

DECORATIVE PAINTING AT THE WORLD'S FAIR.

THE WORKS OF GARI MELCHERS AND WALTER MACEWEN.



DRAWN BY GARI MELCHERS.

WALTER MACEWEN AT WORK.

WE were not without art before the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876, but nobody will quarrel with the statement that our great art impulse dates from that exhibition. It is therefore only three or four years younger than the new Chicago. Why should not that city produce a great work of art? She has wealth, pride, and boundless ambition, and around these art will gather and artists rally, for we moderns have changed only the manner, not the spirit, of art patronage. We have no Cosimo

de' Medici to pet and pamper the artist; no Philip IV. to confer honors and titles. Cosimo's work, however, is carried on in an unconsciously coöperative manner by our merchants, bankers, and others, through dealers and exhibitions; and rulers, such as the Bavarian Regent, sometimes assume—as in the case of Carl Marr and Gari Melchers—the rôle of the Spanish king.

This matter of art patronage, divested of all verbiage, simply means that the artist, no matter how exalted his inspiration, has physical

needs which must be satisfied; that the rich man has intellectual needs which must be gratified; and that the gratification of the latter provides for the physical needs of the former. If artists have but lately congregated in Chicago, it is not because in the West "the perfumed flower of imaginative genius" has not soil to grow in, but because Chicago has been in the habit of coming East to buy its pictures.

That the White City on the shore of Lake Michigan is a wonder, a marvel, an embodied dream, all admit; but our surprise ought not to be that Chicago, but that America, has produced it. The art initiative was Chicago's, and in the carrying out of this initiative it has proved itself an art center of the first magnitude; but while giving due praise to the directorate (and that is high praise indeed), we ought to remember that the result is not a local product. Chicago has only been Aladdin's lamp, the rubbing of which has summoned the genii Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, and Landscape-Gardening.

We should be grateful to Chicago for the fair-mindedness which could forget local pride and local interests, and in so large and open-handed a manner could call from New York, Kansas City, Boston, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia architects, sculptors, painters; and reaching out further, could follow the trail of American artists across the Atlantic, and allure them from Rome and Paris, in order that all might participate in the first great public recognition of the allied arts they practise, might help in the sowing of the seed which, germinating, must bring forth a fruitful crop of beauty.

I see that already we are accused in certain foreign quarters of overestimating what America has done in Jackson Park. These accusations take the form of implying that the collection of buildings which compose the World's Fair is not perfect. Perhaps we do overestimate its beauty,—it goes without saying that there are eyesores there,—but I think we may be forgiven if we are not more stoical—forgiven if Jackson Park shapes itself in our minds as a union of Rome, Palmyra, Athens, Venice, Constantinople, and in reality is only a collection (save its crowning glory, the Art Building) of plaster shells. "Man cannot live by bread alone." He is blind indeed who sees nothing more in Titian's "Sacred and Profane Love" than imperfect drawing. Moreover, we can reply to our critics that the gage of merit is comparison, and where in the wide world to-day is its equal?

We frankly acknowledge its shortcomings; for while we do not cease to love and admire the beauty of its *ensemble*, we have no doubt that Mr. Atwood would sleep easier should the Illinois State Building burn down,

and the designers of the Agricultural, Liberal Arts, and Machinery halls would feel more respect for the Federal authorities should the Government Building be engulfed by an earthquake. Speaking for myself, I feel that sculpture, excellent as much of it is, has been overdone to the exclusion of painting. When I stood under the domes of the towers of the Liberal Arts Building, and saw the paintings by Shirlaw, Blashfield, Reed, Beckwith, Simmons, Weir, Reinhart, and Cox, and stood before Maynard's work in the porticos of the Agricultural Building, and turned from these to the magnificent flat wall-spaces on the Transportation and other buildings, and imagined what might have been done thereon, I could not help wondering why I should be compelled to crane my neck in the search for paintings, and why bas-relief in some instances should have been preferred. But after this is said, I cannot help admitting that it savors of captious criticism: for the whole country should be thankful for what painting has been done (and I am told that more is to be done by Millet, Earle, Dora Wheeler, Mrs. MacMonnies, Miss Cassatt, and perhaps La Farge)—thankful to Chicago for having taken the initiative in showing to the people who are too busy to go abroad what a powerful adjunct to architectural effect painting may be; for proving what those who know our art best have for several years asserted, that our painters are particularly fitted for this branch of art activity; and for the hint, not to the builders of great public buildings only, but to those who seek beautiful and artistic homes.

Another cause for thankfulness lies in the rare skill and judgment displayed first by Mr. Prettyman, and later by Mr. Millet, in the selection of painters; for while there are many who perhaps could have done as good work, those selected have shown their competence in so extraordinary a degree, that although when it is viewed as decoration there must be differences of opinion about the work done, its merit is of such an even degree that it is difficult to accentuate the effort of any one man.

Because I saw them grow, I was most interested in the pictures for the tympana of the towers of the Liberal Arts Building, by Melchers and MacEwen. In discussing the World's Fair, we all like to avoid the subject of bigness. We knew it would be big, and that it would be none the more esthetic for that; but the bigness of these pictures, and the studios in which they were being painted, were not without their effect. It has seldom happened that an artist has had for atelier a whole art gallery in which to paint two pictures, even when the pictures were forty feet long, but such was the happy fate of these two gentlemen; and while seated beside the enormous stove into



PAINTED BY GARI MELCHERS.

THE ARTS OF WAR.

PAINTED BY GARI MELCHERS.



THE ARTS OF PEACE. GARI MELCHERS. XIII.

THE ARTS OF PEACE.



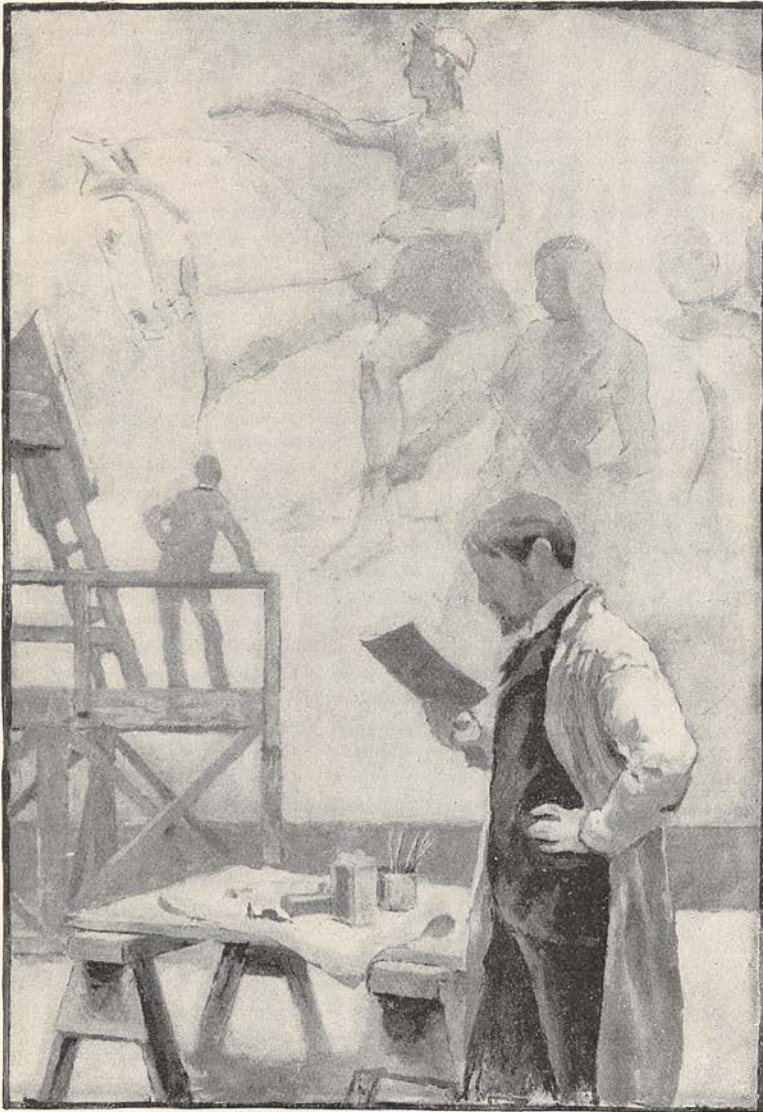
PAINTED BY WALTER MACEWEN.

MUSIC.

PAINTED BY WALTER MACKEN.



LIFE.



DRAWN BY WALTER MACEWEN.

GARI MELCHERS AT WORK.

which coal was poured by the wheelbarrow load, shouting chat at the artists, who looked absurdly small — like Palmer Cox's Brownies — when compared with the colossi they were painting, I could not help drawing a comparison between their comfort and the discomfort of those who, painting on top of risky scaffolds, in an uneven, uncertain light, — and developing that particularly irritating ailment, crick in the neck, — had decorated the Liberal Arts domes, or of the Dodge brothers, in the dome of the Administration Building, making each morning their aerial flight up 287 feet of spindly ladders, and their earthward and bedward descent in the darkness after midnight. Surely MacEwen and Melchers, in their com-

fortable, atelier-like surroundings, were the fortunate ones of the art colony in Jackson Park. Little wonder that the inhospitable sign "Keep out" was posted on their doors: a warning, by the way, effective with the workmen and laborers, but of no avail with the industrious women of the fourth estate who had paid a license fee of two dollars per day for the privilege of using a camera, and were all too faithful to the papers they represented, but who, I am glad to say, received a kindly if a grudging welcome from the artists.

Five minutes in the ateliers was long enough to demonstrate that the artists were by counsel and advice mutually helpful, that they were good comrades, and that their comradeship was

based upon respect for the artist in each other and on the fact that each was strong enough to stand alone; for while the works of both are conceived from the same standpoint of decorative effect, there all resemblance ceases. MacEwen's temperament has led him to the gentle, the poetic, to the more feminine of the arts. In his two compositions womanhood and childhood take the leading places. Women and children form the central groups, and man, while not wholly absent, occupies a secondary and unimportant place, as though but for artistic reasons the painter would have dispensed with him altogether.

Melchers, on the contrary, has been impelled toward the grand, the heroic. In his strongest composition, "The Arts of War," man, and the most manlike of the brute creation, play every part. I was much impressed with this picture, with the fullness without crowding of the composition. How gallantly, how like a god, the old warrior carries himself, and how intelligently the lines of the attendant figures support him! In the second composition the artist is not so happy, because here the heroic and grand have little place. In it, however, man still predominates. I should say that the chief quality of Melchers's compositions is their masculinity without brutality, seen in the fullest extent in the "Arts of War"; of MacEwen's, their femininity without feebleness, as seen in the sweet, subtle charm of his "Life." I cannot justly compare their color, having never seen the completed pictures; but judging from the finished studies, little changed in the large painting, it will show these same opposing qualities.

The true artistic temperament of these men was well exemplified on two occasions when I was with them. Melchers had just begun "The Arts of War," and had painted in the head of the central figure. He descended from the scaffolding, walked across the floor, stood for a few minutes irresolute, and then, opening a door which communicates with the atelier of the sculptor Baur, called to the only one in sight, Baur's assistant, "Come in here, please, will you? I want to ask you something. What do you think of the key of that head? It is too dark, is it not, for out-of-doors?" and waited as anxiously for the answer as though it would come from one of the most celebrated

of painters. Then turning to me, "What do you think? It is so hard to know when one has struck the right key, so easy for a fellow to mistrust himself. Ah, I have it. It is not too dark, but too bricky in color. It wants better grays," and in ten minutes the head was repainted.

It tormented me to see MacEwen day after day spending himself on the sixty or seventy feet of border around his pictures while the compositions called aloud to him, and I remarked, "Why don't you let Cameron [his clever assistant] do that?"

"I suppose I ought to. Cameron would do it as well as I, but—oh, well, it won't take long; it's a part of the work, and naturally a fellow, given a chance, wants to show what he can do, and nothing ought to be slighted."

It was to me most melancholy, as I looked at the decoration of the Liberal Arts domes and the porticos of the Agricultural Building, that so much excellent art had been put upon raw plaster, that up to date the greatest efforts of so many of our leading painters must in a few months pass out of existence,—be but a memory,—and I am glad that the pictures for the tympana, being painted on canvas, and therefore removable, are not to perish in the using; that these examples of two American artists, the recipients of many honors abroad, but all too little known in the land of their birth, are likely to remain with us.

Gari Melchers was born in Detroit in 1860, studied in Düsseldorf, Munich, and Paris, and received honorable mention and a third class medal at the Salon, the former in 1886, the latter in 1888; two medals of the first class in Amsterdam in 1887 and 1888; and two medals of honor, one in Paris, 1889, the other in Berlin, 1891. He was created last year, by the Bavarian Regent, a Knight of the Order of Saint Michael. Mr. Melchers is a member of the Society of American Artists, Society of Munich Artists, and Associate of the National Fine Arts Society, Paris. By comparing the dates it will be seen that he received the major part of his honors before he was thirty.

Walter MacEwen is also a Westerner, born in Chicago in 1859, and has studied in Munich and Paris. He has been an exhibitor at every Salon since 1885, and has been the recipient of many honors.

W. Lewis Fraser.

