

PAINTING AT THE FAIR.



THE great bugaboo of art that chases us half-way around the globe is decadence. It dogs our footsteps in the National Academy, in Burlington House, in the French Salon, in Munich, Rome, China, and Japan. It induces us to question of every international exposition, Is this indicative of progress or decline? And after we have forgotten the good works, and remembered the bad ones, we are disposed to favor the gloomy suggestion of decline. Then we hear periodic regrets expressed about the present work, and sad tales told of the good old times, just as if time were ever so old or so good as to-day, and presently we come to believe that the age of art has passed, and that modern painting is merely the final splutter in the socket.

But the specter of decadence is largely a specter, and the bright star of progress largely a will-o'-the-wisp. Their appearances are more local than general. The law of art is the law of the running brook, and its character is not so much progress or decline as change. There are rapids in the brook where the water breaks in brilliant light and color, there are pools where it lies in deep somber silence, there are places where it disappears from view under tangled brush, or sinks into the sand only to reappear farther on in some new land. It is ever shifting its position, and changing its depth, or hue, or quality, but it does not go out in utter darkness. When art disappeared from Greece and Rome, it rose to the surface in renescent Italy; when it ran out in Italy, it appeared in Spain, Holland, and Flanders; when they too stagnated or ran shallow, the stream suddenly showed in France. If art is now ebbing away from France, as some of our writers are prone to believe, we have only to look for its appearance elsewhere. It may not show soon, but it will surely rise again in some new form, in some new land. In fact, there were indications in the World's Fair Exhibition that it is even now rising in two places at once— America in the west and Scandinavia in the north.

The World's Fair was not the best lookout point from which to judge the world's painting. The representation was uneven, and in no case was the average high, except perhaps with our own country. We were on the ground, and a good showing was possible, yet no one who knows American art but regretted the absence of many notable pictures that would have materially helped our exhibit. The European nations were less fortunate. The good painters of Italy at the present day may be counted on one's fin-

gers, but they were not represented at the Fair with the exception of Boldini, who is Italian only by the accident of birth. Just so with Spain, Austria, and, in measure, with Germany. English painting was out in considerable force, but Scotland and the Glasgow-Edinburgh painters had nothing at all. France and Holland held up indifferently well, and Denmark, Sweden, and Norway did not appear so strong as at Paris in 1889. Still, from the Chicago exhibit one could gain a tolerably correct idea of the tendency of modern painting especially if he had been fortunate enough to see the Paris Exposition of 1889, together with the recent Berlin and Munich exhibitions.

In the nature of things it was not to be supposed that much excellence of painting could come out of Italy. As well expect fine marbles from modern Greece or bas-reliefs from Mesopotamia. The flower is blown, and even the stalk is in a dry rot. The art genius of Italy typified itself in countless forms during the Renaissance. It spent its force, culminating with Titian, and dying with Tiepolo, in an art peculiar to its age and people. The present race cannot repeat the triumphs of the past, nor have they the versatility or strength to produce a new art in keeping with new tastes. The attempts of most of the moderns are pitiful in their weakness. Pictures of the Roman Campagna with ruined aqueducts, pictures of the Pyramids, St. Peter's, the Forum, Pompeian flower-girls at fountains, monks, fruit-sellers, beggars— how much better are they than the tourist pictures of castled Chillon, or the Jungfrau with an Alpine glow collar around its top! Penelope's suitors with the bow of Ulysses, and the modern Italians with the palette of Titian! What could they do that would not seem petty by comparison? That which is Italian is mediocre in quality, and that which is very good is not Italian. Boldini, Michetti, Tito, Nono make a charming mingling of Fortuny and Paris; Morelli is cultivating the obsolete ideal of Dusseldorf, while Segantini is seeking to revive the archaism of the Giottesque. For the rest (those who made up the bulk of the exhibit at Chicago), they compound pictures to their own humiliation. The stream of art has passed through Italy, heading northwest. It is not likely that it will ever return to its source by the old channel.

There is little more encouragement to be extracted from Spanish than from Italian art. It came originally from Italy, and found its greatest representative in Velasquez. Religion was its mainspring, to begin with, but when Velasquez came it grew realistic in a broad sense, and

after his death it sank rapidly. At the end of the last century Goya lent it a fevered flush accompanied by some delirium, and about 1860 Fortuny created something of a revival with a bright, vivacious art of color and light. The example of Fortuny has had great weight with the modern men, and has produced a glittering, ornate art, in both genre and historical work, that is more interesting at first sight than at any time afterward. The best Spanish painters have been drawn to Paris, where they have adopted Parisian methods. Madrazo, Rico, and Palmaroli were not represented at the Fair, but had they been, their works would have shed no light on Spanish art. Alvarez and Villegas were to be seen in indifferent examples only. Two pictures out of about two hundred were conspicuously good, the "Hospital Ward" by Luis Jimenez Aranda, and "Another Marguerite" by Sorolla. There was no reason why these pictures should not have been hung in the French section, because they were typical Parisian art, and had little to do with Spain. What may be the future of Spanish painting no one can predict, but there seems little reason for supposing that it will improve upon modern Italy.

For years all the art roads have led to Paris. It is to-day the center of the art world, a model of taste, skill, and knowledge as well as a hot-bed of eccentricities, mannerisms, stilted affectations, and small trickeries. It takes in the world, takes credit for all its virtues, and is saddled with all its vices. It is ruled by the quips and cranks of what at times seems outrageous fortune; it is magnified and belittled; it is overpraised and underpraised; it seems to be rising to lofty heights at times, and then, again, to be sinking into the mire. It is at once the best and the worst art-center in the world, a crucible where all elements mix, all become alloyed, and yet all average up a respectable grade of amalgam. That which keeps it from hopeless debasement is the art genius of the French people. Has that art genius ever yet reached its apogee? Has it fulfilled its mission, and voiced the finer feeling of France as painting once did in Italy and Spain? Did we accept the exhibit at the World's Fair as a criterion, we might think her day was about finished, that her artists had said all there was for them to say; but the representation was inadequate. The French stand sponsor for all the academic emptiness displayed there, for all the studio recitation, all the exaggerated realism, all the tawdry sentiment, and yet at heart they have little sympathy with them. The academic was foisted upon them early in life by the example of Italy, and the misdirected energy of royalty. Poussin or Lebrun was no more French in thought or method than Corneille. The monarchy upheld the academic because it smacked of heroism, and the empire because it

fostered the military spirit; but the republic has barely tolerated it, and the radicals have always hated it. It is the *bête noire* of French art against which there has been a long series of revolutions. Why, if not that it fails to represent the French? They are fond enough of talking about such loyalists as Poussin, David, Ingres, and Cabanel, but the men they love are the rebels, Watteau, Fragonard, Delacroix, Millet, Corot, Courbet, The vivacious, the decorative, the emotional, the sentimental, the positive—all these they love because they are national characteristics; but the mock-heroic, the grandiloquent, the bombastic, have been more the result of foreign imitation than the outcrop of French feeling.

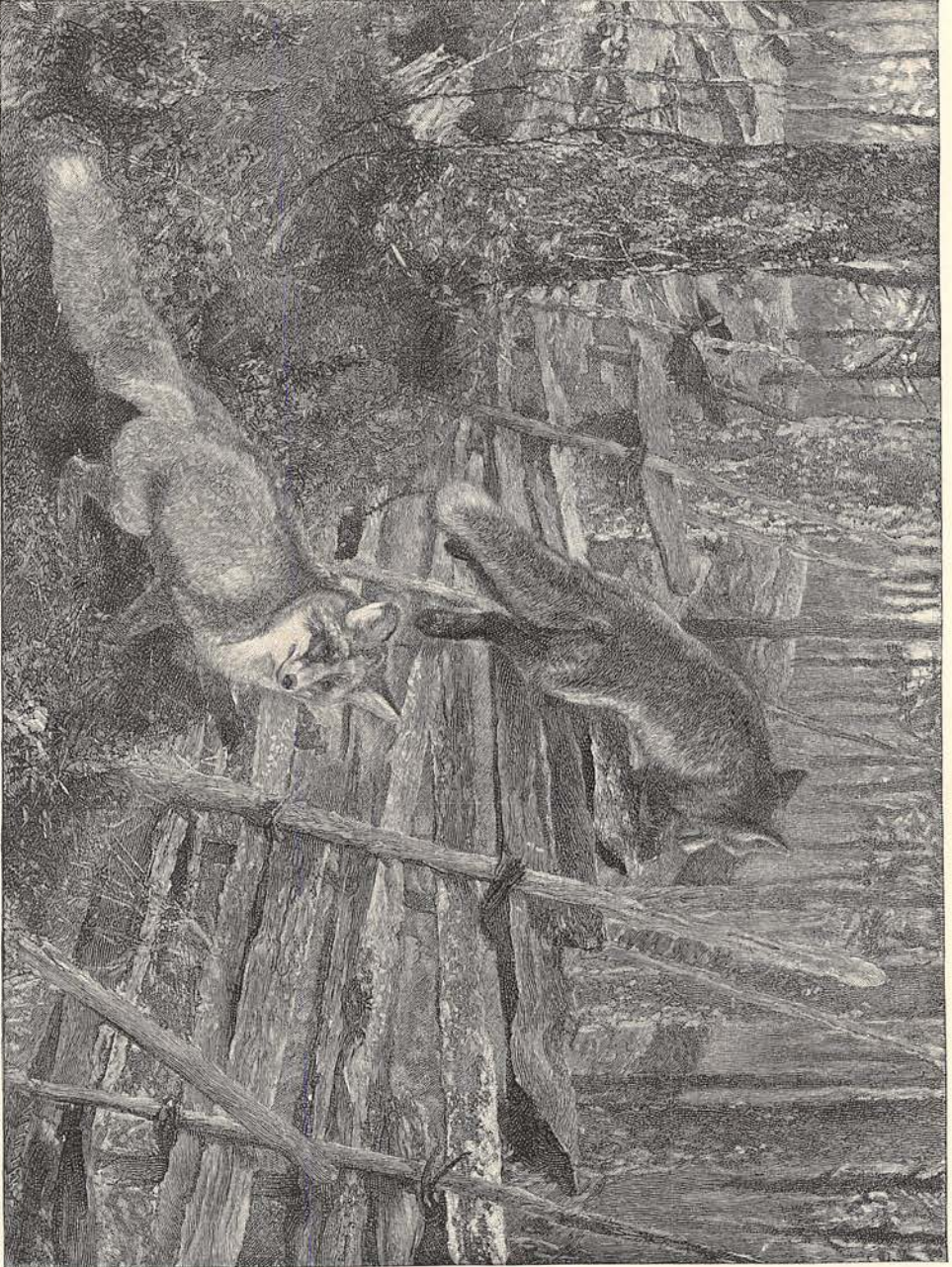
One wonders whether painting in France has ever yet been French painting except in periods of revolt. In the other countries of Europe (England, Holland, Spain, Italy) the course of national art has run smooth, but in France it has been a history of quarrels, an eternal struggle for freedom of expression. Shackling traditions within, and the influx of opposing notions and people from without, have had weight to drag down effort, and to breed fretfulness, eccentricity, mannerism, dull conservatism. This was noticeable at the Fair in the attempts at "smartness" or oddity, in the Beaux-Arts pictures painted for the Salon, in the time-honored nudes or classical themes of the academicians, in the small buttons and cocked hats of the realists. But this, instead of representing France, represents the Old Man of the Mountain she is carrying on her back. The incubus is of her own growing, but it is not the more enjoyable for that. Those painters who might stand for power, sentiment, decorative color, originality,—men like Dagnan-Bouveret, Laurens, Puvis de Chavannes, Ribot, Roybet, Cormon, Degas, Besnard, Boudin, Monet,—were represented but slightly or not at all. There were some good portraits by Carolus-Duran, Gervex, and Bonnat, but they were not sufficient to redeem the many mediocrities. Nearly a thousand pictures, and half of them unworthy of a second study! Such was the display that misrepresented France by showing the capricious, or mannered, efforts of her studios instead of the heart of her people. Judging from this alone, one might well think her art in decline; but the Paris Exposition of 1889 is still fresh in mind, and those who saw it know well the power of her better painters, and have faith to believe that she will rise even higher in the arts in the future. She is the last of the Latin race that has left so deep an impression on the art of Europe, and it is not likely that her light will go out with the end of this century.

In art, England and Germany have never had the excuse of dissension. They have not been great centers of art, such as Paris is to-day; they have not been the stamping-ground of cosmo-

PAINTED BY BRUNO LILJEFORS (SWEDEN).

FOXES.

ENGRAVED BY W. MILLER.



politanism; they have not had to harmonize a score of discordant voices—an ungrateful task that has brought reproach upon France, artistically, as upon these United States, politically. There has been unity of thought and method in both England and Germany; they have expressed themselves and their peoples, and if we do not like their art expression, we must seek the cause elsewhere than in their lack of opportunity. The shortcoming—and there is shortcoming—lies in the nature of the peoples. The English and Germans are readers, thinkers, reasoners. They gather ideas by words (sound), and put them together by thought (logic). They are not observers, and they do not gather ideas by forms and colors (sight), and put them together by taste (feeling). This, for art production, seems to be a radical defect in organization, and results in the application to painting of the wrong senses. For the primary requisite of the painter is that he shall be an observer, and record what he observes with taste or feeling. But the English and Germans have not looked at it in that way. From the very beginning, painting with them was made largely dependent upon literature. Dürer, Holbein, Hogarth, though doing purely pictorial work, were great illustrators, designers for wood- and steel-engraving. The success of Hogarth's satires lay more in the fact that they were adapted to engraving, and would point a moral, than in their picturesque qualities. The idea that painting was illustration, not creation,—an epitome of a sermon, a history, or a novel, rather than a revelation of independent visual beauty,—has obtained with them for years. It is to-day apparent in the tell-a-story pictures—the five sequential canvases corresponding to the five acts of a play, the deaths of Arthurs and Tannhäusers, the rides of Brunhildes, and Guineveres, the loves of Byrons and young Werthers. Even the British landscape-painter who paints a field of waving grain with a blue sky over it is afraid to let it stand as a harmony of blue and gold. He puts to it the title of

the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more,

and hands it out as an illustration of Tennyson.

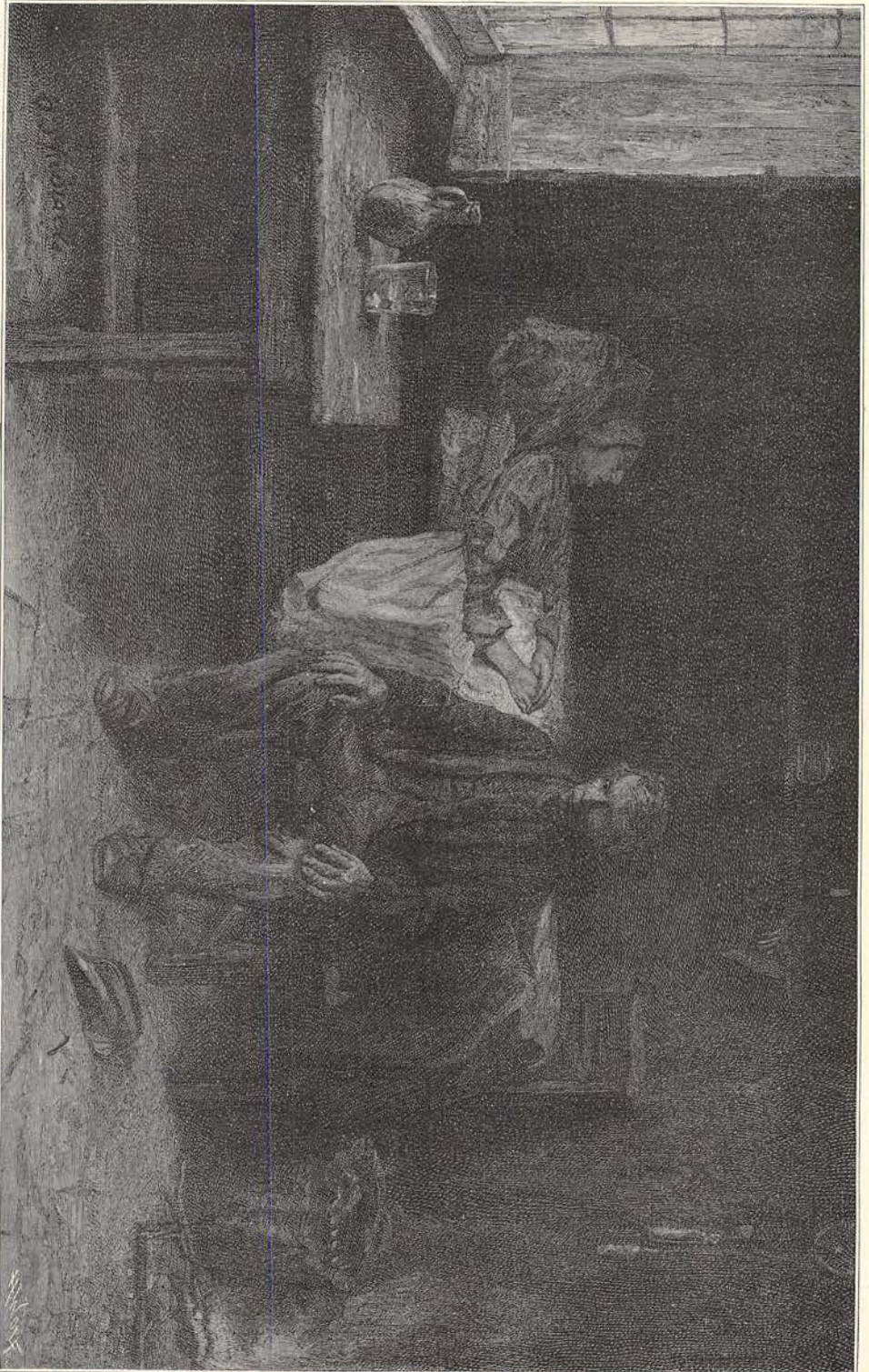
And what becomes of the pictorial, where every nerve is strained to convey the literary? Where are the mysteries of light and shade, the harmonies of color, the rhythm of line, the translucent veil of atmosphere? These qualities, which are beautiful in themselves, are slurred, overlooked, despised, in favor of the story. Lack of use brings lack of knowledge, and as a result we have hot color, weak drawing, false values, and heavy painting. Where they have to observe the model, as in portrait-

ure, they very often do well. Nothing could be much finer than Mr. Watts's "Portrait of Walter Crane," or Lenbach's "Doctor Döllinger." There are Englishmen,—Watts, Leighton, Millais, Orchardson,—and there are Germans,—Menzel, Leibl, Liebermann, Thoma, Lenbach,—who discriminate between the literary and the pictorial, and produce works of much merit, but they are the few out of the many. The prevailing British or Germanism of painting as illustrated literature bears down the majority, and lends a flavor to the whole product. There is no hope that this defect will ever be totally remedied. It is racial. The English and Germans are successful as writers, poets, philosophers. They have never been very successful as artists, and to expect great painting from them is as visionary as to look for great poetry from France or Spain. The exhibits at the Fair were good of their kind, that of England being specially representative, but neither of them was an exhibit of the pure art of painting, barring exceptional work. It is to be regretted that there was no representation of the Scotch painters from Glasgow and Edinburgh. Their work would have pointed the distinction between the pictorial and the literary more strongly than any words could possibly convey it.

From the English to the Dutch section at the Fair was something more than crossing the North Sea. It was a transition from form and color as a means to form and color as an end. The one slurred the means for a factitious result; the other sought no result save that which lay in the beauty of hue or air or sea or sky, in the sentiment of these, or in the sentiment of their producer. The pictures of Israels, the Maris, Neuhuys, Bosboom, Mesdag told the tale of appearance. A woman and child sitting by a window with diffused light and air, cattle standing in the meadows by water with the silvery light of a clouded sky, the nave of a church with its vast spaces of light and shade and broken color, the surge of the yellow sea at the base of the dunes. No more—no need for more. Painting is not a matter of extent, but essence; not so much a matter of subject as of feeling; and surely the Dutch have excelled in these qualities. Their past is perhaps more glorious than their present. For some years there has been no new development; yet in an age not too favorable to the arts they have managed to hold their own with honor.

It was not so long ago that all the art genius of Europe was supposed to rest with the Latins. Louis XIV. thought so at least, and heartily despised the Dutch "maggots." Even those who cared for Dutch painting were inclined to think it odd that art should spring from such a source. The Teutons might be

PAINTED BY JOSEF ISAKELS (HOLLAND).



ALONE IN THE WORLD.

ENGRAVED BY HENRY WOLF.

good musicians, and the Anglo-Saxons good poets, but only the Latins could build, carve, and paint. The history of the past gives some warrant for such a parceling out of the arts. Greece and Italy have been the great art-teachers of Europe. Spain, France, and Flanders have been their aptest pupils, and all the other art-producing nations borrowed what they could of Italian example. The teachers are long dead. The stream of art has passed them with most of their pupils, but where now does it begin to emerge to the light in new form? Not with any Latin descendant, but with the Scandinavians at the North.

Denmark, Norway, and Sweden have not had an art history of much importance. They have never been considered as great art-producers, and the rather sudden appearance of good painting among them is noteworthy. It comes from a body of new men, who, for the main, have been students at their own academies, though often a painter appears who has supplemented an education at home by study in Paris, and, indeed, most of them are acquainted with Parisian art. France has taught them something, has smoothed away their rough edges, helped their technic, but has not as yet disturbed their local character. The color is usually very high—warm reds, yellows, and greens mingling with sharp blues. This leads one at first to imagine that the Scandinavians are impressionists, following the methods of Paris; but the color-motive apparently springs from a different cause. The scientific knowledge that light is prismatic color in a translucent form led the Parisians to use prismatic color with the hope of obtaining light. It was more scientific than optical knowledge with them; but with the Scandinavians it would seem to be exactly the reverse. The Northern summers, with their long sunsets and sunrises, diffuse light through the media of the lower atmosphere with the result of much color brilliancy. Red sunsets are not an unusual thing, and it takes no great faith to believe that Larsson's "Ulf in the Sunset" and Wallander's "Putte," shown at the Fair, were taken directly from nature, though they were sharp and harsh with reds. Again, at other seasons of the year, under a different light, the clearness of the air gives wonderful depth and luminosity to the blue skies, and admits of their intense reflection in calm water. There is no improbability about Prince Eugen's lake views or the water-pieces by Thøgerström, Olsen, and Thaulow, though they appear almost prismatic in their color brilliancy. These men have simply painted what was before them, and if their views look strange to us, it may be because our eyes are accustomed to a different light.

The Scandinavians are among the simplest of the modern painters, composing in large groups,

handling color in large masses, painting with the flat of the brush, and grasping the great essentials at the expense of the trivialities. Simplicity is met with in all the elementary stages of art; but we must not reason from this that the Scandinavians are mere children at painting. True, their years are few, and they have much to learn, but their point of view and craftsmanship are knowing, considering the experience they have had. A people possessed of integrity and capacity, they produce that which is within them in the faith that it is good. That is the basis of true national art.

It is something new, this stream of art under the northern lights. Ten years ago there were only a few painters from the North seen in the Salons. Krøyer, Petersen, Larsson, Edelfelt, and some others had won recognition, and Zorn was a young man just beginning. In the Paris Exposition of 1889 there was an appearance of many canvases that attracted attention. It was a notable exhibition, the first one of importance, and particularly acceptable because of its originality and freshness. The exhibition at Chicago was perhaps less representative, yet every weary wanderer there knows how welcome was the Scandinavian section after viewing the other pictures. It was a breath of pure air after the hot-house studio, something unique, something new. To some it indicated progress, and to others doubtless decline, but it was neither the one nor the other except as regards Scandinavia. It was a change. The old stream of art had put on a different phase, and in a new land was reflecting the beauty of Northern skies, and lakes, and forests. What may be the future of this art it would be unwise to predict. Perhaps it is sufficient that we enjoy it in the present. Its strength lies in its truth, its sincerity, its provincialism, if you please to put it that way. So long as it is true to its own, so long as it reflects the North in thought, method, and spirit, so long as it keeps by itself, it is likely to flourish. The evil that lies ready to ensnare it is cosmopolitanism—the equalizing of all thought and method by a world standard, and the negation of nationality.

Fifteen years ago America had little painting to boast of; certain it is that to-day we have a painting full of much skill, energy, and sentiment, with considerable originality. Fifteen years ago there was a lamentable lack of technical knowledge. Such painters as we had were, with some exceptions, poor workmen. They did not know how to draw, model, or paint. The young men could not get the instruction at home that they desired, and so began the outpouring to Munich and Paris schools. They have been returning to us now for some years, and the present result is a body of young men learned in all the modern knowledge of the brush; but



PAINTED BY WINSLOW HOMER (AMERICAN).

OWNED BY THOMAS D. CLARKE.

EIGHT BELLS.

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ENGRAVED BY HENRY WOLF.

in gaining foreign methods they have acquired foreign ideas, tastes, feelings, sentiments.

Thus we are at the start influenced by foreign elements. The influence is to our gain in craftsmanship, but it is to our loss in originality. Parisian ideas and notions of art may be better than our own, but the point is, they are not our own, and, if we repeat them, we are playing the parrot, imitating, and not creating. American painters are not disposed to be servile followers. On the contrary, the effort is toward being distinctly and individually themselves, but artistically they are hampered by many Gallicisms or world-isms, just as politically a good piece of American legislation is checked by forced consideration for some foreign vote. In both cases there is a compromise not altogether pleasing to either party. We see this compromise in the pictures at the Fair in the profound regard shown for Cazin's tone effects, or Mauve's sheep, or Carolus-Duran's method of handling drapery, or Liebermann's lighting of an interior. "If I could only paint like Velasquez," sighs young Pictor. And the first sitter he gets, he makes it apparent that he can paint just enough like Velasquez to make a nonentity of Pictor. And he is a good American at heart, too. Americanism prevails in his work, but it is indecisive, half-hearted, apologetic. It temporizes, would please the Old World and his own, and in standing on two stools comes near falling down between them. With less technical skill than some of our younger men, Winslow Homer stands by himself, a painter of strength whose works command attention everywhere, largely because they are American without preface or apology. They breathe of the soil and the sea, tell of their place of origin, give the American point of view. Just so with the landscapes of Mr. Inness. They are peculiarly our own in every respect, and would be recognized as such in any country. Many of the older painters, contemporaries of Mr. Inness, such as Mr. Martin, the late Mr. Wyant, and others, men who have not been turned aside by foreign ideas, make up to-day our strongest landscape art. They know what they wish to paint, and they paint it.

We come nearer to having an American school of art in landscape than elsewhere. There is a decisive note even from the younger men. Mr. Platt, Mr. Tryon, Mr. Twachtman, have an individual way of stating their ideas, and some of the painters given to schemes of high light and color are branching out in new and unexpected ways. In fact, there is much hope to be placed in the large band of young landscape-painters at present working in this country. They have skill, and as they grow older they will gain the conviction that our pic-

torial view is the only one for them. It might be added, without national pride, that, as regards landscape, it is the best one now extant in the schools, and that it has little or nothing to gain from the view of others.

Policy as well as patriotism should induce an American to be an American, for there is little advantage in trying to be anything else. Of course there are brilliant painters — Mr. Whistler and Mr. Sargent for instance — who, so far as art is concerned, show no particular nationality. We cannot claim them any more than London or Paris. They are men who would doubtless appear brilliant under any circumstances by virtue of inherent genius. But they are the exceptions, not the rule. The chief value of a nation's art, aside from its being good art, lies in its nationality, its peculiar point of view, its representation of a time, a clime, and a people. We shall never have any great art in America unless it is done in our own way and is distinctly American. We shall never be accounted great because of our doing something like some other people, nor by fashioning that which is best in others into an eclectic cosmopolitanism.

Happily our younger painters are rousing to the necessity of individuality in their work. Year by year their styles deepen, one in refined color, another in pure line, another in brush work, another in largeness of conception, another in delicacy of sentiment. It is these added individualities that produce nationality in art when there is homogeneity in fundamental thought and aim. We have not just now so much of the latter as could be wished for, but we are likely to come to it by degrees. That there is to be great production in painting in this country during the next quarter of a century is almost a foregone conclusion, and it cannot be doubted that our painters will find American life their strongest inspiration.

The pictures at Chicago simply intensified the impression made by the pictures at Paris in 1889. Art in the present, as in the past, is reflecting its surroundings, and throwing out new phases of light and color corresponding to new movements in life. In the older countries of Europe the changes have been few, but with Scandinavia at the north, and America in the west, they have been sudden and rather brilliant. Following the track of civilization, painting writes the color history of the people, and when the land and the people are young, the record is full of aspiration, hope, and energy. Fortunately for the Scandinavians and ourselves, the period is that of youth. The book of our art has just been opened, and no one knows what bright deeds of beauty may be written upon its pages in the years to come.

John C. Van Dyke.