haggard human head with tangled beard and unkempt hair, then of an emaciated body. There is a man in the wood! And then—did they betray themselves by some slight movement?—there are a couple of slender antelopes who were but now invisible and who melt into their surroundings again at the slightest inattention. It is like a pictorial demonstration of protective coloring in men and animals.

[Illustration: Plate 21.—Sargent. “The Hermit.” In the Metropolitan Museum of Art.]

Now, almost any one can see how superbly all this is rendered. Any one can marvel at and admire the free and instantaneous handling, the web of slashing and apparently meaningless brush strokes which, at a given distance, take their places by a kind of magic and *are* the things they represent. But it takes a painter to know how justly it is observed. In these days no painter, whatever may be his deepest convictions, can escape the occasional desire to be modern; and most of us have attempted, at one time or another, the actual study of the human figure in the open air. We have taken our model into a walled garden or a deep wood or the rocky ravine of a brook and have set ourselves seriously to find out what a naked man or woman really looks like in the setting of outdoor nature. And we have found just what Sargent has painted. The human figure, as a figure, has ceased to exist. Line and structure and all that we have most cared for have disappeared. Even the color of flesh has ceased to count, and the most radiant blond skin of the fairest woman has become an insignificant pinkish spot no more important than a stone and not half so important as a flower. Humanity is absorbed into the landscape.

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Obviously, there are two courses open to the painter. If he is a modern by feeling and by training, full of curiosity and of the scientific temper, caring more for the investigation of the aspects of nature and the rendering of natural light and atmosphere than for the telling of a story or the construction of a decoration, he will, if he is able enough, treat his matter much as Sargent has treated it. The figure will become, for him, only an incident in the landscape. It will be important only as a thing of another texture and another color, valuable for the different way in which it receives the light and reflects the sky, just as rocks and foliage and water and bare earth are valuable. For to the true Impressionist light and atmosphere are the only realities, and objects exist only to provide surfaces for the play of light and atmosphere. He will abandon all attempt at rendering the material and physical significance of the human form and will still less concern himself with its spiritual significance. He will gain a great vividness of illusion, and he may console himself for what he loses with the reflection that he has expressed the true relation of man to the universe—that he has expressed either man's insignificance or man's oneness with nature, according as his temper is pessimistic or optimistic.

If, on the other hand, the painter is one to whom the figure as a figure means much; one to whom line and bulk and modelling are the principal means of expression, and who cares for the structure and stress of bone and muscle; if the glow and softness of flesh appeal strongly to him; above all, if he has the human point of view and thinks of his figures as people engaged in certain actions, having certain characters, experiencing certain states of mind and body; then he will give up the struggle with the truths of aspect that seem so vital to the painter of the other type and, by a frank use of conventions, will seek to increase the importance of his figure at the expense of its surroundings. He will give it firmer lines and clearer edges, will strengthen its light and shade, will dwell upon its structure or its movement and expression. He will so compose his landscape as to subordinate it to his figure and will make its lines echo and accentuate that figure's action or repose. When he has accomplished his task he will have painted not man insignificant before nature but man dominating nature.

For an example of this way of representing man's relation to the world about him, let us take Titian's "Saint Jerome" (Pl. 22)—a picture somewhat similar to Sargent's in subject and in the relative size of the figure and its surroundings. Titian has here given more importance to the landscape than was common in his day. He also has meant, as Sargent has, to make a great deal of the wilderness to which his saint has retired, and to make his saint a lonely human being in a savage place. But the saint and his emotion is, after all, what interests

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Titian most, and the wildness of nature is valuable to him mainly for its sympathy with this emotion. He wants to give a single powerful feeling and to give it with the utmost dramatic force—to give it theatrically even, one might admit of this particular picture; for it is by no means so favorable an example of Titian's method, or of the older methods of art in general, as is Sargent's "Hermit" of the modern way of seeing and painting. To attain this end he simplifies and arranges everything. He lowers the pitch of his coloring to a sombre glow and concentrates the little light upon his kneeling figure. He spends all his knowledge on so drawing and modelling that figure as to make you feel to the utmost its bulk and reality and the strain upon its muscles and tendons, and he so places everything else on his canvas as to intensify its action and expression. The gaze of the saint is fixed upon a crucifix high on the right of the picture, and the book behind him, the lines of the rocks, the masses of the foliage, even the general formation of the ground, are so disposed as to echo and reinforce the great diagonal. There is a splendid energy of invention in the drawing of the tree stems, but the effect is clear and simple with nothing of Sargent's dazzle and confusion. As for the lion, he is a mere necessary mark of identification, and Titian has taken no interest in him.

[Illustration: Plate 22.—Titian. "St. Jerome in the Desert." In the Brera Gallery, Milan.]

Now, it is evident that there is not nearly so much literal truth to the appearance of nature in this picture as in Sargent's. It is not only that it would never have occurred to Titian to try to paint the glittering spottiness of sunlight splashing through leafage, or to attempt to raise his key of light to something like that of nature, at the cost of fulness of color. It is not merely that he translates and simplifies and neglects certain truths that the world had not yet learned to see. He deliberately and intentionally falsifies. He knew as well as we do that a natural landscape would not arrange itself in such lines and masses for the purpose of throwing out the figure and of enhancing its emotion. But to him natural facts were but so much material, to be treated as he pleased for the carrying out of his purpose. He was a colorist and a chiaroscurist; and he had a great deal more interest in light and in landscape than most of the painters of his time. If he had been pre-eminently a draughtsman, like Michelangelo, he would have reduced his light and shade to the amount strictly necessary to give that powerful modelling of the figure which is the draughtsman's means of expression, would have greatly increased the relative size and importance of the figure, and would have reduced the landscape to a barely intelligible symbol. Had he been a linealist, like Botticelli, he would have eliminated modelling almost altogether, would have concentrated his attention upon the edges of things, and would have reduced his picture to a flat pattern in which the beauty and expressiveness of the lines should be almost the only attraction.

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For all art is an exchange of gain against loss—you cannot have Sargent's truth of impression and Titian's truth of emotion in the same picture, nor Michelangelo's beauty of structure with Botticelli's beauty of line. To be a successful artist is to know what you want and to get it at any necessary sacrifice, though the greatest artists maintain a noble balance and sacrifice no more than is necessary. And if a painter of to-day is like-minded with these older masters he will have to express himself much in their manner. He will have to make, with his eyes open, the sacrifices which they made, more or less unconsciously, and to deny a whole range of truths with which his fellows are occupied that he may express clearly and forcibly the few truths which he has chosen.

All truths are good, and all ways of painting are legitimate that are necessary to the expression of any truth. I am not here concerned to show that one way is better than another or one set of truths more important than another set of truths. For the present I am desirous only of showing why there is more than one way—of explaining the necessity of different methods for the expression of different individualities and different ways of envisaging nature and art. But a little while ago it was the modern or impressionistic manner that needed explanation. It was new, it was revolutionary, and it was misunderstood and disliked. A generation of critics has been busy in explaining it, a generation of artists has been busy in practising it, and now the balance has turned the other way. The pressure of conformity is upon the other side, and it is the older methods that need justification and explanation. The prejudices of the workers and the writers have gradually and naturally become the prejudices of at least a part of the public, and it has become necessary to show that the small minority of artists who still follow the old roads do so not from ignorance or stupidity or a stolid conservatism, still less from mere wilful caprice, but from necessity, because those roads are the only ones that can lead them where they wish to go. No more magnificent demonstration of the qualities possible to the purely modern methods of painting has been made than this brilliant little picture of Sargent's. All the more is it a demonstration of the qualities impossible to these methods. If such qualities have any permanent value and interest for the modern world it is a gain for art that some painters should try to keep alive the methods that render possible their attainment.

VI

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL

In the catalogues of our museums you may find entries like this: "John Smith, American school; The Empty Jug" or what-not. In such entries little more than a bare statement of nationality is intended. John Smith is an American, by birth or adoption; that is all that the statement is meant to convey. But the question occurs: Have we an American school in a more specific sense than this? Have we a body of painters with certain traits in common and certain differences from the painters of other countries? Has our production in painting sufficient homogeneity and sufficient national and local accent to

entitle it to the name of American school in the sense in which there is, undoubtedly, a French school and an English school?



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Under the conditions of to-day there are no longer anywhere such distinctive local schools as existed in the Renaissance. In Italy, in those days, there were not only such great schools as the Venetian, the Florentine, and the Umbrian, differing widely in their point of view, their manner of seeing, and their technical traditions—each little town had a school with something characteristic that separated its painters from those of other schools in the surrounding towns. To-day every one knows and is influenced by the work of every one else, and it is only broad national characteristics that still subsist. Modern pictures are singularly alike, but, on the whole, it is still possible to tell an English picture from a French one, and a German or Italian picture from either. We may still speak of a Dutch school or a Spanish school with some reasonableness. Is it similarly and equally reasonable to speak of an American school? Does a room full of American pictures have a different look from a room full of pictures by artists of any other nationality? Does one feel that the pictures in such a room have a something in common that makes them kin and a something different that distinguishes them from the pictures of all other countries? I think the answer must be in the affirmative.

We have already passed the stage of mere apprenticeship, and it can no longer be said that our American painters are mere reflections of their European masters. Twenty or even ten years ago there may have been some truth in the accusation. To-day many of our younger painters have had no foreign training at all, or have had such as has left no specific mark of a particular master; and from the work of most of our older painters it would be difficult to guess who their masters were without reference to a catalogue. They have, through long work in America and under American conditions, developed styles of their own bearing no discoverable resemblance to the styles of their first instructors. To take specific examples, who would imagine from the mural paintings of Blashfield or the decorations by Mowbray in the University Club of New York that either had been a pupil of Bonnat? Or who, looking at the exquisite landscapes or delicate figure pieces of Weir, would find anything to recall the name of Gerome? Some of the pupils of Carolus Duran are almost the only painters we have who acquired in their school-days a distinctive method of work which still marks their production, and even they are hardly distinguishable to-day from others; for the method of Duran, as modified and exemplified by John Sargent, has become the method of all the world, and a pupil of Carolus simply paints in the modern manner, like the rest. Those American painters who have adopted the impressionist point of view, again, have modified its technic to suit their own purposes and are at least as different from the Impressionists of France as are the Impressionists of Scandinavia. We have painters who are undeniably

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influenced by Whistler, but so have other countries—the school of Whistler is international—and, after all, Whistler was an American. In short, the resemblances between American painting and the painting of other countries are to-day no greater than the resemblances between the painting of any two of those countries. And I think the differences between American painting and that of other countries are quite as great as, if not greater than, the differences between the paintings of any two of those countries.

Another accusation that used to be heard against our painters has been out-lived. We used to be told, with some truth, that we had learned to paint but had nothing to say with our painting, that we produced admirable studies but no pictures. The accusation never was true of our landscape-painting. Whatever may be the final estimation of the works of Inness and Wyant, there can be no doubt that they produced pictures—things conceived and worked out to give one definite and complete impression; things in which what was presented and what was eliminated were equally determined by a definite purpose; things in which accident and the immediate dominance of nature had little or no part. As for Winslow Homer, whether in landscape or figure painting, his work was unfailingly pictorial, whatever else it might be. He was a great and original designer, and every canvas of his was completely and definitely composed—a quality which at once removes from the category of mere sketches and studies even his slighter and more rapid productions. And our landscape-painters of to-day are equally painters of pictures. Some of them might be thought, by a modern taste, too conventionally painters of pictures—too much occupied with composition and tone and other pictorial qualities at the expense of freshness of observation—while our briskest and most original observers have, many of them, a power of design and a manner of casting even their freshest observations into pictorial form that is as admirable as it is remarkable.

No one could enter one of our exhibitions without feeling the definitely pictorial quality of American landscape-painting, but these exhibitions do less justice to the achievement of our figure-painters. The principal reason for this is that many of our most serious figure-painters have been so much occupied with mural decoration that their work seldom appears in the exhibitions at all, while the work that they have done is so scattered over our vast country that we rather forget its existence and, assuredly, have little realization of its amount. It is one of the defects of our exhibition system that work of this kind, while it is, of course, on permanent exhibition in the place for which it is painted, is hardly ever “exhibited,” in the ordinary sense, in the centres where it is produced. The regular visitor to the Paris salons might know almost all that has been done in France in the way of mural painting.

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The public of our American exhibitions knows only vaguely and by hearsay what our mural painters have done and are doing. It is true that such work is infinitely better seen in place, but it is a pity it cannot be seen, even imperfectly, by the people who attend our exhibitions—people who can rarely have the necessary knowledge to read such collections of sketches, studies, and photographs as are shown at the exhibitions of the Architectural League, where, alone, our mural painters can show anything. If it were seen it would surely alter the estimation in which American figure-painting is held. Such work as was done by the late John La Farge, such work as is being done by Blashfield and Mowbray and Simmons and a dozen others, if not, in the most limited sense of the word, pictorial, is even further removed from the mere sketch or study—the mere bit of good painting—than is the finest easel picture.

But it is not only in mural decoration that serious figure-painting is being done in this country. I do not see how any one can deny the name of pictures to the genre paintings of Mr. Tarbell and Mr. Paxton unless he is prepared to deny pictorial quality to the whole Dutch school of the seventeenth century; and the example of these men is influencing a number of others toward the production of thoroughly thought-out and executed genre pictures. We have long had such serious figure-painters as Thayer and Brush, Dewing and Weir. The late Louis Loeb was attempting figure subjects of a very elaborate sort. To-day every exhibition shows an increasing number of worthy efforts at figure-painting in either the naturalistic or the ideal vein. We have pictures with subjects intelligently chosen and intelligibly treated, pictures with a pattern and a clear arrangement of line and mass, pictures soundly drawn and harmoniously colored as well as admirably painted.

The painters of America are no longer followers of foreign masters or students learning technic and indifferent to anything else. They are a school producing work differing in character from that of other schools and at least equal in quality to that of any school existing to-day.

If so much may be taken as proved, the question remains for consideration: What are the characteristics of the American school of painting? Its most striking characteristic is one that may be considered a fault or a virtue according to the point of view and the prepossessions of the observer. It is a characteristic that has certainly been a cause of the relatively small success of American work at recent international exhibitions. The American school is, among the schools of to-day, singularly old-fashioned. This characteristic has, undoubtedly, puzzled and repelled the foreigner. It is a time when the madness for novelty seems to be carrying everything before it, when anything may be accepted so long as it is or seems new, when the effort of all artists is to get rid of conventions and to shake off the

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“shackles of tradition.” Here is a new people in the blessed state of having no traditions to shake off and from whom, therefore, some peppery wildness might be expected for the tickling of jaded palates. Behold, they are sturdily setting themselves to recover for art the things the others have thrown away! They are trying to revive the old fashion of thoughtful composition, the old fashion of good drawing, the old fashion of lovely color, and the old fashion of sound and beautiful workmanship.

This conservatism of American painting, however, is not of the kind that still marks so much of the painting of England. Excepting exceptions, English painting is somewhat stolidly staying where it was. America’s conservatism is ardent, determined, living. It is not standing still; it is going somewhere as rapidly as possible—it might, perhaps, be more truly called not conservatism but reaction. We have, of course, our ultramodernists, but their audacities are mild compared to those of the French or German models they imitate. We have, even more of course, the followers of the easiest way—the practitioners of current and accepted methods who are alike everywhere. But our most original and most distinguished painters, those who give the tone to our exhibitions and the national accent to our school, are almost all engaged in trying to get back one or another of the qualities that marked the great art of the past. They have gone back of the art of the day and are retying the knots that should bind together the art of all ages.

This tendency shows itself strongly even in those whose work seems, at first sight, most purely naturalistic or impressionistic. Among those of our painters who have adopted and retained the impressionist technic, with its hatching of broken colors, the two most notable are Mr. Hassam and Mr. Weir. But Mr. Hassam, at his best, is a designer with a sense of balance and of classic grace almost equal to that of Corot, and he often uses the impressionist method to express otherwise the delicate shimmer of thin foliage that Corot loved. Nay, so little is he a pure naturalist, he cannot resist letting the white sides of naked nymphs gleam among his tree trunks—he cannot refrain from the artist’s immemorial dream of Arcady. As for Mr. Weir, surely nothing could be more unlike the instantaneousness of true impressionism than his long-brooded-over, subtle-toned, infinitely sensitive art.

There is little dreaminess in the work of Mr. Tarbell and the growing number of his followers. Theirs is almost a pure naturalism, a “making it like.” Yet, notably in the work of Mr. Tarbell himself, and to some extent in that of the others, there is an elegance of arrangement, a thoroughness in the notation of gradations of light, a beauty and a charm that were learned of no modern. Their art is an effort to bring back the artistic quality of the most artistic naturalism ever practised, that of Vermeer of Delft.

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Others of our artists are going still further back in the history of art for a part of their inspiration. Mr. Brush has always been a linealist and a student of form, but his earlier canvases, admirable as they were, were those of a docile pupil of Gerome applying the thoroughness of Gerome's method to a new range of subjects and painting the American Indian as Gerome had painted the modern Egyptian. In recent years each new picture of his has shown more clearly the influence of the early Italians—each has been more nearly a symphony of pure line.

Even in purely technical matters our painters have been experimenting backward, trying to recover lost technical beauties. The last pictures of Louis Loeb were underpainted throughout in monochrome, the final colors being applied in glazes and rubbings, and to-day a number of others, landscape and figure painters, are attempting to restore and master this, the pure Venetian method, while still others, among them Emil Carlsen, are reviving the use of tempera.

But it is in our mural painting even more than elsewhere that the conservative or reactionary tendency of American painting is most clearly marked. John La Farge was always himself, but when the general movement in mural painting began in this country with the Chicago World's Fair and the subsequent decoration of the Library of Congress, the rest of us were much under the influence of Puvis de Chavannes. Even then the design was not his, but was founded on earlier examples of decorative composition, but his pale tones were everywhere. Little by little the study of the past has taught us better. American mural painting has grown steadily more monumental in design, and at the same time it has grown richer and fuller in color. To-day, while it is not less but more personal and original than it was, it has more kinship with the noble achievements of Raphael and Veronese than has any other modern work extant.

And this brings us to the second characteristic of the American school of painting: it is rapidly becoming a school of color. We have still plenty of painters who work in the blackish or chalky or muddy and opaque tones of modern art, but I think we have more men who produce rich and powerful color and more men who produce subtle and delicate color than any other modern school. The experiments in reviving old technical methods have been undertaken for the sake of purity and luminosity of color and have largely succeeded. The pictures of Mr. Tarbell are far more colored than those of the European painter whose work is, in some ways, most analogous to his, M. Joseph Bail. Mr. Hassam's color is always sparkling and brilliant, Mr. Dewing's delicate and charming, Mr. Weir's subtle and harmonious and sometimes very full. Even Mr. Brush's linear arrangements are clothed in sombre but often richly harmonious tones, and the decorative use of powerful color is the main reliance of such painters as Hugo Ballin. But the note of color runs through the school and one hardly needs to name individual men. Whether our landscapists glaze and scumble with the tonalists, or use some modification of the impressionist hatching, it is for the sake of color; and even our most forthright and dashing wielders of the big brush often achieve a surprising power of resonant coloring.

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Power, fulness, and beauty of coloring are hardly modern qualities. Much as impressionism has been praised for restoring color to a colorless art, its result has been, too often, to substitute whitishness for blackishness. Color has characterized no modern painting since that of Delacroix and Millet as it characterizes much of the best American painting. The love for and the success in color of our school is, after all, a part of its conservatism.

It may seem an odd way of praising a modern school to call it the least modern of any. It *would* be an odd way of praising that school if its lack of modernness were a mere matter of lagging behind or of standing still and marking time. But if the “march of progress” has been down-hill—if the path that is trod leads into a swamp or over a precipice—then there may be most hopefulness for those who can 'bout face and march the other way. I have, elsewhere in this volume, given at some length some of my reasons for thinking that modern art has been following a false route and is in danger of perishing in the bog or falling over the cliff. If it is so we may congratulate ourselves that those of our painters who are still following the rest of the world have not so nearly reached the end of the road, and that those who are more independent have discovered in time what that end is and have turned back.

It is because it is least that of to-day that I believe our art may be that of to-morrow—it is because it is, of all art now going, that which has most connection with the past that I hope the art of America may prove to be the art of the future.

VII

AUGUSTUS SAINT-GAUDENS[C]

[C] Address delivered before the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences on February 22, 1908. Now revised and enlarged.

Augustus Saint-Gaudens was born in Dublin, Ireland, on the first day of March, 1848, but was brought to America at the age of six months. His childhood and youth were passed in the city of New York, as was a great part of his working life; and though his origin was foreign, lifelong associations had stamped him indelibly an American. The greater part of his work was done in America; almost all of it was done for America; and I do not think it is fancy that sees in his art the expression of a distinctively American spirit. Yet from his mixed French and Irish blood he may well have derived that mingling of the Latin sense of form with a Celtic depth of sentiment which was so markedly characteristic of his genius.

His father, Bernard Paul Ernest Saint-Gaudens, was a shoemaker from the little town of Aspet in Haute-Garonne, only a few miles from the town of Saint-Gaudens, from which the family must have drawn its origin and its name. His mother was Mary McGuinness,

a native of Dublin. Augustus Saint-Gaudens was one of several children born to this couple and not the only artist among them, for his younger brother Louis also

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attained some reputation as a sculptor, though his entire lack of ambition prevented his achieving all that was expected of him by those who knew his delicate talent. The boy Augustus attended the public schools of New York and received there all the formal education he ever had; but at thirteen it was necessary for him to face the problem of earning his living. His artistic proclivities were probably already well marked, and to give them some scope, while assuring him a regular trade at which money could be earned, he was apprenticed in the good old way to a cameo cutter named Louis Avet, said to be the first man to cut stone cameos in the United States. Thus it came about that the greatest of American sculptors had much such a practical apprenticeship as a Florentine of the fifteenth century might have had. He himself always spoke of it as "one of the most fortunate things that ever happened to him" and attributed much of his success to the habit of faithful labor acquired at this time. Probably, also, the habit of thinking in terms of relief, fostered by years of work at this ancient art, was not without influence in the moulding of his talent.

His relations with Avet lasted from 1861 to 1864, when his master quarrelled with him and abruptly dismissed him from his shop. The boy was already a determined person; he believed that he had suffered an injustice, and, though Avet went to his parents and tried to induce them to send him back, he refused to return. A new master was found for him in the person of a shell-cameo cutter named Jules LeBrethon, and with him Saint-Gaudens remained three years. During his six years' apprenticeship under his two masters the youth showed already that energy and power of will that made him what he was. He meant to be something more than an artisan, and he spent his evenings in the classes, first of the Cooper Union, afterward of the National Academy of Design, in the hard study of drawing, the true foundation of all the fine arts. It was one of the elements of his superiority in his profession that he could draw as few sculptors can, and he always felt that he owed an especial debt to the Cooper Union, which he was glad to repay when he modelled the statue of its venerable founder. Of the other institution by whose freely given instruction he had profited, the National Academy of Design, he became one of the most honored members. By 1867, when he was nineteen years old, he had saved a little money and was master of a trade that could be relied on to bring in more, and he determined to go to Paris and begin the serious study of sculpture. He worked, for a time, at the Petite Ecole, and entered the studio of Jouffroy in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1868, remaining until 1870. During this time, and afterward, he was self-supporting, working half his time at cameo cutting until his efforts at sculpture on a larger scale began to bring in an income.

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When the Franco-Prussian War broke out Paris ceased to be a place for the carrying on of the serious study of art, and Saint-Gaudens went to Rome, where his associates were the French prizemen of the day, of whom Mercie was one. He remained there until 1874, except for a visit to New York in the winter of 1872-3 for the purpose of modelling a bust of Senator Evarts, and one or two other busts, which were put into marble upon his return to Rome. In those Roman days he executed his first statue, a "Hiawatha," one of his few studies of the nude, and a "Silence," a not very characteristic draped figure which yet fills with some impressiveness her niche at the head of the grand stairway of the Masonic Temple on Twenty-fourth Street.

From 1875 to 1877 he had a studio in New York, where he seems to have executed some of his earliest portrait reliefs. During these years he came into contact with La Farge, for whom he turned painter and aided in the execution of the decorations of Trinity Church in Boston. It was at this time, also, that he received his first commissions for important public work, those for the Farragut statue in Madison Square, the Randall at Sailors' Snug Harbor, and the angels for Saint Thomas's Church. He had married Augusta F. Homer in 1877, and in that year, taking his bride and his commissions with him, he returned to Paris, feeling, as many another young Paris-bred artist has felt, that there only could such important works be properly carried out. The "Farragut" was completed and exhibited in the plaster at the Salon of 1880, and from that time his success was assured. For the rest of his life he was constantly busy, receiving almost more commissions for work of importance than it was possible for him to carry out. He returned to New York in 1880, and in 1881 he opened the studio in Thirty-sixth Street, where he remained for sixteen years and where so many of his greatest works were executed. From that studio came many of his exquisite portraits in relief, his caryatids and angelic figures, such as those for the Morgan tomb, so unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1882 (a fate since shared by the earlier angels of Saint Thomas's), the great statues of Lincoln and Chapin, the "Shaw Memorial," and the "Adams Memorial"; and in it was done all the preliminary work of the great equestrian monument to General Sherman.

It is in these years of his prime that he will ever be most fondly remembered by those—and they are many—who had the privilege of his friendship. Admittedly our foremost sculptor, and one of the founders of the Society of American Artists, he became at once a person of importance in the world of art; and as his brilliant career developed he established intimate relationships with an ever-widening circle of men in every walk of life, while no one who ever knew him well can have felt anything but an abiding affection for him. That long, white studio became a familiar meeting-place for all who were interested in any form of art; and the Sunday afternoon concerts that were held there for many years will be looked back to with regret as long as any of their auditors remain alive.

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This studio was given up when Saint-Gaudens went abroad for the third time, in 1897, to execute the Sherman group, and he never resumed his residence in New York. In 1885 he had purchased a property at Cornish, N.H., just across the Connecticut River from Windsor, Vt., and when he returned to this country in 1900, covered with fresh honors but an ill man, he made what had been a summer home his permanent abode. He named it Aspet, after his father's birthplace, and there he erected two studios and finished his Sherman statue. In these studios were executed the second "Lincoln," the Parnell statue for Dublin, and much other work. The larger studio was burned in 1904, but was rebuilt and the lost work re-begun and carried to a conclusion. What can never be quite replaced were two portraits of himself. A study, of the head only, in the collection of the National Academy of Design and a sketch by Will H. Low, painted in Paris in 1877, are now the only existing portraits of him done from life in his best years. The Metropolitan Museum possesses a portrait of him in his last years, by Miss Ellen Emmet, and a replica, painted since his death, of my own earlier portrait.

From the illness he brought back from Paris in 1900 Saint-Gaudens never recovered. At times he showed something of his old vigor and was able not only to do fine work but to indulge more in out-of-door sports than he had ever done in his youth, while a growing love for nature and for literature made his life fuller, in some respects, than in the days when his own art more entirely absorbed him. But year by year his strength grew less and his intervals of freedom from pain grew shorter, and he was more and more forced to rely upon the corps of able and devoted assistants which he gathered about him. He developed to an extraordinary extent the faculty of communicating his ideas and desires to others and of producing through their hands work essentially his own and of a quality entirely beyond their ability; but it was at the cost of a strain upon brain and nerve almost infinitely greater than would have been involved in work done with his own hand. In the summer of 1906 he broke down utterly, the work of his studio was interrupted, and he ceased to see even his most intimate friends. He rallied somewhat from this attack, and began again his heroic struggle against fate, directing the work of assistants while himself so weak that he had to be carried from the house to the studio. The end came on the evening of August 3, 1907. He died as he had lived, a member of no church, but a man of pure and lofty character. As he had wished, his body was cremated, and his ashes were temporarily deposited in the cemetery at Windsor, Vt., across the river from his home. An informal funeral service was held in his private studio on August 7, attended by friends and neighbors and by a few old friends from a distance; but the gathering could include but a few of the many who felt his death as a personal loss.



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The merits of Saint-Gaudens's work were fully recognized in his lifetime. He was an officer of the Legion of Honor, a Corresponding Member of the Institute of France, a member of half a dozen academies, and the bearer of honorary degrees from the universities of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. But of all the honors he received there were two, one of a public, the other of a private nature, which he himself valued most highly: the one as showing the estimation in which his art was held by his fellow artists, the other as an evidence of the personal affection felt for him by his friends. At the Pan-American Exposition in 1901, upon the unanimous recommendation of the Jury of Fine Arts, composed of painters, sculptors, and architects, he was awarded a special diploma and medal of honor, "apart from and above all other awards," an entirely exceptional honor, which marked him as the first of American artists, as previously received honors had marked him one of the greatest sculptors of his time. On June 23, 1905, the artistic and literary colony which had gradually grown up about his home in Cornish celebrated the twentieth anniversary of his coming there by a fete and open-air masque held in the groves of Aspet. The beauty of this spectacle has become almost legendary. The altar with its columned canopy, which served for a background to the play, still stands, or recently stood, though much dilapidated by weather, as it was immortalized by the sculptor himself in a commemorative plaquette (Pl. 23) which is among the most charming of his minor works. He planned if he had lived to perpetuate it in enduring marble, and this task has now been taken up by his wife, who means to dedicate the monument as a fitting memorial to a great artist and a noble man in the place he loved as his chosen home.

Some part of the vivid and lovable personality of Augustus Saint-Gaudens must have been visible, almost at a glance, to any one who ever came in contact with him—to any one, even, who ever saw his portrait. In his spare but strong-knit figure, his firm but supple hands, his manner of carrying himself, his every gesture, one felt the abounding vitality, the almost furious energy of the man. That extraordinary head, with its heavy brow beetling above the small but piercing eyes, its red beard and crisp, wiry hair, its projecting jaw and great, strongly modelled nose, was alive with power—with power of intellect no less than of will. His lack of early education gave him a certain diffidence and a distrust of his own gifts of expression. He was apt to overrate the mere verbal facility of others and to underestimate himself in the comparison—indeed, a certain humility was strongly marked in him, even as regards his art, though he was self-confident also. When he was unconstrained his great powers of observation, his shrewdness of judgment, his bubbling humor, and a picturesque vivacity of phrase not uncommon among artists made him one of the most entrancing of talkers.

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[Illustration: Copyright, De W.C. Ward. Plate 23.—Saint-Gaudens. “Plaque Commemorating Cornish Masque.”]

Underneath his humor and his gayety, however, there lay a deep-seated Celtic melancholy, and beside his energy was an infinite patience at the service of an exacting artistic conscience. The endless painstaking of his work and the time he took over it were almost proverbial. He was twelve years engaged upon the “Shaw Memorial” and eleven upon the “Sherman,” and, though he did much other work while these were in progress, yet it was his constant revision, his ever-renewed striving for perfection that kept them so long achieving. The “Diana” of the Madison Square Garden was taken down from her tower because he and the architect, Stanford White, thought her too large, and was entirely remodelled on a smaller scale. And with this patience went a gentleness, a sweetness, a delicate sensitiveness, and an abounding humanity and sympathy. He could be almost ruthless in the assertion of his will when the interests of his art or of justice seemed to demand it, yet there was a tender-heartedness in him which made it distressing to him to inflict pain on any one. The conflict of these elements in his nature sometimes made his actions seem inconsistent and indecipherable even to those who knew him. He would be long-suffering, compromising, disinclined to strike; but when he was at last roused the blow would be as staggering as it was unexpected. It was as if he struck the harder to have done with it and to spare himself the pain of striking again.

It was his whole-hearted devotion to his art which caused his rare acts of self-assertion, and it was this same devotion, no less than his natural kindness, that made him ever helpful to younger artists who showed any promise of future worth. Even in his last days of unspeakable suffering he would summon what was left of his old strength to give a word of criticism and advice, above all, a word of commendation, to any one who needed the one or had earned the other. The essential goodness of the man was most felt by those who stood nearest him, and most of all, perhaps, by his actual coworkers. He could command, as few have been able to do, the love and devotion of his assistants. To all who knew him the man himself seemed finer, rarer, sweeter than his work, and the gap he has left in their lives will be even more impossible to fill than his place in American art.

But the personality of an artist, though he be a great one, is for the memory of his private friends. It is only as it colors his art that it is of public interest. It is his art itself, his gift to the world, that the world cares for; it is of the kind and quality of that art, the nature and the degree of its greatness, that the world wishes to hear. Because the man was my friend I have wished to give some glimpse of the manner of man he was; because the artist was the greatest our country has produced I am to try to give some idea of his art, of the elements of its strength, and of the limitations which are as necessary as its qualities.



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The time of Saint-Gaudens's study in Paris was a time of great importance in the development of modern sculpture, and, although Jouffroy was not himself a sculptor of the highest rank, his studio was a centre for what was then the new movement in the sculpture of France. The essential thing in this movement was the abandoning of the formal imitation of second-rate antiques and the substitution of the sculpture of the Italian Renaissance as a source of inspiration and of the direct study of nature as a means of self-expression. There had always been individual sculptors of power and originality in France, but the movement of the French school of sculpture, as a whole, away from the pseudo classicism which had long dominated it was really inaugurated by Paul Dubois only a few years before Saint-Gaudens's arrival in Paris. Many of the men destined to a brilliant part in the history of modern sculpture were trained in the *atelier* of Jouffroy. Falguiere and Saint-Marceau had but just left that studio when the young American entered it, and Mercie was his fellow student there. Dalou and Rodin have since made these men seem old-fashioned and academic, but they were then, and for many years afterward, the heads of the new school; and of this new school, so different from anything he had known in America, Saint-Gaudens inevitably became a part. His own pronounced individuality, and perhaps his comparative isolation during the years of his greatest productivity, gave his art a character of its own, unlike any other, but to the French school of sculpture of the third quarter of the nineteenth century he essentially belonged.

Of course, his style was not formed in a moment. His "Hiawatha" seems, to-day, much such a piece of neo-classicism as was being produced by other men in the Rome of that time, and the "Silence," though somewhat more modern in accent, is an academic work such as might have been expected from a docile pupil of his master. The relief of angels for the reredos of Saint Thomas's Church is the earliest important work which shows his personal manner. It was undertaken in collaboration with John La Farge, and perhaps the influence of La Farge, and of that eminently picturesque genius Stanford White, mingled with that of the younger French school in forming its decorative and almost pictorial character. It was a kind of improvisation, done at prodigious speed and without study from nature—a sketch rather than a completed work of art, but a sketch to be slowly developed into the reliefs of the Farragut pedestal, the angels of the Morgan tomb, the caryatids of the Vanderbilt mantelpiece, and, at length, into such a masterpiece as the "Amor-Caritas." In each of these developments the work becomes less picturesque and more formal, the taste is purified, the exuberance of decorative feeling is more restrained. The final term is reached in the caryatids for the Albright Gallery at Buffalo—works of his last days, when his hands were no longer able to shape the clay, yet essentially his though he never touched them; works of an almost austere nobility of style, the most grandly monumental figures he ever produced.



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The commonest criticism on Saint-Gaudens's art has been that it is not, primarily, sculptural in its inspiration; and, in a sense, the criticism is justified. One need not, perhaps, greatly care whether it is true or not. It is, after all, only a matter of definition, and if we were forbidden to call his work sculpture at all and required to find another name for it, the important fact that it is art—art of the finest, the most exquisite, at times the most powerful—would in no wise be altered. Ghiberti went beyond the traditions of sculpture in relief, introduced perspective into his compositions, modelled trees and rocks and clouds and cast them in bronze, made pictures, if you like, instead of reliefs. Does any one care? Is it not enough that they are beautiful pictures? The gates of the Baptistry of Florence are still worthy, as the greatest sculptor since the Greeks thought them, to be the gates of paradise. A work of art remains a work of art, call it what you please, and a thing of beauty will be a joy forever, whether or not you can pigeonhole it in some ready-made category. After all, the critical pigeonholes are made for the things, not the things for the pigeonholes. The work is there, and if it does not fit your preconceived definition the fault is as likely to be in the definition as in the work itself.

And the first and most essential thing to note about the art of Augustus Saint-Gaudens is that it is always art of the purest—free in an extraordinary degree from the besetting sins of naturalism and the scientific temper on the one hand and of the display of cleverness and technical brilliancy on the other. Never more than in our own day have these been the great temptations of an able artist: that he should in the absorption of study forget the end in the means and produce demonstrations of anatomy or of the laws of light rather than statues or pictures; or that he should, in the joy of exercising great talents, seem to say, "See how well I can do it!" and invent difficulties for the sake of triumphantly resolving them, becoming a virtuoso rather than a creator. Of the meaner temptation of mere sensationalism—the desire to attract attention by ugliness and eccentricity lest one should be unable to secure it by truth and beauty—one need not speak. It is the temptation of vulgar souls. But great and true artists have yielded, occasionally or habitually, to these other two; Saint-Gaudens never does. I know no work of his to which raw nature has been admitted, in which a piece of study has been allowed to remain as such without the moulding touch of art to subdue it to its place; and I know only one which has any spice of bravura—the Logan statue—and the bravura is there because the subject seemed to demand it, not because the artist wished it. The dash and glitter are those of "Black Jack Logan," not of Saint-Gaudens. The sculptor strove to render them as he strove to render higher qualities at other times, but they remain antipathetic to his nature, and the statue is one of the least satisfactory of his works. He is essentially the artist—the artificer of beauty—ever bent on the making of a lovely and significant thing; and the study of nature and the resources of his craft are but tools and are never allowed to become anything more.

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If, then, the accusation that Saint-Gaudens's art is not sculptural means that he was a designer rather than a modeller, that he cared for composition more than for representation, that the ensemble interested him more than the details, I would cheerfully admit that the accusation is well founded. Such marvels of rendering as Rodin could give us, before he lost himself in the effort to deserve that reputation as a profound thinker which has been thrust upon him, were not for Saint-Gaudens. The modelling of the *morceau* was not particularly his affair. The discrimination of hard and soft, of bone and muscle and integument, the expression of tension where a fleshy tissue is tightly drawn over the framework beneath, or of weight where it falls away from it—these were not the things that most compelled his interest or in which he was most successful. For the human figure as a figure, for the inherent beauty of its marvellous mechanism, he did not greatly care. The problems of bulk and mass and weight and movement which have occupied sculptors from the beginning were not especially his problems. It may have been due to the nature of the commissions he received that, after the “Hiawatha” of his student days, he modelled no nude except the “Diana” of the tower—a purely decorative figure, designed for distant effect, in which structural modelling would have been out of place because invisible. But it was not accident that in such draped figures as the “Amor-Caritas” (Pl. 24) or the caryatids of the Vanderbilt mantelpiece there is little effort to make the figure visible beneath the draperies. In the hands of a master of the figure—of one of those artists to whom the expressiveness and the beauty of the human structure is all in all—drapery is a means of rendering the masses and the movement of the figure more apparent than they would be in the nude. In such works as these it is a thing beautiful in itself, for its own ripple and flow and ordered intricacy. The figure is there beneath the drapery, but the drapery is expressive of the mood of the artist and of the sentiment of the work rather than especially explanatory of the figure.

[Illustration: Copyright, De W.C. Ward. Plate 24.—Saint-Gaudens. “Amor Caritas.”]

First of all, by nature and by training, Saint-Gaudens was a designer, and exquisiteness of design was the quality he most consciously strove for—the quality on which he expended his unresting, unending, persevering toil. From the start one feels that design is his principal preoccupation, that he is thinking mainly of the pattern of the whole, its decorative effect and play of line, its beauty of masses and spaces, its fitness for its place and its surroundings; in a word, its composition. In the beginning, as a workman in the shop of the cameo cutter, he was concerned with a kind of art in which perfection of composition is almost the sole claim to serious consideration. Then he produces a multiplicity of small reliefs,



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dainty, exquisite, infallibly charming in their arrangement—things which are so dependent on design for their very existence that they seem scarcely modelled at all. He goes on to decorative figures in the round, to heroic statues, to monumental groups, but always it is design that he thinks of first and last—design, now, in three dimensions rather than in two—design properly sculptural rather than pictorial, in so much as it deals with bosses and concaves, with solid matter in space—but still design. This power of design rises to higher uses as time goes on, is bent to the interpretation of lofty themes and the expression of deep emotions, but it is in its nature the same power that produced the delicate, ethereal beauty of the reliefs. The infinite fastidiousness of a master designer, constantly reworking and readjusting his design, that every part shall be perfect and that no fold or spray of leafage shall be out of its proper place, never satisfied that his composition is beyond improvement while an experiment remains untried—this is what cost him years of labor. His first important statue, the “Farragut,” is a masterpiece of restrained and elegant yet original and forceful design—a design, too, that includes the pedestal and the bench below, and of which the figures in bas-relief are almost as important a part as the statue itself. In later and maturer work, with a more clarified taste and a deeper feeling, he can reach such unsurpassable expressiveness of composition as is shown in the “Shaw Memorial” or the great equestrian statue of Sherman.

Saint-Gaudens’s mastery of low relief was primarily a matter of this power of design, but it was conditioned also upon two other qualities: knowledge of drawing and extreme sensitiveness to delicate modulation of surface. And by drawing I mean not merely knowledge of form and proportion and the exact rendering of these, in which sense a statue may be said to be well drawn if its measurements are correct—I mean that much more subtle and difficult art, the rendering in two dimensions only of the appearance of objects of three dimensions. Sculpture in the round is the simplest and, in a sense, the easiest of the arts. It deals with actual form—a piece of sculpture does not merely look like the form of an object, it *is* the form of an object. Leaving out of the count, for the moment, the refinements and the illusions which may be added to it—which must be added to it to make it art—it is the reproduction in another material of the actual forms of things. Something which shall answer for it, to the uninitiate, may be produced by merely casting natural objects; and there is a great deal that is called sculpture which scarcely aims at anything more than the production, by a more difficult method, of something like a plaster cast from nature. It is the very simplicity of the art that makes its difficulty, for to avoid the look of casting and achieve the feeling of art requires the most delicate handling

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and the most powerful inspiration, and there is need in the art of sculpture for the rarest qualities of the greatest minds. The art of drawing is entirely different. It is all illusion, it deals only in appearances. Its aim is to depict on a flat surface the aspect of objects supposed to stand behind it and to be seen through it, and its means are two branches of the science of optics. It is based on the study of perspective and on the study of the way light falls upon objects and reveals their shapes and the direction of their surfaces by the varying degrees of their illumination. Of this art a sculptor in the round need not necessarily know anything, and, in fact, many of them, unfortunately, know altogether too little of it. The maker of a statue need not think about foreshortenings: if he gives the correct form the foreshortening will take care of itself. Sometimes it does so in a disastrous manner! Theoretically he need not worry over light and shade, although of course he does, in practice, think about it and rely upon it, more or less. If he gives the true forms they will necessarily have the true light and shade. But low relief, standing between sculpture and drawing, is really more closely related to drawing than to sculpture—is really a kind of drawing—and this is why so few sculptors succeed in it.

It is a kind of drawing but an exceedingly difficult kind—the most delicate and difficult of any of the arts that deal with form alone. As to the contour, it stands on the same ground with drawing in any other material. The linear part of it requires exactly the same degree and the same kind of talent as linear design with a pen or with a burin. But for all that stands within the contour, for the suggestion of interior forms and the illusion of solidity, it depends on means of the utmost subtlety. It exists, as all drawing does, by light and shade, but the shadows are not produced by the mere darkening of the surface—they are produced by projections and recessions, by the inclination of the planes away from or toward the light. The lower the relief the more subtle and tender must be the variation of the surface which produces them, and therefore success in relief is one of the best attainable measures of a sculptor's fineness of touch and perfection of craftsmanship. But as the light and shade is produced by actual forms which are yet quite unlike the true forms of nature, it follows that the artist in relief can never imitate either the shape or the depth of the shadow he sees in nature. His art becomes one of suggestions and equivalents—an art which can give neither the literal truth of form nor the literal truth of aspect—an art at the farthest remove from direct representation. And success in it becomes, therefore, one of the best tests of a sculptor's artistry—of his ability to produce essential beauty by the treatment of his material, rather than to imitate successfully external fact.

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As the degree of relief varies, also, from the lowest possible to that highest relief which, nearly approaches sculpture in the round, the problems involved constantly vary. At each stage there is a new compromise to be made, a new adjustment to find, between fact and illusion, between the real form and the desired appearance. And there may be a number of different degrees of relief in the same work, even in different parts of the same figure, so that the art of relief becomes one of the most complicated and difficult of arts. It has not, indeed, the added complication of color, but neither has it the resources of color, success in which will more or less compensate for failure elsewhere. There is no permissible failure in bas-relief, any more than in sculpture in the round, and its difficulties are far greater. Nothing but truest feeling, completest knowledge, consummate skill will serve.

This explanation may give some measure of what I mean when I say that I believe Augustus Saint-Gaudens the most complete master of relief since the fifteenth century.

He has produced a series of works which run through the whole range of the art, from lowest relief to highest; from things of which the relief is so infinitesimal that they seem as if dreamed into existence rather than wrought in bronze or marble to things which are virtually engaged statues; from things which you fear a chance touch might brush away, like a pastel of Whistler's, to things as solid and enduring in appearance as in actual material. And in all these things there is the same inevitable mastery of design and of drawing, the same infinite resource and the same technical perfection. The "Butler Children" (Pl. 25), the "Schiff Children," the "Sarah Redwood Lee" (Pl. 26), to name but a few of his masterpieces of this kind, are in their perfection of spacing, their grace of line, their exquisite and ethereal illusiveness of surface, comparable only to the loveliest works of the Florentine Renaissance; while the assured mastery of the most complicated problems of relief evinced in the "Shaw Memorial"—a mastery which shows, in the result, no trace of the strenuous and long-continued effort that it cost—is unsurpassed—I had almost said unequalled—in any work of any epoch.

[Illustration: Copyright, De W.C. Ward. Plate 25.—Saint-Gaudens. "The Butler Children."]

Illustration can give but a faint idea of the special beauties of this or that particular work in this long series. It can show no more than the composition and the draughtsmanship. The refinement of workmanship, the sensitiveness and subtlety of modelling, can be appreciated only before the works themselves. And this sensitiveness and delicacy of workmanship, this mastery of the problems of relief, with its reliance on illusion and its necessary abstention from realization, is applied to sculpture in the round, and becomes with Saint-Gaudens, as it did with the sculptors of

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the Florentine Renaissance, the means of escape from the matter of fact. The concrete art of sculpture becomes an art of mystery and of suggestion—an art having affinities with that of painting. Hollows are filled up, shadows are obliterated, lines are softened or accentuated, as the effect may require, details are eliminated or made prominent as they are less or more essential and significant, as they hinder or aid the expressiveness of the whole. It is by such methods that beauty is achieved, that the most unpromising material is subdued to the purposes of art, that even our hideous modern costume may be made to yield a decorative effect. Pure sculpture, as the ancients understood it, the art of form *per se*, demands the nude figure, or a costume which reveals it rather than hides it. The costume of to-day reveals as little of the figure as possible, and, unlike mediaeval armor, it has no beauty of its own. A painter may make it interesting by dwelling on color or tone or texture, or may so lose it in shadow that it ceases to count at all except as a space of darkness. A sculptor can do none of these things, and if he is to make it serve the ends of beauty he has need of all the resourcefulness and all the skill of the master of low relief. It was fortunate that the artist whose greatest task was to commemorate the heroes of the Civil War should have had the temperament and the training of such a master, and I know of no other sculptor than Saint-Gaudens who has so magnificently succeeded in the rendering of modern clothing—no other who could have made the uniform of Farragut or the frock coat of Lincoln as interesting as the armor of Colleone or the toga of Augustus.

[Illustration: Copyright, De W.C. Ward. Plate 26.—Saint-Gaudens. “Sarah Redwood Lee.”]

But if the genius of Saint-Gaudens was primarily a decorative genius—if it was, even, in his earlier work, a trifle picturesque, so that, as he said himself, he had “to fight against picturesqueness,” his work was never pictorial. He never indulged in perspective or composed his reliefs on more than one plane; never took such liberties with the traditions of sculpture as did Ghiberti, or painted pictures in bronze or marble as more than one modern has done. His very feeling for decoration kept him from pictorial realism, and his fight against picturesqueness was nobly won. His design becomes ever cleaner and more classic; by years of work and of experience he becomes stronger and stronger in the more purely sculptural qualities—attains a grasp of form and structure only second to his mastery of composition. He is always a consummate artist—in his finest works he is a great sculptor in the strictest sense of the word.

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I have dwelt somewhat at length upon technical matters because technical power is the first necessity for an artist; because technical mastery is that for which he consciously endeavors; because the technical language of his art is the necessary vehicle of expression for his thoughts and emotions, and determines, even, the nature of the thoughts and emotions he shall express. But while the technical accomplishment of an artist is the most necessary part of his art, without which his imagination would be mute, it is not the highest or the most significant part of it. I have tried to show that Saint-Gaudens was a highly accomplished artist, the equal of any of his contemporaries, the superior of most. What made him something much more than this—something infinitely more important for us—was the vigor and loftiness of his imagination. Without his imaginative power he would have been an artist of great distinction, of whom any country might be proud; with it he became a great creator, able to embody in enduring bronze the highest ideals and the deepest feelings of a nation and of a time.

It is a penetrating and sympathetic imagination that gave him his unerring grasp of character, that enabled him to seize upon the significant elements of a personality, to divine the attitude and the gesture that should reveal it, to eliminate the unessential, to present to us the man. This is the imagination of the portrait-painter, and Saint-Gaudens has shown it again and again, in many of his reliefs and memorial tablets, above all in his portrait statues. He showed it conclusively in so early a work as the “Farragut” (Pl. 27), a work that remains one of the modern masterpieces of portrait statuary. The man stands there forever, feet apart, upon his swaying deck, his glass in one strong hand, cool, courageous, ready, full of determination but absolutely without bluster or braggadocio, a sailor, a gentleman, and a hero. He showed it again, and with ampler maturity, in that august figure of “Lincoln” (Pl. 28), grandly dignified, austere, simple, sorrowfully human, risen from the chair of state that marks his office, but about to speak as a man to men, his bent head and worn face filled with a sense of power, but even more with the sadness of responsibility—filled, above all, with a yearning, tender passion of sympathy and love. In imaginative presentation of character, in nobility of feeling and breadth of treatment, no less than in perfection of workmanship, these are among the world’s few worthy monuments to its great men.

[Illustration: Copyright, De W.C. Ward. Plate 27.—Saint-Gaudens. “Farragut.”]

And they are monuments to Americans by an American. Saint-Gaudens had lived through the time of the Civil War, had felt, as a boy, the stir of its great happenings in his blood, and its epic emotions had become a part of his consciousness, deep-seated at the roots of his nature. The feelings of the American people were his feelings, and his representations of these and of other heroes of that great struggle are among the most national as they are among the most vital things that our country has produced in art.

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But if Saint-Gaudens's imagination was thus capable of raising the portrait to the dignity of the type, it was no less capable of endowing the imagined type with all the individuality of the portrait. In the "Deacon Chapin" (Pl. 29), of Springfield, we have a purely ideal production, the finest embodiment of New England Puritanism in our art, for no portrait of the real Chapin existed. This swift-striding, stern-looking old man, who clasps his Bible as Moses clasped the tables of the law and grips his peaceful walking-stick as though it were a sword, is a Puritan of the Puritans; but he is an individual also—a rough-hewn piece of humanity with plenty of the old Adam about him—an individual so clearly seen and so vigorously characterized that one can hardly believe the statue an invention or realize that no such old Puritan deacon ever existed in the flesh. Something of this imaginative quality there is in almost everything Saint-Gaudens touched, even in his purely decorative figures. His angels and caryatides are not classical goddesses but modern women, lovely, but with a personal and particular loveliness, not insisted upon but delicately suggested. And it is not the personality of the model who chanced to pose for them but an invented personality, the expression of the nobility, the sweetness, and the pure-mindedness of their creator. And in such a figure as that of the "Adams Memorial" (Pl. 30), in Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, his imaginative power reaches to a degree of impressiveness almost unequalled in modern art. One knows of nothing since the tombs of the Medici that fills one with the same hushed awe as this shrouded, hooded, deeply brooding figure, rigid with contemplation, still with an eternal stillness, her soul rapt from her body on some distant quest. Is she Nirvana? Is she The Peace of God? She has been given many names—her maker would give her none. Her meaning is mystery; she is the everlasting enigma.

[Illustration: Copyright, De W.C. Ward. Plate 28.—Saint-Gaudens. "Lincoln."]

Not the greatest artist could twice sound so deep a note as this. The figure remains unique in the work of the sculptor as it is unique in the art of the century. Yet, perhaps, Saint-Gaudens's greatest works are two in which all the varied elements of his genius find simultaneous expression; into which his mastery of composition, his breadth and solidity of structure, his technical skill, his insight into character, and his power of imagination enter in nearly equal measure: the "Shaw Memorial" and the great equestrian group of the "Sherman Monument."

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The “Shaw Memorial” (Pl. 31) is a relief, but a relief of many planes. The marching troops are in three files, one behind the other, the varying distances from the spectator marked by differences of the degree of projection. Nearer than all of them is the equestrian figure of Shaw himself, the horse and rider modelled nearly but not quite in the round. The whole scale of relief was altered in the course of the work, after it had once been nearly completed, and the mastery of the infinitely complicated problem of relief in many degrees is supreme. But all the more because the scheme was so full and so varied, the artist has carefully avoided the pictorial in his treatment. There is no perspective, the figures being all on the same scale, and there is no background, no setting of houses or landscape. Everywhere, between and above the figures, is the flat surface which is the immemorial tradition of sculpture in relief; and the fact that it *is* a surface, representing nothing, is made more clear by the inscription written upon it—an inscription placed there, consciously or unconsciously, that it might have that very effect. The composition is magnificent, whether for its intrinsic beauty of arrangement—its balancing of lines and spaces—or for its perfect expressiveness. The rhythmic step of marching men is perfectly rendered, and the guns fill the middle of the panel in an admirable pattern, without confusion or monotony. The heads are superb in characterization, strikingly varied and individual, yet each a strongly marked racial type, unmistakably African in all its forms.

[Illustration: Plate 29.—Saint-Gaudens. “Deacon Chapin.”]

These are merits, and merits of a very high order, enough of themselves to place the work in the front rank of modern sculpture, but they are, after all, its minor merits. What makes it the great thing it is is the imaginative power displayed in it—the depth of emotion expressed, and expressed with perfect simplicity and directness and an entire absence of parade. The negro troops are marching steadily, soberly, with high seriousness of purpose, and their white leader rides beside them, drawn sword in hand, but with no military swagger, courageous, yet with a hint of melancholy, ready not only to lay down his life but to face, if need be, an ignominious death for the cause he believes to be just. And above them, laden with poppy and with laurels, floats the Death Angel pointing out the way.

[Illustration: Copyright, Curtis & Cameron. Plate 30.—Saint-Gaudens. “Adams Memorial.”]

It is a work which artists may study again and again with growing admiration and increasing profit, yet it is one that has found its way straight to the popular heart. It is not always—it is not often—that the artists and the public are thus at one. When they are it is safe to assume that the work they equally admire is truly great—that it belongs to the highest order of noble works of art.

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The Sherman group (Pl. 32), though it has been more criticised than the “Shaw Memorial,” seems to me, if possible, an even finer work. The main objection to it has been that it is not sufficiently “monumental,” and, indeed, it has not the massiveness nor the repose of such a work as Donatello’s “Gattamelata,” the greatest of all equestrian statues. It could not well have these qualities in the same degree, its motive being what it is, but they are, perhaps, not ill exchanged for the character and the nationalism so marked in horse and rider and for the irresistible onward rush of movement never more adequately expressed. In all other respects the group seems to me almost beyond criticism. The composition—composition, now, in the round and to be considered from many points of view—builds up superbly; the flow of line in wing and limb and drapery is perfect; the purely sculptural problems of anatomical rendering, equine and human, are thoroughly resolved; the modelling, as such, is almost as fine as the design.

[Illustration: Copyright, De. W.C. Ward. Plate 31.—Saint-Gaudens. “Shaw Memorial.”]

To the boyish Saint-Gaudens Sherman had seemed the typical American hero. To the matured artist he had sat for an admirable bust. The sculptor had thus an unusual knowledge of his subject, a perfect sympathy with his theme; and he has produced a work of epic sweep and significance. Tall and erect, the general sits his horse, his military cloak bellying out behind him, his trousers strapped down over his shoes, his hat in his right hand, dropping at arm’s length behind his knee, his bare head like that of an old eagle, looking straight forward. The horse is as long and thin as his rider, with a tremendous stride; and his big head, closely reined in, twitches viciously at the bridle. Before the horse and rider, upon the ground, yet as if new-lighted there from an aerial existence, half walks, half flies, a splendid winged figure, one arm outstretched, the other brandishing the palm—Victory leading them on. She has a certain fierce wildness of aspect, but her rapt gaze and half-open mouth indicate the seer of visions—peace is ahead, and an end of war. On the bosom of her gown is brodered the eagle of the United States, for she is an American Victory, as this is an American man on an American horse; and the broken pine bough beneath the horse’s feet localizes the victorious march—it is the march through Georgia to the sea.

Long ago I expressed my conviction that the “Sherman Monument” is third in rank of the great equestrian statues of the world. To-day I am not sure that that conviction remains unaltered. Donatello’s “Gattamelata” is unapproached and unapproachable in its quiet dignity; Verrocchio’s “Colleone” is unsurpassed in picturesque attractiveness. Both are consecrated by the admiration of centuries. To-day I am not sure that this work of an American sculptor is not, in its own way, equal to either of them.

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There are those who are troubled by the introduction of the symbolical figures in such works as the “Shaw Memorial” and the Sherman statue; and, indeed, it was a bold enterprise to place them where they are, mingling thus in the same work the real and the ideal, the actual and the allegorical. But the boldness seems to me abundantly justified by success. In either case the entire work is pitched to the key of these figures; the treatment of the whole is so elevated by style and so infused with imagination that there is no shock of unlikeness or difficulty of transition. And these figures are not merely necessary to the composition, an essential part of its beauty—they are even more essential to the expression of the artist’s thought. Without that hovering Angel of Death, the negro troops upon the “Shaw Memorial” might be going anywhere, to battle or to review. We should have a passing regiment, nothing more. Without the striding Victory before him, the impetuous movement of Sherman’s horse would have no especial significance. And these figures are no mere conventional allegories; they are true creations. To their creator the unseen was as real as the seen—nay, it was more so. That Shaw was riding to his death at the command of duty was, the only thing that made Shaw memorable. That Sherman was marching to a victory the fruits of which should be peace was the essential thing about Sherman. Death and Duty—Victory and Peace—in each case the compound ideal found its expression in a figure entirely original and astonishingly living: a *person* as truly as Shaw or Sherman themselves. He could not have left them out. It were better to give up the work entirely than to do it otherwise than as he saw it.

[Illustration: Copyright, De W.C. Ward. Plate 32.—Saint-Gaudens. “Sherman.”]

I have described and discussed but a few of the many works of this great artist, choosing those which seem to me the most significant and the most important, and in doing so I have keenly felt the inadequacy of words to express the qualities of an art which exists by forms. Fortunately, the works themselves are, for the most part, readily accessible. In the originals, in casts, or in photographs, they may be studied by every one. Nothing is more difficult than to estimate justly the greatness of an object that is too near to us—it is only as it recedes into the distance that the mountain visibly overtops its neighboring hills. It is difficult to understand that this man so lately familiar to us, moving among us as one of ourselves, is of the company of the immortals. Yet I believe, as we make this study of his works, as we yield ourselves to the graciousness of his charm or are exalted by the sweep of his imagination, we shall come to feel an assured conviction that Augustus Saint-Gaudens was not merely the most accomplished artist of America, not merely one of the foremost sculptors of his time—we shall feel that he is one of those great, creative minds, transcending time and place, not of America or of to-day, but of the world and forever.

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Where, among such minds, he will take his rank we need not ask. It is enough that he is among them. Such an artist is assuredly a benefactor of his country, and it is eminently fitting that his gift to us should be acknowledged by such tribute as we can pay him. By his works in other lands and by his world-wide fame he sheds a glory upon the name of America, helping to convince the world that here also are those who occupy themselves with the things of the spirit, that here also are other capabilities than those of industrial energy and material success. In his many minor works he has endowed us with an inexhaustible heritage of beauty—beauty which is “about the best thing God invents.” He is the educator of our taste and of more than our taste—of our sentiment and our emotions. In his great monuments he has not only given us fitting presentments of our national heroes; he has expressed, and in expressing elevated, our loftiest ideals; he has expressed, and in expressing deepened, our profoundest feelings. He has become the voice of all that is best in the American people, and his works are incentives to patriotism and lessons in devotion to duty.

But the great and true artist is more than a benefactor of his country, he is a benefactor of the human race. The body of Saint-Gaudens is ashes, but his mind, his spirit, his character have taken on enduring forms and are become a part of the inheritance of mankind. And if, in the lapse of ages, his very name should be forgotten—as are the names of many great artists who have gone before him—yet his work will remain; and while any fragment of it is decipherable the world will be the richer in that he lived.

[Transcriber’s Note: In the Table of Illustrations and in the caption for plate 17, Bolensa was corrected to Bolsena.]