

AMERICAN WILD ANIMALS IN ART.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE SCULPTURES OF EDWARD KEMEYS.



THE STILL HUNT.

THE hunter and the sportsman are two very different persons. The hunter pursues animals because he loves them and sympathizes with them, and kills them as the champions of chivalry used to slay one another—courteously, fairly, and with admiration and respect. To stalk and shoot the elk and the grizzly bear is to him what wooing and winning a beloved maiden would be to another man. Far from being the foe or exterminator of the game he follows, he more than any one else is their friend, vindicator, and confidant. A strange mutual ardor and understanding unites him with his quarry. He loves the mountain sheep and the antelope, because they can escape him; the panther and the bear, because they can destroy him. His relations with them are clean, generous, and manly. And on the other hand, the wild animals, whose wildness can never be tamed, whose inmost principle of existence it is to be apart and unapproachable,—those creatures who may be said to cease to be when they cease to be intractable,—seem, after they have eluded their pursuer to the utmost, or fought him to the death, to yield themselves to him with a sort of wild contentment—as if they were glad to admit the sovereignty of man, though death come with the admission. The hunter, in short, asks for

his happiness only to be alone with what he hunts; the sportsman, after his day's sport, must needs hasten home to publish the size of the "bag," and to wring from his fellowmen the glory and applause which he has not the strength and simplicity to find in the game itself.

But if the true hunter is rare, the union of the hunter and the artist is rarer still. It demands not only the close familiarity, the loving observation, and the sympathy, but also the faculty of creation—the eye which selects what is constructive and beautiful, and passes over what is superfluous and inharmonious, and the hand skillful to carry out what the imagination conceives. In the man whose work I am about to consider, these qualities are developed in a remarkable degree, though it was not until he was a man grown, and had fought with distinction through the civil war, that he himself became aware of the artistic power that was in him. The events of his life, could they be rehearsed here, would form a tale of adventure and vicissitude more varied and stirring than is often found in fiction. He has spent by himself days and weeks in the vast solitudes of our western prairies and southern morasses. He has been the companion of trappers and frontiersmen, the friend and comrade of Indians,

sleeping side by side with them in their wigwams, running the rapids in their canoes, and riding with them in the hunt. He has met and overcome the panther and the grizzly single-handed, and has pursued the flying cimarron to the snowy summits of the Rocky Mountains, and brought back its crescent horns as a trophy. He has fought and slain the gray wolf with no other weapons than his hands and teeth; and at night he has lain concealed by lonely tarns, where the wild coyote came to patter and bark and howl at the midnight moon. His name and achievements are familiar to the dwellers in those savage regions, whose estimate of a man is based, not upon his society and financial advantages, but upon what he is and can do. Yet he is not one who wears his merit outwardly. His appearance, indeed, is striking: tall and athletic, broad-shouldered and stout-limbed, with the long, elastic step of the moccasined Indian, and something of the Indian's reticence and simplicity. But he can with difficulty be brought to allude to his adventures, and is reserved almost to the point of ingenuity on all that concerns himself or redounds to his credit. It is only in familiar converse with friends that the humor, the cultivation, the knowledge, and the social charm of the man appear, and his marvelous gift of vivid and picturesque narration discloses itself. But, in addition to all this, or above it all, he is the only great animal sculptor of his time, the successor of the French Barye, and (as any one may satisfy himself who will take the trouble to compare their works) the equal of that famous artist in scope and treatment, and his superior in knowledge and in truth and power of conception. It would be a poor compliment to call Edward Kemeys the American Barye; but Barye is the only man whose works can bear any comparison with Mr. Kemeys's.*

Of Mr. Kemeys's productions, a few are to be seen at his studio, 133 West Fifty-third street, New York City. These are the models, in clay or plaster, as they came fresh from the artist's hand.† From this condition they can either be enlarged to life or colossal size, for parks or public buildings, or cast in bronze in their present dimensions for the

enrichment of private houses. Though this collection includes scarce a tithe of what the artist has produced, it forms a series of groups and figures which, for truth to nature, artistic excellence, and originality, are actually unique. So unique are they, indeed, that the uneducated eye does not at first realize their really immense value. Nothing like this little sculpture gallery has been seen before, and it is very improbable that there will ever again be a meeting of conditions and qualities adequate to reproducing such an exhibition. For we saw here not merely, nor chiefly, the accurate representation of the animal's external aspect, but — what is vastly more difficult to seize and portray — the essential animal character or temperament which controls and actuates the animal's movements and behavior. Each one of Mr. Kemeys's figures gives not only the form and proportions of the animal, according to the nicest anatomical studies and measurements, but it is the speaking embodiment of profound insight into that animal's nature and knowledge of its habits. The spectator cannot long examine it without feeling that he has learned much more of its characteristics and genius than if he had been standing in front of the same animal's cage at the Zoölogical Gardens; for here is an artist who understands how to translate pose into meaning, and action into utterance, and to select those poses and actions which convey the broadest and most comprehensive idea of the subject's prevailing traits. He not only knows what posture or movement the anatomical structure of the animal renders possible, but he knows precisely in what degree such posture or movement is modified by the animal's physical needs and instincts. In other words, he always respects the modesty of nature, and never yields to the temptation to be dramatic and impressive at the expense of truth. Here is none of Barye's exaggeration, or of Landseer's sentimental effort to humanize animal nature. Mr. Kemeys has rightly perceived that animal nature is not a mere contraction of human nature; but that each animal, so far as it owns any relation to man at all, represents the unimpeded development of some particular ele-

[* While an editor is, of course, not to be held personally responsible for the individual opinions of contributors, we have Mr. Hawthorne's courteous acquiescence in our wish to express here a decided dissent from what we regard as a somewhat misleading opinion of the art value of Mr. Kemeys's work, and especially from his depreciation, by comparison, of the work of Barye. The American sculptor has apparently been affected by the great Frenchman, though he may be unconscious of the fact; but we consider it a serious mistake to elevate Mr. Kemeys above so great a master as Barye. Mr. Kemeys's modelings, however, have decided value, especially as portraiture and as record. We greatly admire the pluck and perseverance shown by the sculptor in his field-studies of the originals, and are glad to be able to help make his work more widely known. An illustrated article on Barye has been for some time in preparation for THE CENTURY.—EDITOR.]

† A set of the models referred to in this paper have found a home in the National Museum at Washington.

ment of man's nature. Accordingly, animals must be studied and portrayed solely upon their own basis and within their own limits; and he who approaches them with this understanding will find, possibly to his surprise, that the theater thus afforded is wide and varied enough for the exercise of his best ingenuity and capacities. At first, no doubt, the simple animal appears too simple to be made artistically interesting, apart from this or that conventional or imaginative addition. The lion must be presented, not as he is, but as vulgar anticipation expects him to be; not

the mind of the observer with an ever-increasing power; they lead him into a new, strange, and fascinating world, and generously recompense him for any effort he may have made to penetrate thither. Of that strange and fascinating world Mr. Kemeys is the true and worthy interpreter, and, so far as appears, the only one. Through difficulty and discouragement of all kinds, he has kept to the simple truth, and the truth has rewarded him. He has done a service of incalculable value to his country, not only in vindicating American art, but in preserving to us, in a



GRIZZLY BEAR.

with the savageness and terror which are native to him, but with the savageness and terror which those who have trembled and fled at the echo of his roar invest him with,—which are quite another matter. Zoölogical gardens and museums have their uses, but they cannot introduce us to wild animals as they really are; and the reports of those who have caught terrified or ignorant glimpses of them in their native regions will mislead us no less in another direction. Nature reveals her secrets only to those who have faithfully and rigorously submitted to the initiation; but to them she shows herself marvelous and inexhaustible. The “simple animal” avouches his ability to transcend any imaginative conception of him. The stern economy of his structure and character, the sureness and sufficiency of his every manifestation, the instinct and capacity which inform all his proceedings,—these are things which are concealed from a hasty glance by the very perfection of their state. Once seen and comprehended, however, they work upon

permanent and beautiful form, the vivid and veracious figures of a wild fauna which, in the inevitable progress of colonization and civilization, is destined within a few years to vanish altogether. The American bear and bison, the cimarron and the elk, the wolf and the 'coon—where will they be a generation hence? Nowhere, save in the possession of those persons who have to-day the opportunity and the intelligence to decorate their rooms and parks with Mr. Kemeys's inimitable bronzes. The opportunity is great—much greater, I should think, than the intelligence necessary for availing ourselves of it; and it is a unique opportunity. In other words, it lies within the power of every cultivated family in the United States to enrich itself with a work of art which is entirely American; which, as art, fulfills every requirement; which is of permanent and increasing interest and value from an ornamental point of view; and which is embodied in the most enduring of artistic materials.

The studio in which Mr. Kemeys works is



COUGAR AND YOUNG.

a spacious apartment between Forty-sixth and Forty-seventh streets, on Broadway. In appearance it is a cross between a barn-loft and a wigwam. Round the walls are suspended the hides, the heads, and the horns of the animals which the hunter has shot; and below are groups, single figures, and busts, modeled by the artist, in plaster, terra-cotta, or clay. The colossal design of the "Still Hunt"—an American panther crouching before its spring—is not now here; it has been removed to the foundry at East Twenty-eighth

street, where it will be cast in bronze, and will then be placed in its appointed site in Central Park. It will be a monument of which New York and America may be proud; for no such powerful and voracious conception of a wild animal has ever before found artistic embodiment. The great cat crouches with head low, extended throat, and ears erect. The shoulders are drawn far back, the fore paws huddled beneath the jaws. The long, lithe back rises in an arch in the middle, sinking thence to the haunches, while the angry tail makes a strong curve along the ground to the right. The whole figure is tense and compact with restrained and waiting power; the expression is stealthy, pitiless, and terrible; it at once fascinates and astounds the beholder. While Mr. Kemeys was modeling this animal, an incident occurred which he has told me in something like the following words. The artist does not encourage the intrusion of idle persons while he is at work, though no one welcomes intelligent inspection and criticism more cordially than he. On this occasion he was alone in the studio with his Irish factotum, Tom, and the outer door, owing to the heat of the weather, had been left ajar. All of a sudden the artist was aware of the presence of a stranger in the room. "He was a tall, hulking fellow, shabbily dressed, like a tramp, and looked as if he might make trouble if he had a mind to. However, he stood quite still in front of the statue, staring at it, and not saying anything. So I let him alone for awhile; I thought it would be time enough to attend to him when he began to beg or



CAT'S HEAD.

make a row. But after some time, as he still hadn't stirred, Tom came to the conclusion that a hint had better be given him to move on; so he took a broom and began sweeping the floor, and the dust went all over the fellow; but he didn't pay the least attention. I began to think there would probably be a fight; but I thought I'd wait a little longer before doing anything. At last I said to him, 'Will you move aside, please? You're in my way.' He stepped over a little to the right, but still didn't open his mouth, and kept his eyes fixed on the panther. Presently I said to Tom, 'Well, Tom, the cheek of some people passes belief!' Tom replied with

of which grins upon the wall overhead, a grisly trophy indeed. The impression of enormous strength, massive yet elastic, ponderous yet alert, impregnable for defense as irresistible in attack; a strength which knows no obstacles, and which never meets its match,—this impression is as fully conveyed in these figures, which are not over a foot in height, as if the animal were before us in its natural size. You see the vast limbs, crooked with power, bound about with huge ropes and plates of muscle, and clothed in shaggy depths of fur; the vast breadth of the head, with its thick, low ears, dull, small eyes, and long up-curving snout; the roll and lunge of



PLAYING 'POSSUM.

more clouds of dust; but the stranger never made a sign. At last I got tired, so I stepped up to the fellow and said to him: 'Look here, my friend, when I asked you to move aside, I meant you should move the other side of the door.' He roused up then, and gave himself a shake, and took a last look at the panther, and said he, 'That's all right, boss; I know all about the door; but—what a spring she's going to make!' Then," added Kemeys, self-reproachfully, "I could have wept!"

But although this superb figure no longer dominates the studio, there is no lack of models as valuable and as interesting, though not of heroic size. Most interesting of all to the general observer are, perhaps, the two figures of the grizzly bear. These were designed from a grizzly which Mr. Kemeys fought and killed in the autumn of 1881 in the Rocky Mountains, and the mounted head

the gait, like the motion of a vessel plunging forward before the wind; the rounded immensity of the trunk, and the huge bluntness of the posteriors; and all these features are combined with such masterly unity of conception and plastic vigor, that the diminutive model insensibly grows mighty beneath your gaze, until you realize the monster as if he stood stupendous and grim before you. In the first of the figures the bear has paused in his great stride to paw over and snuff at the horned head of a mountain sheep, half buried in the soil. The action of the right arm and shoulder, and the burly slouch of the arrested stride, are of themselves worth a gallery of pseudo-classic Venuses and Roman senators. The other bear is lolling back on his haunches, with all four paws in the air, munching some grapes from a vine which he has torn from its support. The contrast be-



RACCOON.

tween the savage character of the beast and his absurdly peaceful employment gives a touch of terrific comedy to this design. After studying these figures, one cannot help thinking what a noble embellishment either of them would be, put in bronze, of colossal size, in the public grounds of one of our great Western cities. And inasmuch as the rich citizens of the West not only know what a grizzly bear is, but are more fearless and independent, and therefore often more correct in their artistic opinions, than the somewhat sophisticated critics of the East, there is some cause for hoping that this thing may be brought to pass.

Beside the grizzly stands the mountain sheep, or cimarron, the most difficult to capture of all four-footed animals, whose gigantic curved horns are the best trophy of skill and enterprise that a hunter can bring home with him. The sculptor has here caught him in one of his most characteristic attitudes—just alighted from some dizzy leap on the headlong slope of a rocky mountain-side. On such a spot nothing but the cimarron could retain its footing; yet there he stands, firm and secure as the rock itself, his fore feet planted close together, the fore legs rigid and straight as the shaft of a lance, while the hind legs pose easily in attendance upon them. "The cimarron always strikes plumb-center, and he never makes a mistake," is Mr. Kemeys's laconic comment; and we can recognize the truth of the observation in this image.

Perfectly at home and comfortable on its almost impossible perch, the cimarron curves its great neck and turns its head upward, gazing aloft toward the height whence it has descended. "It's the golden eagle he hears," says the sculptor; "they give him warning of danger." It is a magnificent animal, a model of tireless vigor in all its parts; a creature made to hurl itself head-foremost down appalling gulfs of space, and poise itself at the bottom as jauntily as if gravitation were but a bugbear of timid imaginations. I find myself unconsciously speaking about these plaster models as if they were the living animals which they represent; but the more one studies Mr. Kemeys's works, the more instinct with redundant and breathing life do they appear.

It would be impossible even to catalogue the contents of this studio, the greater part of which are as well worth describing as those which have already been touched upon; nor could a more graphic pen than mine convey an adequate impression of their excellence. But there is here a figure of the 'coon, which, as it is the only one ever modeled, ought not to be passed over in silence. In appearance this animal is a curious medley of the fox, the wolf, and the bear, besides I-know-not-what (as the lady in "Punch" would say) that belongs to none of those beasts. As may be imagined, therefore, its right portrayal involves peculiar difficulties, and Mr. Kemeys's genius is nowhere better shown than in the

manner in which these have been surmounted. Compact, plump, and active in figure, quick and subtle in its movements, the 'coon crouches in a flattened position along the limb of a tree, its broad, shallow head and pointed snout a little lifted, as it gazes alertly outward and downward. It sustains itself by the clutch of its slender-clawed toes on the branch, the fore legs being spread apart, while the left hind leg is withdrawn inward, and enters smoothly into the contour of the furred side; the bushy, fox-like tail, ringed with dark and light bands, curving to the left. Thus posed and modeled in high relief on a tile-shaped plaque, Mr. Kemeys's 'coon forms a most desirable ornament for some wise man's sideboard or mantel-piece, where it may one day be pointed out as the only surviving representative of its species.

The two most elaborate groups here have already attained some measure of publicity; the "Bison and Wolves" having been exhibited in the Paris Salon in 1878, and the "Deer and Panther" having been purchased in bronze by Mr. Winans during the sculptor's sojourn in England. Each group represents one of those deadly combats between wild beasts which are among the most terrific and at the same time most natural incidents of animal existence; and they are of especial interest as showing the artist's power of concentrated and graphic composition. A complicated story is told in both these instances with a masterly economy of material and balance of proportion; so that the spectator's eye takes in the whole subject at a glance, and yet finds inexhaustible interest in the examination of details, all of which contribute to the central effect without distracting the attention. A companion piece to the "Deer and Panther" shows the same animals as they have fallen, locked together in death, after the combat is over. In the former group, the panther, in springing upon the deer, had impaled its neck on the deer's right antler, and had then swung round under the latter's body, burying the claws of its right fore foot in the ruminant's throat. In order truthfully to represent the second stage of the encounter, therefore, it was necessary not merely to model a second group, but to retain the elements and construction of the first group under totally changed conditions. This is a

feat of such peculiar difficulty that I think few artists in any branch of art would venture to attempt it: nevertheless, Mr. Kemeys has accomplished it; and the more the two groups are studied in connection with each other, the more complete will his success be found to have been. The man who can do this may surely be admitted a master, whose works are open only to affirmative criticism. For his works the most trying of all tests is their comparison with one another; and the result of such comparison is not merely to confirm their merit, but to illustrate and enhance it.

For my own part, my introduction to Mr. Kemeys's studio was the opening to me of a new world, where it has been my good fortune to spend many days of delightful and enlightening study. How far the subject of this writing may have been already familiar to the readers of it, I have no means of knowing; but I conceive it to be no less than my duty, as a countryman of Mr. Kemeys's, and a lover of all that is true and original in art, to pay the tribute of my appreciation to what he has done. There is no danger of his getting more recognition than he deserves, and he is not one whom recognition can injure. He reverences his art too highly to magnify his own exposition of it; and when he reads what I have set down here, he will smile and shake his head, and mutter that I have divined the perfect idea in the imperfect embodiment. Unless I greatly err, however, no one but himself is competent to take that exception. The genuine artist is never satisfied with his work; he perceives where it falls short of his conception. But to others it will not be incomplete; for the achievements of real art are always invested with an atmosphere and aroma—a spiritual quality perhaps—proceeding from the artist's mind and affecting that of the beholder. And thus it happens that the story or the poem, the picture or the sculpture, receives even in its material form that last indefinable grace, that magic light that never was on sea or land, which no pen or brush or graving-tool has skill to seize. Matter can never rise to the height of spirit; but spirit informs it when it has done its best, and ennobles it with the charm that the artist sought and the world desired.

Julian Hawthorne.

