

## ARTISTS' MODELS IN NEW YORK.



A MODEL CRITIC.

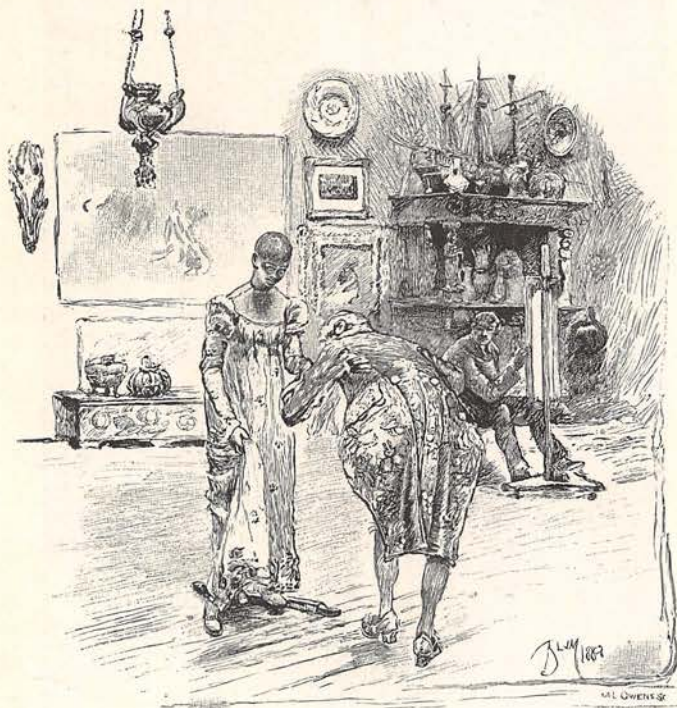
WITH the rapid growth of New York as an art-center, the demand for, and supply of, living models have increased proportionately. Time was, when the American artist, returning from the schools of Europe where there are trained and experienced models, found himself quite at a loss for the material embodiment of his ideas in the shape of a professional sitter. He was obliged to resort to that process, jocularly defined, in studio language, as evolving an object from the inner consciousness, or to speak plainly, painting from memory and imagination. This evolution from the inner consciousness undoubtedly had a paralyzing effect upon American art, since it is a process successfully employed only by great geniuses. Realism, to which American art inclines, demands careful study of the model. As the artistic colony in New York became a recognized factor of the population,

professional models followed as a natural consequence. It is little more than ten years since models were something of a rarity even at the Academy of Design. Some three or four were regularly engaged for the various classes and were paid at the rate of a dollar and a half an hour. With the appointment of the present director of the model department, a new order of things was instituted. By means of advertising and by exploring the by-ways of the great city, a number of models were brought together, untrained and inexperienced, but still suited to the purpose. The fee was temporarily reduced to seventy-five cents an hour, and competition rose high between the trained models and the inexperienced. Since that time, the supply of models has been constantly increasing, and to-day is fairly equal to the demand. They lack the experience and training of the for-

eign model, and it is rare to find one of either sex who has any of the grace or *chic* which makes of the Paris model a natural artist. They are also destitute of that dramatic instinct without which it is impossible to throw life or spirit into a pose. Few persons, outside of the charmed circle of art, realize the absolute power exercised by the conditions of the model over the brush of the artist. A stupid, awkward, or restless model will stultify

constantly increasing in numbers, it is fair to suppose that, with this nucleus, before many years have passed, trained and skilled models will be as easily procured in New York as in Paris.

The models of New York may properly be classed as a part of the floating population. Every few seasons, a new set of faces appears at the studio doors in search of employment. Most of these applicants are persons out of



A LAY FIGURE.

the execution of a clever or charming idea. When a New York artist stands in need of a model, he has only to send to the Academy of Design or the Art-Students' League, on the books of which professional models are registered. The Academy has a list of some thirty models who pose for the nude figure as well as in costume. There are others who pose only for the draped figure. The average fee is fifty cents an hour. This is increased or lessened according to circumstances, such as special contract with the artist or class, or the varying demand for the model. Among these professional models are a few who have been trained to their occupation from childhood. These are chiefly foreign or of foreign parentage. One family, in particular, of mixed German and Italian blood, furnishes models of various ages and both sexes. This family serves as a stand-by through all the vicissitudes of the model-market, and as models are

work, who take this means of bridging over a gulf of consequent impecuniosity. In New York many trades and professions have their dull seasons, and at such times, many able and willing men and women are left stranded on the shore of literal starvation. Instinct sends them to the studios. Most artists have known the discipline of poverty, and unless success has hopelessly imbedded them in selfishness, they keep a warm corner of their hearts for these waifs blown by adverse winds to their studio doors. It is difficult to believe that the sturdy realism of New York life should offer such suggestions of romance as are presented by the procession of models which, in the course of a winter, passes in review before the eyes of the artists. Most of them, especially the female models, pose under fictitious names. They come no one knows whence and vanish when necessity no longer demands that they shall

eke out a livelihood in this precarious fashion. The tragedy which treads upon the heels of comedy in the great city's life, finds pitiful exemplification in the brief summing-up of the list of female models on the Academy's books, "Married women whose husbands cannot support them, or women unable to procure other employment." Many of them are educated and refined. One adds to the small income derived from copying law papers by the opportunities given her to pose in the Academy. Another case cited was that of a young lady, who, having married a foreigner of position, discovered that he had a wife in his own country. Left penniless by her husband and her friends, she supported herself by posing. A touching episode was offered by the case of an English actress who went out to Canada with her husband in search of professional employment. The husband fell ill and died, leaving the wife unprovided for and with a child to support. Unable to procure an engagement, at a time when the financial depression of the country affected theatrical matters, and having found her way to New York, she became a model attached to the Academy. It often happens that a pretty face looks down from the wall in a New York spring exhibition, of which only this is known—that its owner, passing under an assumed name, applied at the studios for employment, and, after earning the money she needed, carried her beauty and her reticence back into the obscurity they came from, leaving the artist who had perpetuated the one and respected the other to speculate upon her identity, and perhaps at some later day to meet her in an entirely different sphere of life. A rounded arm or throat, a tapering hand, a head of curling golden hair, have temporarily fed and clothed many a young woman. When the genius shall be born who will reconcile the opposing elements of New York life in fiction as Balzac did those of Paris, it would not be strange if he



AN AWKWARD MODEL.

should find some magnificent type of heroine in some anonymous beauty of the New York studios. Many of the professional female models have become such because they found they could earn a better living by posing than by working in shops, book-binders, factories, in domestic service, or at the needle. I know of a French model who supports herself and a relative comfortably by posing. She formerly gave lessons in languages, and barely managed to exist. Another model, who is noted for her stately presence and superb physique, is greatly in demand, and commands three dollars a day. But the average fee of a model is fifty cents an hour when the engagement is made by the hour, or two dollars a day when the engagement is made for the day. For a morning or afternoon session, whether of two or three hours, the model receives only one dollar, unless there is a special agreement to pay more.

Foreign models occasionally come to New York on speculation, having exalted ideas on the subject of the gold to be picked up in the streets of the New World. There is a colony of Italian models in Crosby street, of the conventional type. They came from Paris to New York with magnificent ideas concerning the model-market. They began by asking a dollar and a half an hour, but finally condescended to accept twenty-five cents for the very few occasions upon which their services were required. American artists have rather outgrown the conventional Roman subject, so much in favor some years ago. With the increase of realistic tendencies and broad, rugged treatment, the Italian



EARNING HIS LIVING.



AN ITALIAN FAMILY.

model has been relegated to the region of artistic "prettiness," so heartily disliked by the younger school of American art. These Italian models haunt the studios in groups. When mysterious, thumping noises are heard on the silent stair-ways the artist is prepared for the loud, imperious rapping on his door which follows. Opening the door, he finds an entire family of Italian models grouped in the fashion of the Piazza di Spagna, smiling, bowing, and gesticulating in the conventional model manner. But, alas for them! Their day is over. Paris and Munich have driven out Rome. The neat old dame who sits in the portrait class of the League, with smooth white hair, good, patient face, and every-day dress of dark green and brown, is nearer the heart of the American art-student of the period than the insipid prettiness of the Roman *contadina*. Old women and old men are rather in demand as models in New York, now that strong and realistic types are preferred to ideal ones. Several of these models are known at the Academy as having posed for years. There is one old man, well known to the studios, whose head of snowy hair and long white beard cause him to be much sought after, particularly by artists recently from Europe. I saw him not long since, mounted on a posing platform in a studio, with his fine old head outlined against a tawny wall, bare-legged, the folds of his stockings simulating the leather folds of an antique boot. There was a staff in his hand, a gourd by his side, and about his body was draped a Spanish muleteer's cloak, orange, blue, and white. He was standing for a St. Joseph, in a water-color of the "Flight into Egypt." There was a reminiscence of Velasquez in the model and the picture.

Sometimes, an artist, upon answering the

knock at his studio door, sees before him a model whom he has known in Europe. He is obliged to be chary of demonstrations of sympathy, or the draught on his friendship will be heavy. An old model from Paris appeared not long since in New York,—a stout, military looking person, with a large mustache and pointed beard. A tradition hung over him to the effect that he had once been a sculptor. An artist of charitable and imaginative mind took him in and employed him as a water-color subject in a military costume, which gave him the look of a sturdy Fleming of the six-

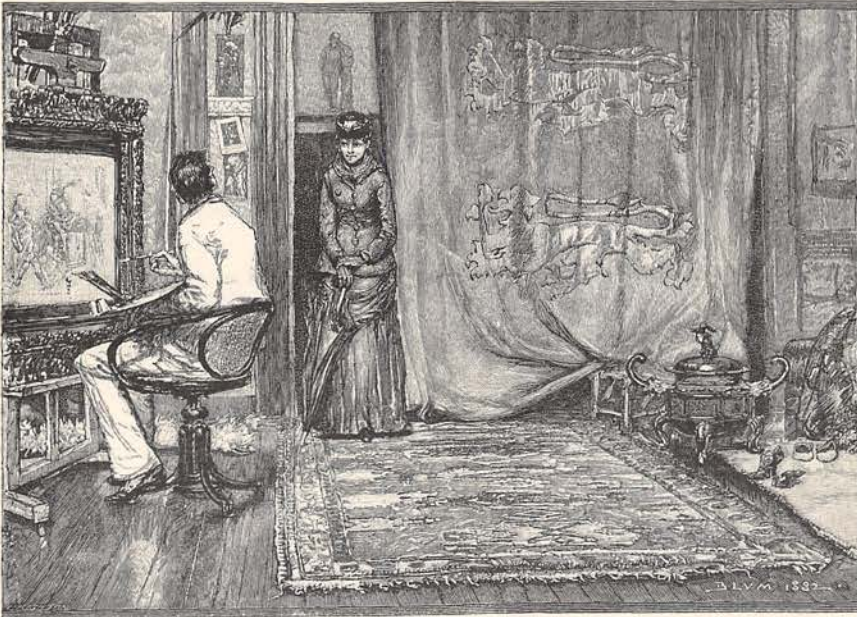
teenth century. An artist of cynical soul dubbed him an old humbug, and refused to aid him on the basis of artistic brotherhood. One lent him a hat too old and shabby to be worn by a respectable artist in the streets of New York, too good to be the spoil of the studio. The understanding was, that when the hat was fairly worn out, it should be returned to the studio, and exchanged for another held in readiness. The pretext of showing the hat brought the old model to the studio door so often, that the artist, whose consideration for him had been based on a former acquaintance in Paris, greatly regretted having revived this friendship of the *atelier*. The vague romance associated with the models in Europe gives place in America to a practical estimate of their value as posing subjects. The New York



ONE OLD MAN.

model is not generally encouraged to tell his or her history. The opportunities of posing afforded to the official models in the classes of the Academy and the League, are so few in comparison with the number of models clamoring for employment that the artists in charge of the matter are obliged to use much kindly diplomacy in selecting the types required from the list of registered names. Sometimes models of absolutely unavailable

adorned, and resides in an inland city. Another temporary model was the son of a prominent artist in another city. Many studies of Arabs executed in New York during the past few years have had for their model a negro attached to the Academy, whose head and figure offered a perfect type of that race. A prosperous manufacturer of picture frames in an interior town, having failed in business, became a model in New



DO YOU WANT A MODEL, SIR?

personalities present themselves at the Academy, only to be disappointed at the refusal of their amateur services. Among the Academy models some time since, was the son of a banker in Wall street who had failed during a financial crisis. Later, the young model obtained a position in a down-town bank, but such was his pride in his physique and his interest in art that he continued to pose in the evening classes. Another model, valued for his fine muscular development, was a blacksmith by trade. Another was a house-painter, who, during the winter months, when all of his trade are thrown out of employment, supported himself in this fashion. Still another, also noted for his fine development, was a German athlete. One model, well-known in his day at the Academy, was a half-breed Indian employed as coachman in a wealthy family. In his leisure hours he posed at the Academy and became a popular model, but one day his employer discovered his artistic bias and forced him to desist. He has since returned to the equine sphere he

York. This might be regarded as an instance of retributive justice, since it is well-known that the mortal enemy of the impecunious artist is the prosperous, heartless, and dunning frame-maker. Imagine the grim delight with which a young knight of the brush, who had suffered the pangs of unpaid bills for frames, would avenge the wrongs of himself and his brethren on the person of a fallen frame-maker who sued for employment at fifty cents an hour.

A few artists in New York have their models acting also as domestics or studio-retainers. This is a foreign custom imported by artists who have received their schooling abroad. Under these circumstances, a sort of comradeship arises between the artist and his faithful model, which has its pathetic as well as its grotesque side, since the remuneration of the model is apt to depend upon the successes or failures of the artist. There is a colony of young artists in New York which possesses a retainer known to the world as "Sammy"—a youth of muscular type with

blonde mustache and hair and a fresh complexion. His face and figure fit him for all spheres of model life. One day, he poses as a stalwart fisherman, in a pea-jacket, a disreputable hat, and high sea-boots. Another week, in a dress-suit borrowed for the occasion, he figures as a ball-room gallant with one arm encircling the waist of a bald-pated lay-figure, arrayed in silken robes, likewise borrowed, into whose glass eyes he gazes with an expression of the deepest tenderness. He has even appeared as a bold horseman seated astride a wooden chair, which was placed on a table, tightly clutching two pieces of clothes-line for reins, with his body inclined at the angle necessary to imply a furious galloping on the part of his fiery steed, and his coat-tails spread out and fastened to the wall behind to illustrate the action of the wind. In addition to his accomplishments as a model, this young man does everything an artist's henchman can be expected to do, in the line of general usefulness. There is another model much in favor,



AN EQUESTRIAN MODEL.



FALLING FROM A HORSE.

particularly among illustrators, on account of his gentlemanly appearance. His well-shaped head, black mustache and clean shirt-front, can be adapted to almost any artistic exigency. When not engaged in posing, he finds employment as a porter, for his excellent education and musical accomplishments are of small service to him in the competitive bread-struggle of New York. Not long since, he entered the matrimonial state, espousing a widow with a pretty little daughter, seven or eight years old. The child entered the model field under the auspices of her step-father. Being a picturesque child, with long, chestnut hair, she soon became a favorite model for illustrations designed for juvenile magazines.

These child-models are much sought after by artists. Those on the lists of the schools do not always meet the wants of the painter. Advertisements for pretty little children to serve as models are often seen in the morning papers, and are doubtless viewed by the unenlightened and ignorant as the device of some hideous ogre, some Croquemitaine of the metropolis, seeking what he may devour in the shape of tender nurslings. The initiated person, familiar with the *coulisses* of New York art, sees at a glance that the advertisement is only the last resort of some unhappy artist. The introduction of Christmas cards has greatly increased the demand for child-models. Then the "high art" picture books for children, imitated or reproduced from

London publications, have set the fashion of mediæval or "Queen Anne" types in the illustration of native juvenile books and magazines. The good old picture-book of the past, with its broad classic illustrations by Gilbert and Cruikshank which laid no particular stress on individuality of face or dress, and was satisfied with simply pleasing, would hardly be tolerated to-day by these ambitious workers in the realm of æsthetic quaintness who

such matters to a degree that would astonish a Paris artist. Happy the artist whose women-friends or relatives are able to help him avoid the *baroque* developments of female attire which characterize so many of our native canvases, especially in genre subjects. I do not refer to the fashion of costuming known familiarly and satirically as "high art," for that, however abnormal, is the result of forethought and consistent



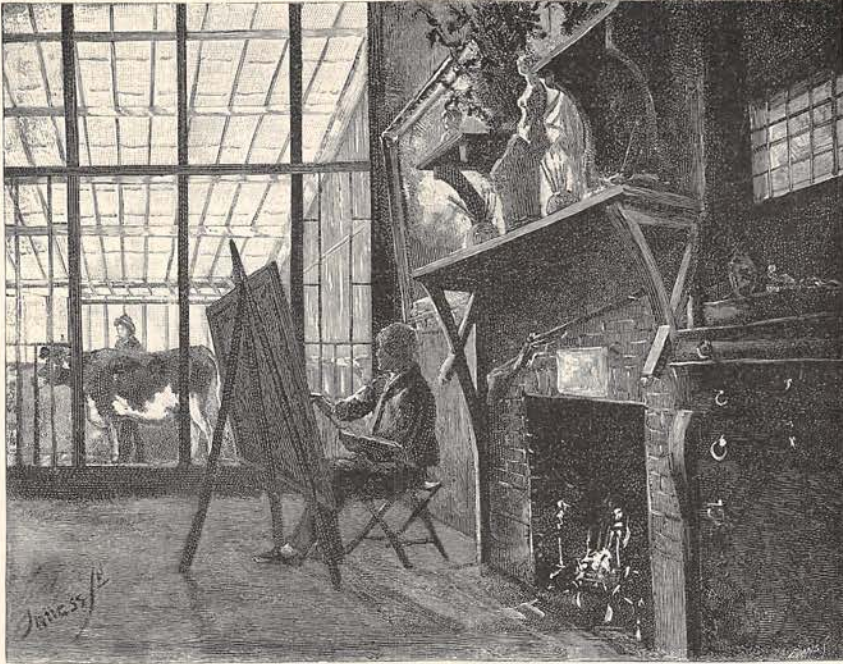
A MARINE MODEL.

make careful individual studies of child-faces and costumes from the living model. The magazines, also, aim at absolute fidelity and care in their illustrations of the letterpress in their pages. This realistic tendency in book-illustration is constantly increasing, and as a natural consequence the demand for individual types of models keeps pace with it.

Yet the fact remains that models are still an artistic luxury in New York. Few young artists can afford to employ models for any length of time for pictures that are painted on speculation and must take their chances in the crowded art-market of New York. Many a young painter is forced to content himself with the suggestions given him by a few sittings, and relies on his imagination and his inventive faculty to help him out. Then comes in the question of costume. A model may be everything, personally, that is desirable, and yet not possess the costume required by the artist. A female model with a tasteful wardrobe can find numerous engagements and command her own prices. Few artists in New York possess any costumes at all, and still fewer own modern female dresses, or have other than the usual masculine crudity of idea as to how they should be worn. Consequently they are entirely at the mercy of their models, and helpless in

reasoning,—a logical development of our century,—but simply to those fortuitous combinations of shape and color which spring from instinctive vulgarity of taste or ingenuous ignorance.

Sometimes an obliging female relative will lend an artist a handsome gown for his Exhibition picture, with many cautions as to paint from palette and brush. Sometimes, he repairs to the theatrical costumer and hires a vile concoction of gaudy colors and cheap material at a ruinous rate. Sometimes his model makes a gown to fit herself of some common, inexpensive fabric, say, for instance, blue silesia. By that mysterious and convenient agency known as *chic* it will appear on the walls of the Exhibition as the richest of blue satin. The artist buys half a yard of blue satin and studies the effects of the folds, then applies the same combinations of light and shade to the silesia gown on his model. The properties and methods of the studio are not unlike those of the stage: magnificent results are produced from humble materials. To use *chic*, in artistic parlance is to produce effects by means of the imagination and by means of analogy—as, for instance, to create from one model's face a dozen of different ages, or by a few skillful strokes to transform the cloth garment on the model into a fur one on the



STUDIO OF AN ANIMAL-PAINTER.

paper or canvas, or to make a straw hat over into a beaver. Examples might be multiplied indefinitely of this very handy development of artistic creativeness.

The artists of New York are unanimous in the opinion that an agency for the hire of costumes exclusively for studio use is one of the absolute necessities of the artistic growth of the metropolis. I have heard of a model who contemplates establishing such an agency, but she is hampered by want of capital. The initiative must come from the artists themselves. Certainly New York art, and consequently American art, would be greatly the gainer by this apparently trifling circumstance.

Many artists prefer picking up their models in a chance way, believing that the types so secured will be more original and realistic than those whose poses have been reduced to method by Academic practice. One artist whose name is associated with the reproduction on canvas of the small street Arab of New York, gathers up his models from their native element of mud, thereby preserving all their delightful *gamin* characteristics. When he first undertook his researches, it was with difficulty that he was able to make the audacious bootblack and the dauntless newsboy enter his studio. Fear and horror seized them upon the very stair, and they struggled for escape. But a few of the boldest of the tribe having undergone the operation of having their "picters took," the report of the

wonders and beauties, not to say the commercial advantages of the studio, spread abroad, and the market became overstocked with small boy models. It is said that upon one occasion, the artist, being unable to overcome their embarrassment in posing, bethought himself of the expedient of inciting them to a fight, in order to throw some spirit into their attitudes. An artist of my acquaintance was searching for a model in the streets of New York. Crossing Union Square, he saw the very type of face he required. The owner of the face was seated on one of the benches in an attitude of cheerful expectancy. The artist accosted the old man and asked if he would pose. He readily consented, went to the studio at the appointed time, was employed, gave satisfaction, and became a sort of retainer at the studio. His massive white head and large white beard met with favor in æsthetic circles. By degrees, items of his personal history came to light. He had been a gold-digger in California in the early days of the mining excitement. He claimed to have experienced fifteen shipwrecks in the capacity of a sea-captain. Left an orphan at an early age, he had been educated by a physician, and had acquired some knowledge of medicine. Fate threw him among the Indians of the far West, presumably on his way from the gold-diggings, and he became a medicine-man. He was learned in natural philosophy, and possessed a mineralogical cabinet



and also a singular collection of roots, each twisted by nature into the shape of one of the letters of the alphabet. He painted shells skillfully, and had an ambition to go round the world in a canoe. This remarkable person also wrote poetry and was a Yankee. It needed only a master-brush to make this same representative Yankee as classic as a Millet peasant. By far the best models, from the point of view of originality, are those captured by chance. A model—a tramp—picked up in the street not long ago, fainted after a few moments of posing. He had seemed overjoyed at the prospect of earning fifty cents. He revived, insisted upon completing his task, received something over the fee promised from a suspicion on the part of the artist that his feebleness was the result of hunger, and went his way. Such episodes as this often occur among the experiences of a searcher after models. When an athletic model is required, the painter sometimes applies to circus-performers, heavy-weight men, boxers, and pugilists. They frequently appear on canvas as gladiators, Greek wrestlers, and Roman senators.

The New York streets offer a variety of picturesque types, which for artistic value are not surpassed by those found in any European city. The deficiency in color and conventional picturesqueness is atoned for by the strong realism and robust distinctiveness of character to be found in the surging humanity of this many-sided American city. The artistic exponent of American life lies in the reproduction of the very types that pass under the studio windows, in their daily round of work or pleasure. The great masters of foreign art, whether ancient or modern, have always found their models close to their own door-stones and hearth-fires. The same must be true of American painters before we can claim for ourselves a nationality in art, remembering the while that the familiar is not necessarily the vulgar.

New York artists, in advertising for models, frequently find themselves the heroes of romantic or humorous adventures. Upon one occasion, an advertisement for a nude model inserted in a morning paper by two young artists, was answered by a palsied old woman, who, twenty-five years before, had once posed for some forgotten artist. Sometimes a young artist with a taste for intrigue amuses himself by answering the advertisement of his brother-painter. This results in much mystification and the enjoyment of a practical joke. Male

models have been procured upon occasion from the Young Men's Christian Association. The birds and animals in Central Park unconsciously do duty as models and are reproduced in illustrated books and magazines. Bird and animal fanciers frequently allow artists to make studies from their stock-in-trade.

Animal painters frequently have studios out of town, in which they can study from cows, sheep, and horses with a freedom and ease hardly afforded by a sixth-story New York atelier. Live stock of a minor kind for model purposes can, however, be comfortably quartered in some of the studios. A family of serious-minded kittens recently sojourned for months under the heraldic eaves of the old University Building and posed conscientiously for its board. Country dogs have been known to visit artistic New York and to pay their way by their services as models. Young alligators, turtles, macaws, parrots,—all these have I seen under conditions highly creditable to their appreciation of artistic and domestic exigencies.

The useful and protean lay-figure should not be forgotten,—that model who amid all the changes of artist-life remains ever true to its master. In one studio it lies upon a couch, clothed in spotless draperies of unbleached cotton, as an early Christian bearing the palm of martyrdom. In another, it appears as a young woman of fashion attired in a Parisian costume, seated at an imaginary piano with cotton gloves over its sawdust fingers, striking inaudible chords, and gazing into space with an inspired air. In another, it is seen as a bold *bravo* of mixed nationality, wrapped in a heavy cloak with a Turkish fez over one eye, and the rosy baldness of its head concealed by a flowing wig.

It does not come within the scope of this article to enter upon the question of study from the nude model which has given rise to so much argument during the last few years. In the life-classes of the New York art-schools the discipline is most rigid. The monitor of the class is the only person who holds communication with the model, and in the case of a female model a mask is sometimes worn over the face. New York possesses an abundance of crude material in the way of models, and it is fair to suppose that a few years more will see the establishment of a complete and perfected system of accomplished and trained models, of those realistic types most valued by American artists.

Charlotte Adams.