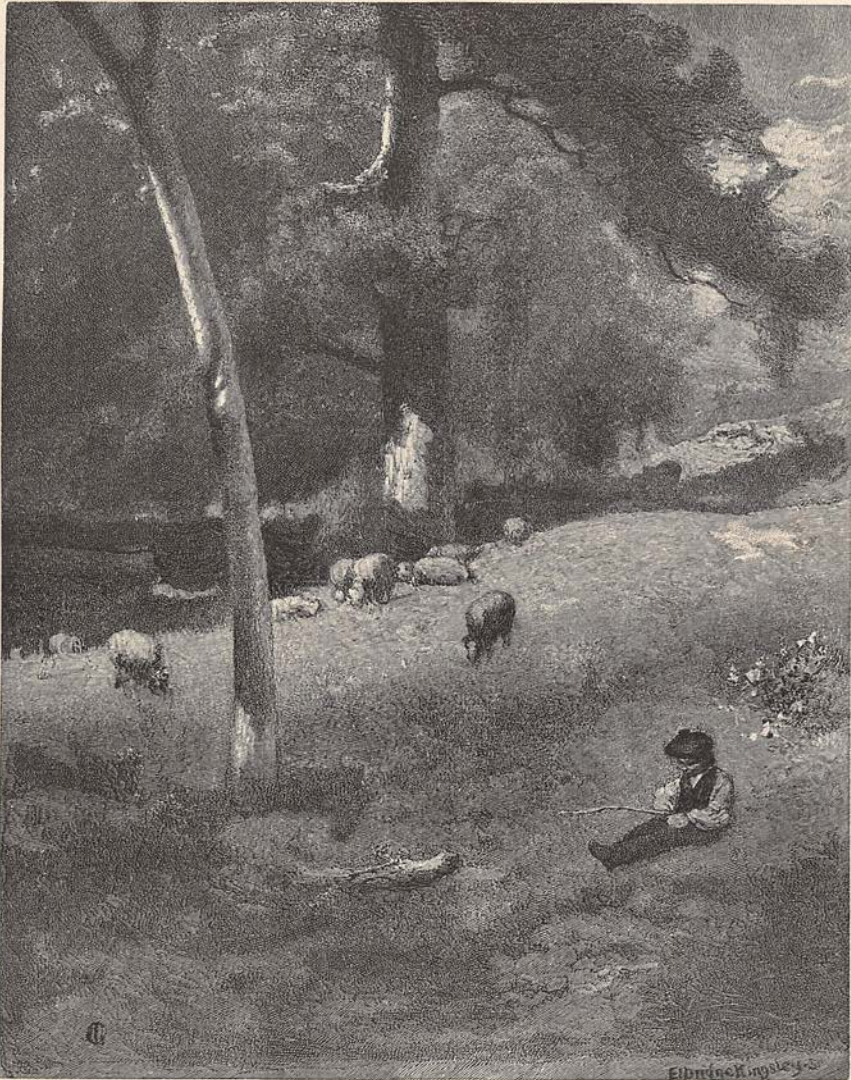


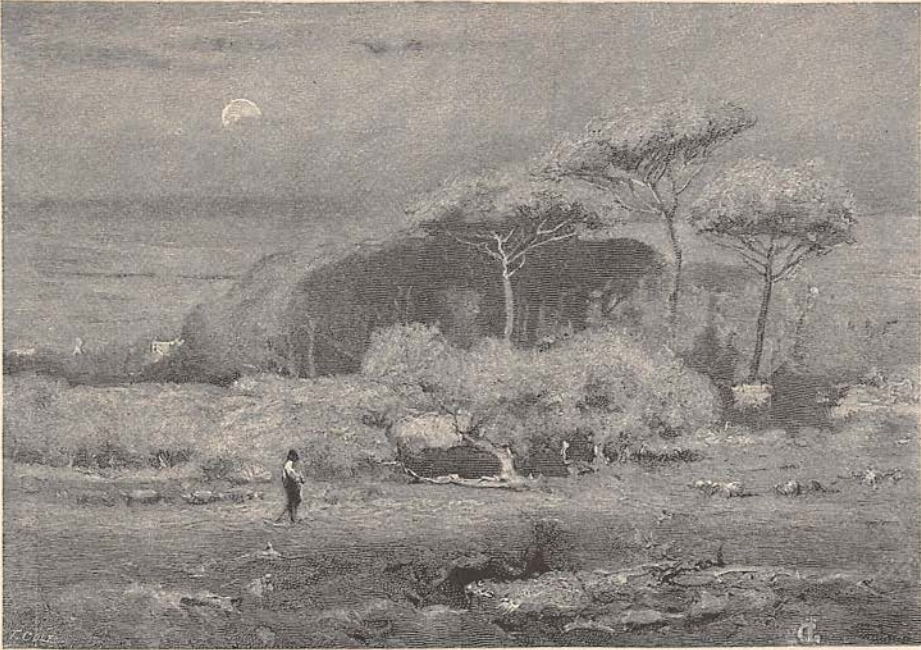
GEORGE INNESS.



UNDER THE GREENWOOD.

It is little short of impertinent to write of a painter who, in his own work, has already expressed himself a thousand times better. But there are many who never see his pictures, and many who, seeing them, lack the habit of judging and do not understand. The natural refuge of the writer on art is the commonplace of praise, extracted either from the comments of the artist on his own productions, or from utterances, private or public, on the part of his friends. For who cares to be dogmatic

in the analysis of work which the painter alone understands, and he not always thoroughly? By much more is the hazard greater when one comes to consider the subtler processes which go before the work—namely, the mental and moral processes which give that work its value. We meet with a picture that gives us a pleasant feeling; it is a graceful figure that one would like to have in one's home; or a landscape that recalls memories of happy days. Having become possessed of it, there



PINE-GROVES OF BARBARINE VILLA.

is a period of enjoyment which ends either pleasantly or ill. In one case, it fits into place and becomes a spiritual comrade; in the other tedium sets in, and one feels that its absence would be a relief. But now and then we come upon a picture that may not be certainly and at once pleasurable in its effect, but it arrests the attention with a shock. We may be troubled before it; but if we are not hampered by prejudices or schooled learning,—if we have resolved not to take opinions at second-hand, but to be brave enough to admire what gives us sensations of pleasure, or akin thereto,—we may be sure that, to us at least, the work of art is a masterpiece. Our taste may change. Ten years hence we may have come to other conclusions, sounder or less sound. But, for the time being, this is the picture that reveals to us a glimpse of that shadowy paradise of which the gate-keeper is genius.

Some such shock has befallen the writer while looking at more than one—yes, more than ten—of the landscapes of George Inness. A private opinion, to be sure, and perhaps worth no more and no less than that of anybody else. But when one has such a sensation, it is interesting to follow it back and see if there is not good reason for its existence. Are the technical processes by which the artist reaches these effects marked by the freedom and variety, the grasp and certainty, which characterize a master of his profes-

sion? And behind the technical work does there lie a mental labor which will explain to some extent the excitement produced in the mind of the observer? These few pages are scant space in which to make the trial, but possibly a more pretentious medium would only serve to show more plainly how threadbare is the attempt.

Looking at the life of Inness from the outside, it is merely that of a thousand other artists. He had few advantages of education; became an engraver; was overtaken by ill health. He had his days of enthusiasm and hope. He married and brought up children—one a painter of promise, with children of his own. When fortune smiled he enjoyed three stays in Europe—the last, and most fruitful of beautiful work, being of four years' duration. He shared the struggles of American art before the war—its well-meant but not always wise encouragements after the war, its period of dejection and loss of prestige. There have been years in his life when he sold pictures quickly at very high prices, succeeded by more years when he made nothing. He has felt the fallacious stimulus of our "good times," and endured the wholesome discipline of our "hard times." And what is the upshot of it all? Well, for one thing, the lack of pettiness seen in his work might reasonably be attributed to this varied experience. As devoted to his studio as J. J., the painter drawn by Thackeray, and as careless of the

business portion of his profession, nevertheless, Inness has not been able to escape the usual lot of men. Black Care has peeped over his shoulder and insisted on having a hand in his work. Another thing is the ab-

hood, which answered scorn for scorn, and social snubbing by artistic snubbing. Elastic, like our government, the social atmosphere in which he found himself was full of crudities, but full of life; if there was no great support



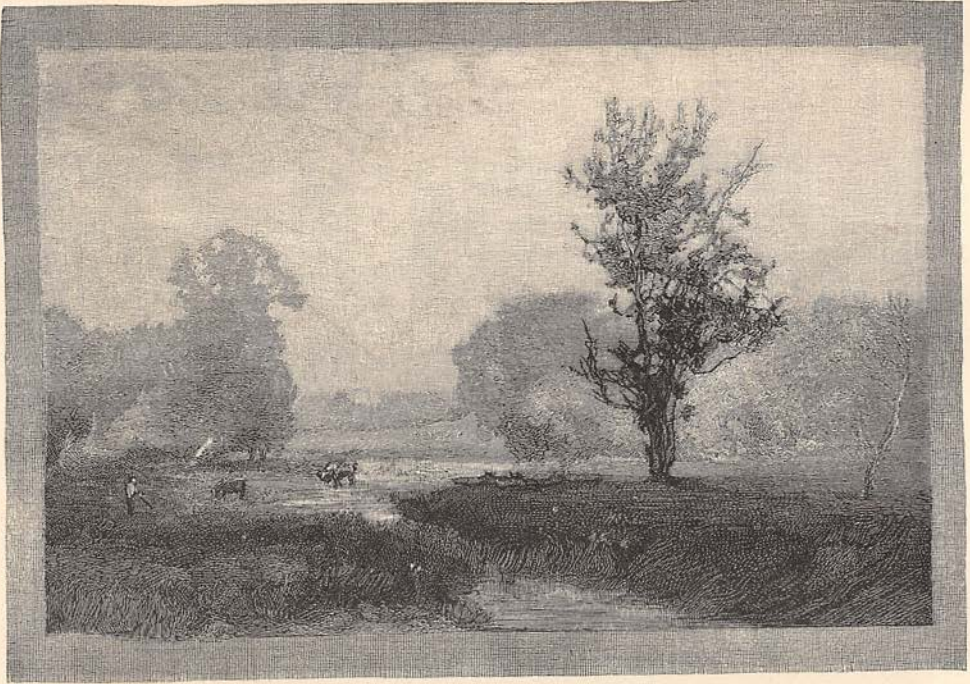
CLOSE OF A STORMY DAY.

sence of early paintings. What has become of all the pictures painted before 1860, when the pre-Raphaelite movement was beginning to have its echoes on this side of the water? Sold to all sorts of people, at all sorts of prices, in all sorts of ways; destroyed, many of them, painted over by their maker, scattered to the four quarters of the earth. There would have been no chance for this artist to coddle his pictures and concentrate his art upon itself, even if it had been strongly in his nature to do so. Another result: no possibility of becoming self-conscious and affected, like too many of his English cousins in art. Severely as the social fabric of New York handled him, there was breadth in its treatment. If it did not buy his pictures, it was either because it was honestly ignorant of their value, or because it thought it could not afford the money. But there was no social caste to drive artists and writers into one of two fatal paths—either into revolt at the fretting and pervasive tyranny, or into those grimaces which often prove a passport to success.

Inness has suffered; but there has never been a necessity here, as there was in England, that painters of genius should band themselves together into a Pre-Raphaelite Brother-

hood, which answered scorn for scorn, and social snubbing by artistic snubbing. Elastic, like our government, the social atmosphere in which he found himself was full of crudities, but full of life; if there was no great support exerted by it upon his art. He fought his way along by his own methods, without the depressing feeling that, let his genius be ever so great, ninnyes were being born every day whom a large body of his fellow-citizens would rank above him. The acid that bit into the soul of Carlyle was present in America in such a feeble, dilute condition that the painter need never feel its presence.

Inness seems never to have had even so much of social ambition as to make him wish to knock at those doors in his city which are least ready to open to men neither rich nor well-accredited. Sufficient for him were his own family, his studio, and his private circle of friends. A steady workman at his profession, he would go to nature for impressions, simply, neither with boast nor with too much hope. Sometimes it is plain that he has labored hard at his sketches; hours and days pass while struggling at one scene. In such cases the work is minute, painstaking, almost painful. For his nature is most excitable, and can only be made to apply itself by the strongest exercise of will. But then the benefit of self-restraint shows unerringly in the sketch. On other occasions, he has been an impressionist in the fullest sense of the term.



AN AUTUMN MORNING.

Overwhelmed by the beauty of a scene, the play of light and shade, the balance of clouds, distant hills and nearer masses of forest, he has dashed his paint on with hardly a line of pencil or charcoal to guide him, working in that rapt condition of mind during which the lapse of time is not felt, in which the mind seems to extend itself through the fingers to the tip of the brush, and the latter, as it moves on the prepared surface, seems to obey the general laws of nature which fashioned the very landscape that is being counterfeited at the instant. These were moments of the painter's ecstasy, rare enough in comparison with cooler moods, but leaving their mark with equal unerringness. From sketches taken under such varying circumstances have arisen in the quiet of his studio the procession of landscapes issuing from his hand during the past thirty years. Grave landscapes and gay, landscapes noble and plain, expressive landscapes and those that told of indifferent moods. Some touch a height of magnificence that gives one cause to remember the great men of former days—Claude, Poussin, Rosa, Ruysdael, Constable, Turner. Others have the sturdy look of Rousseau. But Inness is not an imitator or follower of any of these; if he had one merit only, it would be originality. Genius more varied is not unknown and genius that has broader limits. But in his own lines as a

landscapist and colorist he is like no one else. Consider his "Stone Pines at Monte Mario," and "Hickory Grove at Medfield, Mass.," his "Coming Storm," and "Light Triumphant."

It is only at a distance that the work of Inness seems to be unvaried. It is always landscape, and always one feels the individual manner which has not been allowed to degenerate into mannerism. But the moods in which the different pictures have been conceived are often varied, and then another key-note of color is struck. Sometimes that note is laid down on the canvas at the start; its complementary color is added; then follow the other colors and their shades of color, all with reference to the first. Again, it may seem better to reverse the order somewhat: the key color is washed over later. Inness has learned to subordinate his materials; they flow plastic under his brush or thumb. A disciple of the older school, he seldom uses the palette-knife or brushes of extraordinary character, yet, if he thought better effects could be gained through them, he would not hesitate a moment to use them. This may seem trivial; it is only mentioned to show that, notwithstanding the intensity of certain of his convictions, which will presently be mentioned, he has no narrowness regarding the methods of his work or the tools employed. When the right mood is on he becomes dra-



J. P. Davis & Co.

SUNSET.

matic, although always as a landscapist, and reaches closely to the borders of the sublime. There is a moorland piece which shows this trait well. Heavy boulders encumber the moor; one almost hides a farm-house, whose gray roof, were it not for the smoke at its chimney, might be taken for another mass of rock. A figure is detected in the open central space. The sky is magnificent with heavy, black rain-clouds, that reflect the ruggedness of the moor; in the center, and as a counterpart of the farm-house roof, is a brilliant white cloud that has caught the sunlight. There is a fine glowing effect in the heavens and in the distant moor that is aided by the smoke and the

little curling white clouds above the heavier masses. This is not direct work from nature—it is pure dramatic imagination. It is based on a very different scene. The original is a comparatively sober copy of a real landscape, in which thickets and woods stand for the boulders, a peaceful train of cattle fills a green meadow in the center, and in which the bed of the wild stream, that seems at one time to have spun the boulders about like curling-stones, is a placid river. The narrow realist will be likely to object to a picture which he will say is one of *chic*. But what then? Suppose it is. *Chic* is a great thing—if you are great enough in art to use and not abuse it!

It has become almost hackneyed to divide the works of a painter into so many "styles," more or less representative of varying periods of his development. The habit is convenient as affording a method of obtaining a comprehensive view; it is also the natural method, for artists often do materially change their styles. With Inness, distinctions of the kind are not sharply defined, yet they exist all the same. His art has been very slow in development. He does not accept philosophical ideas suddenly, nor without great stress of thought—a veritable spiritual combat. Three epochs may be distinguished in his work, but their borders overlap, and it would be rash to affirm absolutely in every

the Italian masters,—his influences were rather French, Flemish, and Dutch,—but because he painted Italian scenes. Finally, a post-war style, in which he now works without loss of the good in his previous efforts, but with complete control of his art. If big words are not out of place, the present may be called his synthetic style as opposed to the analytic of the days before the war. In the figure he was never grounded, partly because of an overwhelming tendency to landscape, but also because of illness in youth and the lack of sound instruction to be had in New York when he was a boy. It is heresy to suggest that in the end the omission has served him. But is it not imaginable that the lack of early



LOITERING.

case to which of the three a picture belongs. With due deference, therefore, to the possibility of mistake, these three styles may be postulated: An ante-war style, consisting of painstaking, rather stiff, analytical work, similar to that of many of his comrades in the "Hudson River School," etc. Secondly, a war style, which we may consider the result of the agitation produced by the four years of tumult and national anguish, and which shows itself in fluidity of outlines, a breaking-up of the old rigidity, a new grasp of what is magnificent in landscape breadth, a throwing overboard of the pettiness of the former style. This may also be called the "Italian" style of Inness, not so much because he learned from

training, such as artists get easily to-day, kept him poor and humble and forced him to greater efforts in the only branch of painting he could follow?

There remains the personality behind the artistic product. A painter deserving the name of artist works, consciously or unconsciously, from inner rules which he has, as it were, invented for himself. It is easily conceivable that he may be a great artist, and yet unequal in his work; a genius, and surpassed by lesser men in deftness of hand. But behind his pictures he must have intellectual and moral forces more potent than those of the ordinary craftsman of his profession, and also possess naturally either a fair share of facility

in the expression of his ideas, or else such indomitable will that he overcomes that lack in his temperament by hard labor. Now, Inness piques himself on the logic displayed in the management of his landscapes. His methods are the result of much observation of nature and the pictures of modern and ancient masters. Particulars are reasoned out with a rigidity of logic that sounds dry. His groping after truth has been as constant as it was earnest. Yet there is plenty of imagination and poetry in the scenes. Back of the landscapes, in whose confection rules founded on logic that can be expressed in the mathematical terms have been strictly followed, lies the whole world of immaterial spirits, of whom Swedenborg was the latest prophet. Not for Inness the wild extravagances of technique belonging to the later pictures of Turner. The so-called "Slave-ship" is a bugbear. He has a horror of the illogical presence of floating iron chains and of marine monsters unknown to the merely human eye—neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. His contempt for the "Slave-ship" is so great that one is half persuaded that there is self-illusion at the bottom, and that some day Inness will awake to the fact that the picture which shocked him so much is just the picture he would prefer out of all the other eccentricities of Turner. He regards as unmanly, if not positively ignorant, the fashion Turner had of placing the vanishing point—that point to which all the parallel lines seem to tend—to the left or the right of the picture, instead of near the center, thus disturbing its repose. But—paradox as it may seem—along with such dry and technical axioms, such *Philisterschaft*, in a true artist goes the fact that to Inness the whole cosmogony of inner spirits superintends the creation of the pictures. He is nothing if not an idealist.

He is, in fact, without being of a complicated nature, an artist with more than one side to his character. Alternately one might take him for a poet or a Philistine; an idealist or a hide-bound realist; an impressionist or a pre-Raphaelite. Beginning under the influence of Durand, he saw the limitations of that good but restricted painter. From Thomas Cole he had the same repulsion that shows in his criticism of Turner. The pre-Raphaelite influences in their English shape were strong enough to make him try more than one study in that direction. But good sense—or, shall we say, the intuition of genius?—saved him from exhibiting much that smacked strongly of a movement wholesome as a preparation but misleading when taken literally. The impressionists also leave him cold, for has he not been, on many occasions,

an impressionist? Some of his studies are faithful imitations of nature pursued for weeks at a time. Others, as we have said, are dashed in during the heat of imaginative creation.

Like some of the great Dutchmen, like their reverential followers Constable, Corot, Rousseau, landscape is to this artist the highest walk of art. It not only represents the nature that we see and the human feelings that move us when we look on nature, but something that includes both. It is an expression—feeble enough, to be sure, but still an expression—of the Godhead. In the mind of Inness, religion, landscape, and human nature mingle so thoroughly that there is no separating the several ideas. You may learn from him how the symbolization of the Divine Trinity is reflected in the mathematical relations of perspective and aerial distance. That such ideas are not mere whims with him is attested by various papers published in the magazines where he has given some of his thoughts. He not only believes what he says, but tries to carry out in his pictures this interrelation of art and religion. He is too much of an artist to make the result hard and absolute, as, to choose an extreme example in the opposite direction, Holman Hunt did in "The Shadow of the Cross." Holman Hunt seeks to return to the simplicity of the Van Eycks in treating religious questions, and would like to make himself a pious burgher of the tenth century in order to accomplish it. Inness is a modern to the last degree, and, thrown in upon himself by a scoffing world, tries to express his religious opinions under the veil of landscape. Perhaps even that is saying too much. Do his landscapes hint of religion? Does he try to express religion? We should say no. It is rather the methods by which he does them that are governed in his own mind by religious ideas. The result is fine, but, to the world, too far removed to be understood as religious in motive. Let us, then, rather say of his religion that he does not express, but hides it, in his art. Holman Hunt uses religious scenes to point a moral. Inness uses his convictions of a "world religion" in order to "adorn a tale." Out of all the landscape-painters stimulated and over-stimulated by the civil war, a few are emerging here and there into the position of masters. A rough and unideal schooling has been theirs: the public ignorant and uncritical; the press ignorant and hypercritical, or else fulsome in praise. Here an artist would be ruined by the injudicious support of friends and followers; there another was starved mentally and pinched actually by lack of notice. The survivors in the struggle are such landscape-

painters as Homer Martin, George Fuller, and others. Inness belongs to the scanty band.

He is often compared to Rousseau. No doubt Rousseau had some effect in crystallizing the ideas of Inness in landscape art, but the latter is in no sense his follower. The limitations of Rousseau have not been maintained—who knows whether wisely or not? Truly American in this, Inness has demanded more elbow-room than his great Parisian contemporary. Inside his own wider field he is also more versatile. Strangely enough, he approaches in temperament and physique a type that is considered Gallic. Black, slender, agile, not tall, vivacious of gesture, rapid in talk, easily moved, imaginative within sharply defined bounds, he is more of a Gaul than the average Frenchman. The name Inness means "island" in the Irish and Highland Scotch dialects of the Celtic. Mr. Inness is probably of comparatively pure Celtic blood, and may, for that reason, be dowered with ideality, opinionativeness, enthusiasm. In talk he becomes so carried away by the subject that he forgets how time is flying. What pleases him best is to have many pictures in process of making at one time. Then, having them arranged about his room, he

likes to attack one or the other, as the mood strikes him. It is the insatiable craving for movement and variety which makes him picturesque even while at work on what are often considered sober landscapes. No painter labors harder; but the intensity of his work must find relief in change of mood and method. Habit has made him love the chains that bind him in his studio, but his excitable mind must have vent. For that reason one can see in his studio, side by side on different easels, a careful wood interior that has just escaped the commonplace by a happy flood of light which he has poured into a blue patch of sky, caught again on a trickling stream and reflected off on the nodding heads of blackberry vines; a wild stretch of desolation on a moor, with an accompanying drama of cloud-forms; or a railway embankment with laborers and supply-train on the long sweep of red clay, and, beyond them, the steeples of a New Jersey town. There are even genre pictures—small groups of girls at play, and such attempts at work foreign to his best vein. But in these the landscape is always the valuable part.

Inness paints Nature as the Ossian of the Highlands sang of it—in its great outer, rather than in its little inner, form.

Henry Eckford.

LOVE CROWNED.

A MAIDEN, with a garland on her head,
 Sat in her bower between two lovers: one
 Wore such a wreath as hers; the other none.
 But him, in merry wise, she garlanded
 With that she wore; then, gayly, took instead
 The other's wreath and wore it as her own;
 Whereat both smiled, each deeming she had shown
 Himself the favorite. Though she nothing said
 Concerning this by any spoken word,
 Yet by her act, methinks, the maid preferred
 The lover she discrowned. A friendly thing
 Or whimsical—no more—the gift she gave
 (A queen might do as much by any slave),
 But he whose crown she wore was her heart's king.

John Godfrey Saxe.

