

# THE CENTURY MAGAZINE

VOL. LII.

JUNE, 1896.

No. 2.



## SARGENT AND HIS PAINTING.

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS DECORATIONS IN THE  
BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

### I.

THE first question to be asked about a work of decorative art is, «Is it in itself decorative?» This may be answered in one sense when the work is seen detached from its setting, as on the walls of an exhibition gallery. It may be more completely and decidedly answered when the work is looked at in place. We may have a good room with bare walls—a well-proportioned room. If the painter decorates it he must take care that it remains good in this sense. Not much more than this may be required of him, except that the subject of his work be appropriate to the uses of the room, and that the treatment be in accord with the architectural environment. He may even enhance architectural effects, but the first point is to beautify. Within certain architectural limitations he has a wide field in which he may exercise his decorative fancy.

Sargent's work in the Boston Public Library fills only one end of a hall, and consists of a frieze, a lunette, and an arched ceiling. All the rest of the hall is bare. The walls, which are of a very light yellowish-gray tint, have an effect that can only be described as garish, lighted as they are by skylights in the ceiling high above the floor. If these walls, now bare, were covered

with temporary hangings of dark, quiet tints, the decorations would appear to far better advantage. The pictures cover such a small part of the entire wall and ceiling space that, even from a near, and consequently unfavorable, point of view, it is impossible to avoid the damaging effect of their harsh surroundings. With their present environment, the pictures might well be compared to a fine ruby set in a plaster brooch. Mr. Sargent's work suffers in this respect as the work of Puvis de Chavannes or Edwin A. Abbey does not. The pictures by Abbey are suitably framed by the dark-colored wainscoting and other woodwork in the delivery-room. The yellow marble of the splendid stairway and corridor, as well as the prevailing general tint of that part of the walls not intended to be decorated, were taken account of, of course, by Puvis de Chavannes when he painted the beautiful composition, «The Muses Welcoming the Genius of Enlightenment.»<sup>1</sup> When his work in the stairway is finished there will still be large wall-spaces undecorated. How admirably the composition now in place fits its surroundings, how complete in itself it is, we need only walk up the steps and through the corridor to appreciate. It does not obtrude, it does not distort the architectural proportions, and it harmonizes in the most subtle

<sup>1</sup> See THE CENTURY for February, 1896.



T. COLE SC.

PAINTED BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

IN THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE.

CEILING—ASTARTE.

and delicate way with everything that comes in sight when looked at from any point of view. There may be in the work certain portions—one or two heads of the muses, perhaps—that do not seem to be as good as the average of Puvis's work, and the white of the robes seems a little cold and harsh when looked at piece by piece, lacking in the tender quality of color that characterizes other work by the great artist; but as a whole it is the acme of successful decoration, simple, beautiful, and absolutely fitting.

Where Mr. Sargent has had a somewhat similar problem to solve he also has succeeded. The color of the stone floor in Sargent Hall is permanent. So, too, I take it, is the color of the wall below the frieze. The composition of the prophets is admirably colored to unite the wan effect of what is below it with the brilliant tints of the lunette and arch. The transition is made easily and without a jar. It is only when we look above that we feel the sharp and disagreeable contrast with the rest of the room. There can be no doubt whatever that when the work, which includes the decoration of the entire room, is completed, the pictures now in place will gain immeasurably in general effect.

Let us now consider them by themselves. The frieze begins at the height of the door in the end wall, over which is placed a figure of Moses, modeled in relief, and colored. There are five painted figures on each side of the Moses, and four on each of the side walls, all representing Hebrew prophets.

In the ceiling are depicted the gods of polytheism and idolatry. A dark figure of the goddess Neith, the All Mother, treated almost as a flat mass, stretches over the entire arch from base to base, and serves as the groundwork of the composition. This figure typifies the eternal forces to which the first religious instincts in mankind may be attributed. The head of Neith appears in the upper right-hand portion of the arch of the ceiling; her hands reach down to the cornice on one side, her feet to that on the other. The firmament is her body; a golden zodiac forms her collar or necklace; a serpent with silver scales is coiled around her neck; an archer, caught in the huge folds of the serpent, represents the forces of warmth and summer struggling with those of cold and winter, typified by the serpent.

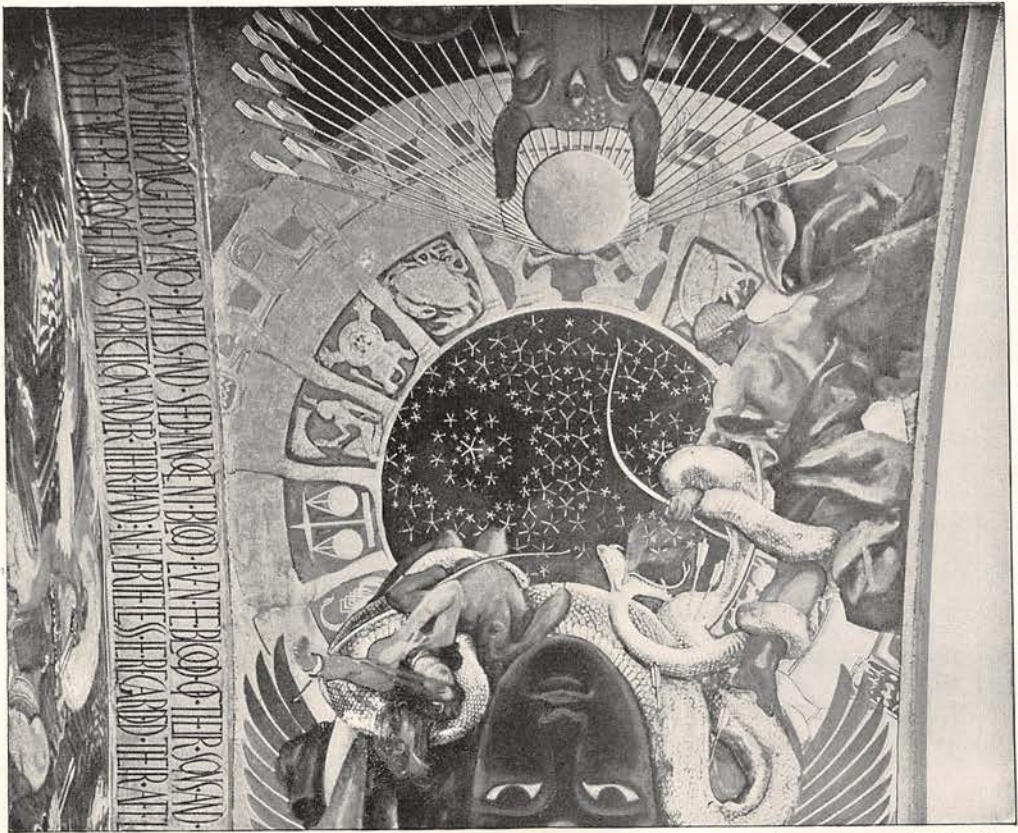
The story is a development of the primeval myth of the eternal conflict between the sun and the dragon, in which the sun is conquered in the winter months, but conquers during the summer.

In the Phœnician mythology Tammuz (the sun), a beautiful youth beloved by the goddess Astarte (typifying the productive forces of nature), was slain on Mount Lebanon by a boar (the dragon); but by the intercession of Astarte he was allowed to spend a portion of each year on earth. Annually the river Adonis, which rises in Mount Lebanon, ran red with his blood, the signal for a period of lamentation for his death, which was changed to rejoicing when he revived, and the river again flowed clear. From this story the familiar myth of Venus and Adonis was developed.<sup>1</sup>

In the decoration the archer in the serpent's coils on one side of the zodiac drives it back with his arrows far enough to reveal the signs of the six warm months. On the other side he is depicted lifeless in the serpent's strangling folds, and the six cold months are covered up. The figure of Astarte, the lover of Adonis, or Tammuz, occupies the lower right-hand portion of the ceiling. The left-hand portion shows the giant figure of Moloch, with the head of a bull, and four arms, seated on his throne. The sun is over his head; at his feet are the figures of the Egyptian trinity, Osiris, Isis, and Horus, the father, mother, and son. With two of his hands he crushes human victims, in a third he holds a dagger, and in the fourth the Assyrian disk. Five golden lions about his knees typify the heat of the sun and its destroying force. From the sun itself, however, radiate long golden beams, each terminating in a hand holding a seed between the thumb and finger, symbols of life-giving power.

In the lunette the Jews, represented by a group of twelve nude figures, are shown in subjection to the Egyptian and the Assyrian, typified by figures of Pharaoh and the Assyrian king. Behind the one is a heap of dead captives, the male sphinx of Egypt, and the goddess Pasht, with the head of a lioness, the body of a woman, and great wings of black and gold. Behind the other is the Assyrian lion trampling on the slain, and an Assyrian god, with the body of a man and the head of a vulture. Over and above all, dominating the mighty rulers, their gods and symbols, is Jehovah, whose hands stretch out from the clouds and restrain the oppressors. His face is veiled by a group of cherubim with crimson wings, who fly before him. The lunette, thus showing the overwhelming of the heathen oppressors, unites by its subject and by its middle position in the decoration the ceiling and the frieze.

<sup>1</sup> Handbook of the New Public Library in Boston. Compiled by Herbert Small, with contributions by C. Howard Walker and Lindsay Swift.



PAINTED BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

FROM "THE CENTURY" FOR NOVEMBER, 1895.

«THE ZODIAC,» FROM THE CEILING ARCH IN THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

At least as much as is given in this brief description is necessary to an understanding of Mr. Sargent's subject. The work now in place illustrates Confusion, the first part of his theme. Unity, in which Christ preaching the gospel will be the subject, and Conventionality, depicting the rites and symbolism of early Christianity, will follow. There are details, both of subject and of pictorial representation, in the part under consideration that I have not touched upon, but we may now not unintelligibly speak of the work in its artistic aspects.

The work as a whole is like a casket of jewels. Let not conventional theories prevent us from seeing that it is intensely decorative. There is a difference between it and such decoration as that of which the work of Puvis de Chavannes may serve as an example. Beautifully tinted and chastely designed papers are suitable for wall-hangings, but so, too, are richly embroidered stuffs. The difference reduced to its lowest terms may be expressed by such a comparison. The Puvis picture is admirably simple. The Sargent pictures, though

they comprise pieces of painting of great simplicity of treatment, are complicated; but they are brilliant, almost dazzling, in effect. You may prefer one sort of work to another, but it is not fair to condemn either for its difference from the one you like better, if both are good. I fancy that here in America, unaccustomed as we are to palaces, we may forget some of the magnificently gilded and painted rooms we have seen in Europe. Readers may recall one or two where grand effects were produced by a profusion of ornament and glowing color. And the East? No doubt Mr. Sargent had in mind the jeweled architecture of India, the lacquers of Japan, and the polychromatic temples of the Egyptians.

There are some things in the work that are finer than any other fine things, and there are three imperfections. The choice of red as the color for the wings of the cherubim I cannot but think unfortunate. I know that to change them would upset a part of the general color-scheme, and so involve in a measure the painting of something different from what we now see. But if they had been orange instead of

red, they could have been made to appear luminous in the decoration; and as they are now, they are not. Red, by its inherent quality, is a dark, non-luminous pigment; it can be made to glow only by skilful juxtaposition of combative tints. The effect of the mass where the cherubim are flying before Jehovah is dark. Would not a light, a luminous mass, have been better in this important central position if it could have been attained? Might not even the uncovered face of Jehovah have been better? As it is, too, one does not see the heads of the cherubim. They are «lost,» and the wings seem to be flying alone in a whirl impelled by some hidden centripetal force. The second defect is that the distinctly dark parts of the composition, while it is easy to see that they are not actually very low in tone, *appear* so dark that their form is not clear. This is so in the case of the whole figure of Neith, though the head is plain enough. In the lunette the head of the goddess Pasht is invisible. The third fault is in the Moses. No valid objection may be made to modeling this figure in relief, nor to relief

employed in other parts of the work. On the contrary, the placing of the Moses in the center of the frieze, with the importance given to it by the relief, was a masterly stroke, but the head seems small and without much dignity. In actual measurement it may be as large as the heads of the prophets, even larger, but it looks smaller. This may be partly owing to the head-dress which hems it in on each side, and it may also be that it is the result of the lighting on the modeled forms. If the shadows cast are not strong enough, or fall in the wrong way, a head may look weak that under other conditions would look strong. The body of the Moses, with the arms outstretched to grasp the tables of the law, is vigorous, imposing, and filled with a fine sense of mystery. Apart from these points, I can see nothing in Mr. Sargent's work that can be found fault with even by the hypercritical.

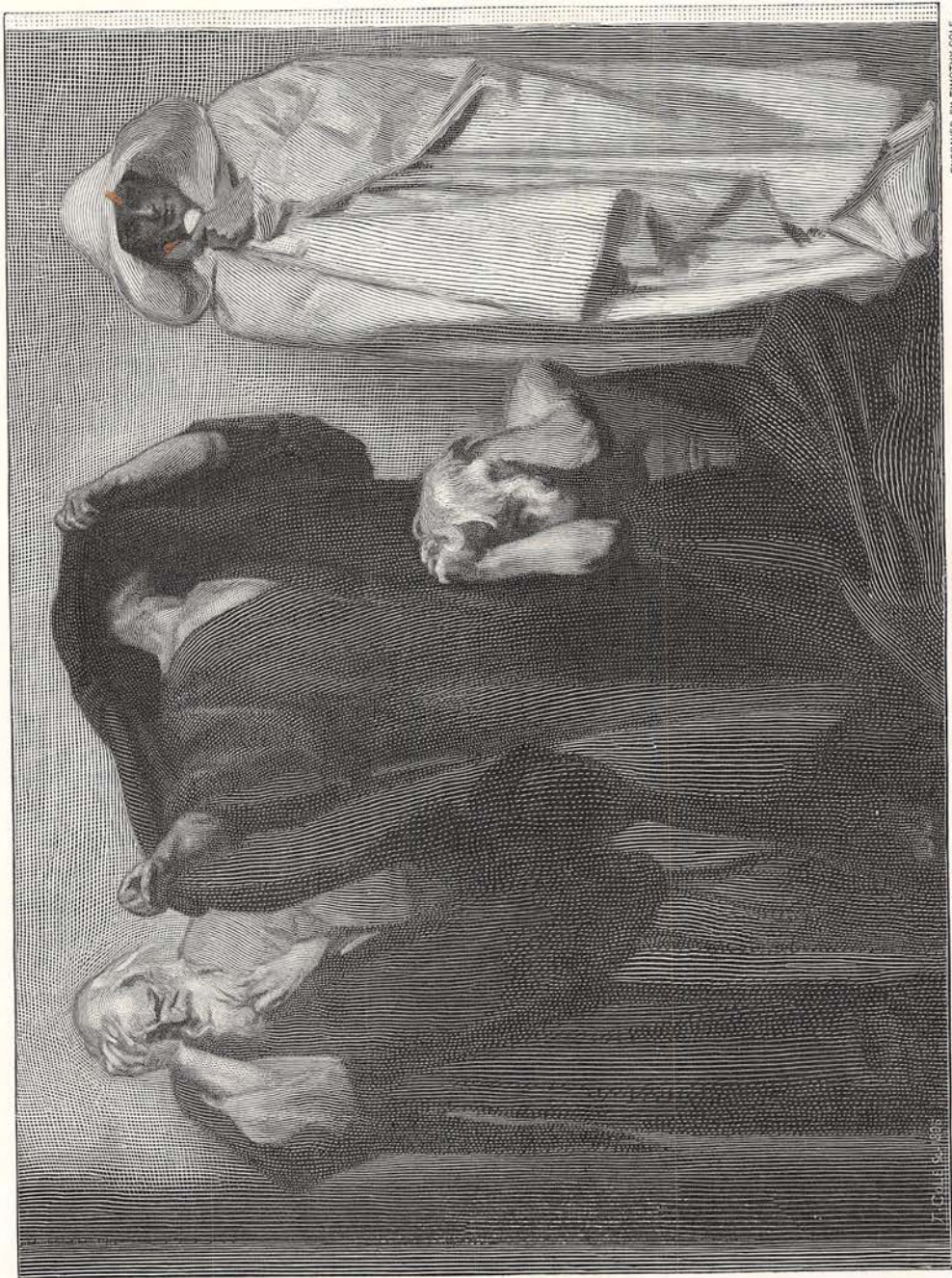
The particular portions of the decoration that are marked by the highest achievement, both in imaginative and technical qualities, are the figure of Astarte, the fighting archer



PAINTED BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

PANEL—THE PROPHETS MICAH, HAGGAI, MALACHI, ZECHARIAH.

IN THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.



ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE.

IN THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

PANEL—THE PROPHETS ZEPHANIAH, JOEL, OBADIAH, HOSEA

PAINTED BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

and the serpent, the Pharaoh, and the group of the Jews. In his portrait work Mr. Sargent has often given evidence of the possession of the most sensitive appreciation of form and color, but he has seldom, if ever, given better proof of it than in the conception and execution of this figure of Astarte. As long ago as 1880, in the early days of his artistic career, having made a winter's journey to Morocco, he exhibited in the Salon at Paris a picture called «Smoke of Ambergris,» a Moorish woman in white, holding some of the ample folds of her mantle above her head like a canopy. At her feet on the marble floor burned the ambergris, and the thin vapors, rising, filled her improvised hood as she inhaled the delicious fragrance. There was a mysterious charm in the picture, though, apparently, it was only a direct, cleverly handled study from nature, and in looking at it one felt a sensation as of the Orient brought to one's door. When I saw the Astarte at Boston I thought of this early canvas, and while there is no analogy between the two, it caused me to reflect that in the Salon picture there was an indication of the same phase of the artist's temperament that dominated him when he produced the Astarte. The love of things weird and mysterious, manifested in the fanciful portrayal of the Moorish woman, found a wider scope for expression in the mythical personality of the Phenician goddess. Originally, she was worshiped as the goddess of the moon, and the female, or productive principle.

The worship of Astarte was degraded by the Phenicians into a lascivious and wanton rite. She is depicted, therefore, not as the kindly and abundant mother of fruits and grains, like Ceres, but as the goddess of sensuality. . . . She stands upon the crescent, and a cobra is coiled at her feet. Around her is a floating blue veil. The hem of her robe is richly embroidered with gold, the ornament including figures of the sun and moon, and lions, fishes, birds, and other emblems connected with her worship. On either side of her are the columns used in her temples. Behind her is the tree of life, only the pine cones which terminate its branches, however, being visible. Through her veil may be seen, on either side of her form, a group of three priestesses, shaking the sistrum, or rattle, and swaying to the measure of a wanton and luxurious dance. At her feet are her victims, whom her lusts have lured to their ruin, a vulture tearing at the flesh of one, and a chimæra devouring the other.<sup>1</sup>

We are told that Mr. Sargent painted this figure in a single day, and we can well believe it. It bears the marks of intrepid execution, and every part of it vibrates in harmony.

<sup>1</sup> Handbook of the New Public Library.

Brain and hand must have worked in perfect unison, and the figure and its accessories seem to have been carried to completion in a single sustained effort. The insinuating charm of the face, the vague, inscrutable enticement of the figure, with its diaphanous veiling of tender, gas-like blue, fascinate the eye. The dexterity of the work is amazing, its grace is irresistible.

The portion of the ceiling which includes the zodiac and the archer struggling with the serpent is admirable in composition, movement, and color. The figure of Adonis, with his robe flying from his shoulders, seen in back view, with the head in profile, one arm drawn up to pull an arrow, and the other straight to hold the bow, is as broadly rendered as the sculpture of the ancient Greeks. It is Hellenic in conception, and appears in fine contrast with the conventionalized forms of Egyptian and Assyrian art which environ it. That, while so different in spirit from these weird, symbolical figures, it does not seem in the least out of place, affords proof of what is indeed plain throughout the decoration—the rare skill with which the artist has woven a picturesque and harmonious whole out of so many incongruous elements.

In the figure of Pharaoh the artist has adapted the conventional design of the Egyptians, placing the head and legs in profile, and the body and arms in full-face view. This figure, and that of the Assyrian king, also following archaic conventions, are represented as of great stature. In both the uncouth forms of the earliest art are so skillfully translated that they do not conflict with the realistic treatment of the nude figures of the Jews. The slight proportions of Pharaoh, the slim waist, the long arms extended, and the ferret-like face, with the long, black-encircled eye, combine to produce an impression of sinister cruelty. The massive golden crown, dome-like in shape, adds an air of majesty and power. In the treatment of this figure, as in those of the Assyrian god and lion, in the right-hand portion of the lunette, the artist has accomplished a *tour de force* such as has been rarely attempted. How able is this treatment is shown by the telling importance of the group of the Jews in the middle of the composition. Unlike the oppressors and their gods, they are painted life-size only, and with as much realism as the decorative limitations allow. Here there are no problems involving the adaptation of archaic forms, and, as in the figures of the prophets, the painter appears as we know him in other work—a draftsman of force, style, and confident sureness, a col-



PAINTED BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

LUNETTE.

IN THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.



orist of restrained strength and comprehensive breadth of scale. The central figure of the group, on his knees, like his companions, but with his arms uplifted, and his face raised to Jehovah, while the other heads are bowed, is a fine piece of painting, simply conceived and as simply wrought. Its place in the group, and the contrasting attitudes of its fellows, not subordinated, but helping to show the idea expressed by this one for all,—the wail of agony and supplication from the twelve tribes of Israel, who have forgotten their God and worshiped the idols of the heathen, and now, with his altar-fire rekindled, turn to implore his mercy and protection,—constitute one of the best illustrations in modern art of a subject interpreted in the plain language of painting, which may not transgress the laws of truth to nature.

The color-scheme of the frieze, as has been said, serves well its purpose in the ensemble of the decoration. The figures of the prophets, taken separately, present some fine characterizations, and in painting them, the composition having been determined, the artist has had a task difficult enough to cause him to exert his best powers, but uncomplicated by the archaic considerations in the lunette and the ceiling. Particularly worthy of note is the management of the strong reds in the figures of Joshua and Elijah, on each side of the Moses, and the intermingling of reddish tints with the gold in the garment and wings that envelop this commanding figure. Not less effective is the strong note given by the blue robe of Isaiah on the right, and those of blue and brown in the group of Zephaniah and Joel on the side wall at the left. Through these, and the prevailing white and neutral tints of the garments in the other groups, there is a fine play of color, subdued in just proportion to meet the requirements of the position of the frieze.

## II.

THE high reputation of John Singer Sargent, the painter of this remarkable work, makes him one of the most prominent figures in the modern world of art. No American artist has occupied such an exalted position as he has attained before reaching his fortieth year; none is more celebrated in Paris, London, and the other art centers of Europe. He has painted some of his best portraits in the United States, and «La Carmencita,» the picture which represents him in the famous Luxembourg Gallery in Paris, was painted in



DRAWN FROM LIFE BY CARROLL BECKWITH, APRIL 16, 1876.

JOHN S. SARGENT AT THE AGE OF TWENTY.

New York, and first publicly shown at the exhibition of the Society of American Artists. His career has been a cosmopolitan one, and his youth was passed among surroundings very different from those that affect the intellectual bent of most American boys who become painters and sculptors. He was born in Florence, Italy, in 1856, whither his parents had gone to live some years before. His father was Dr. Fitz-Hugh Sargent, a Boston physician, and his mother, whose maiden name was Newbold, and who belonged to a well-known family of Philadelphia, possessed the accomplishment of painting very cleverly in water-colors. Educated partly in Italy and partly in Germany, young Sargent entered the Academy of Fine Arts at Florence at a comparatively early age, and before he was eighteen had spent several years in art study. He learned to paint in water-colors, as well as to draw with the pencil or charcoal, and one summer, when he was in the Tyrol with his mother, Frederick Leighton, not yet a peer and president of the Royal Academy, but a famous English artist notwithstanding, meeting them, commended the boy's work, and counseled him to continue. His advent a year or two later in the studio of the pupils of Carolus Duran is thus described by Sargent's intimate



MODELED BY AUGUSTUS ST. GAUDENS.

BAS-RELIEF PORTRAIT IN BRONZE OF JOHN S. SARGENT.

friend and fellow-student in Paris, the well-known portrait-painter, Carroll Beckwith:

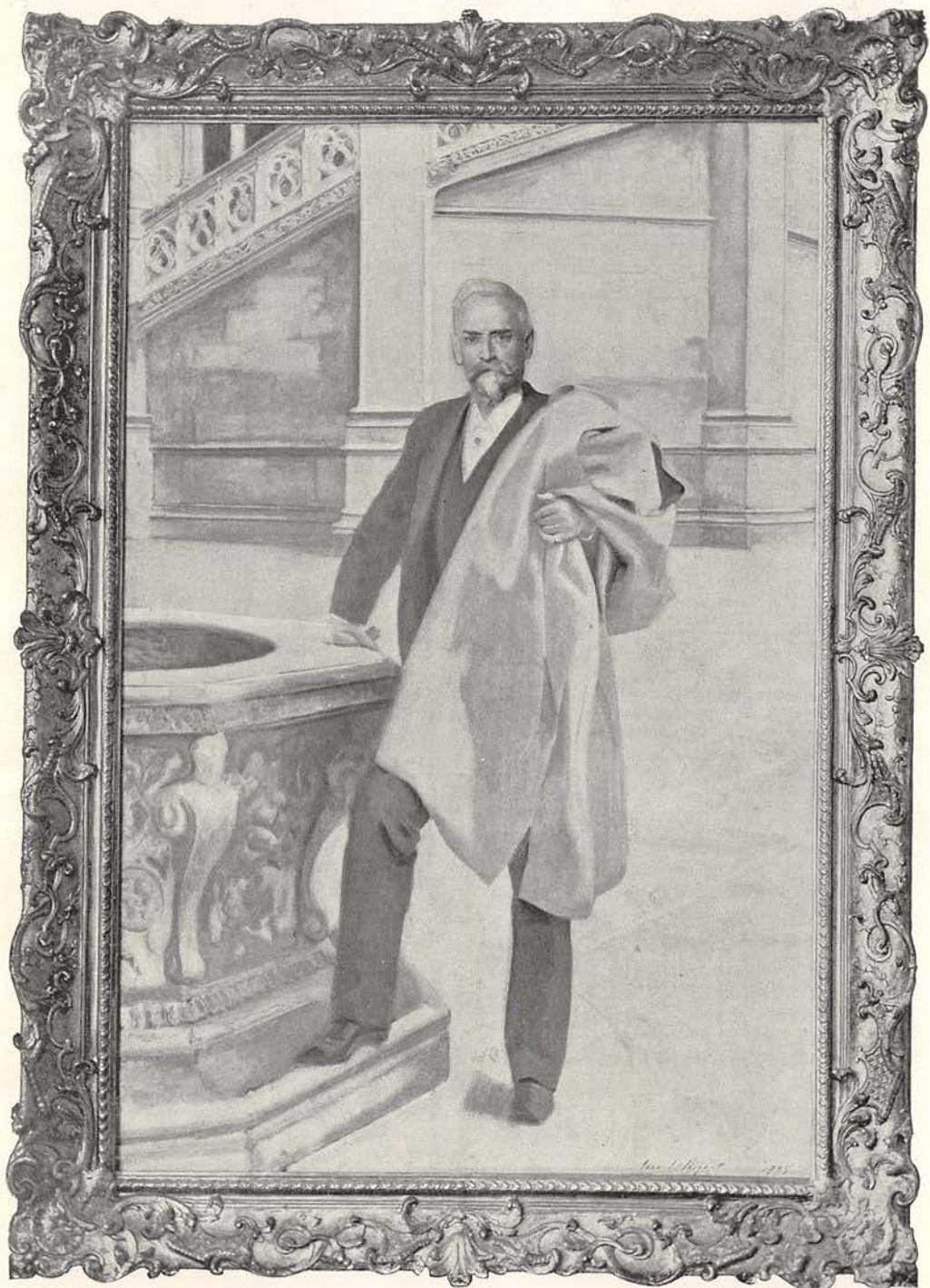
It was on a Tuesday or Friday, the days when Carolus came to criticize our work, in the spring of 1874, at the old studio on the Boulevard du Mont-Parnasse. I had a place near the door, and when I heard a knock I turned to open it. There stood a gray-haired gentleman, accompanied by a tall, rather lank youth, who carried a portfolio under his arm, and I guessed that he must be a coming *nouveau*. The gentleman addressed me politely in French, and I replied in the same language, but with less fluency, for I had not been long in Paris myself, telling him that the "patron" was in the studio at the moment, and asking him if they would wait. He evidently saw that I was a fellow countryman, for he then spoke in English, and we held a short conversation in subdued tones; for the school etiquette of course forbade talking while the patron was within the walls. At any other time the visitors might have had a more demonstrative reception. Carolus soon finished his criticism, and I presented my compatriots. Sargent's father explained that he had brought his son to the studio that he might become a pupil; the portfolio was laid on the floor, and the drawings were spread out. We all crowded about to look, and Carolus spoke favorably. He told the young artist that he might enter his class, and when he had departed we all crowded about again to look more closely at the drawings. We were astonished at the cleverness shown in the water-color and pencil work, and his *début* was considered a most promising one. He made rapid progress from the day he entered the school, and gradually rose to perfection in academic study.

The serious and earnest side of Sargent's character always impressed his fellow-students in those Latin Quarter days. He had no taste for dissipation, though he was by no

means puritanical. The lighter side of his temperament found satisfaction in music, the theater, and literature, and in the keen appreciation of everything in the tastes and amusements of the day that had a new or original flavor. Though an eager reader, he was not a bookman, but an observer. "Alert" is the adjective which perhaps best expresses the quality of his predominating characteristic. He was quick to see, and ready to absorb, everything that struck him as novel.

I remember how much we used to like to go to the Colonne concerts at the Châtelet, and to those given by Maître Padeloup at the Cirque d'Hiver, on Sunday afternoons. Some of us had heard Berlioz's «*Damnation de Faust*» at the former place fifteen or sixteen times. Sargent, who dearly loved the music, was struck by the odd picturesqueness of the orchestra at Padeloup's, seen in the middle of the amphitheater, the musicians' figures foreshortened from the high point of view on the rising benches, the necks of the bass-voils sticking up above their heads, the white sheets of music illuminated by little lamps on the racks, and the violin-bows moving in unison. While he listened he looked, and one day he took a canvas and painted his impression. He made an effective picture of it, broad, and full of color. Sargent's musical perceptions should be particularly mentioned in an analysis of his temperament, for they are very keen, and his knowledge of good music and his love of it are strong factors in his personality. Another strong temperamental trait is his susceptibility to the impress of race characteristics. He has shown this in the eager grasp of the picturesque, not only in foreign lands, but whenever he met with anything markedly racial in subject for a picture at home. His large canvas, «*El Jaleo*,» a woman dancing, with a company of Spanish singers and time-makers behind her, and the studies he made of the Javanese dancing-girls at the Paris Exposition of 1889, are among the tangible results of this tendency. Besides his native language, he speaks and writes French, Italian, and German.

Sargent's studio is always a sociable place. Unlike many artists, the presence of visitors or companions does not disturb him when he is painting. He seems to work without obvious exertion even in his intensest activity. «*When his models are resting, he fills up the gap by strumming on the piano or guitar,*» says one of his friends; «*his manner while at work is that of a man of consummate address, and does not show physical or mental effort.*» He



PAINTED BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

RICHARD M. HUNT.

OWNED BY GEORGE VANDERBILT.

BEATRICE



PAINTED BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

OWNED BY ROBERT GOELET.

FROM "THE CENTURY" FOR MARCH, 1892.

ENGRAVED BY H. WOLF.

PORTRAIT OF MISS BEATRICE GOELET.

knows thoroughly well what he is about and what his capabilities are, so that, while he searches the truth in his pictorial rendering of what is before him, and often repaints a part of his picture entirely in the effort to make it as perfect as possible, he works with confidence. He has never been allied with any revolutionary movements in art, and, while novelty appeals to him in things seen, he shuns all passing crazes or new doctrines. His feeling in art is of the most intense sort. Skill and accomplishment in every field excite his admiration, but his own creed is stable and unaffected by transitory influences. Possibly, in his youthful days, when he made pencil drawings from the heroic figures in the great canvases by Tintoretto, Titian, and Paul Veronese in Venice and Florence, and drew them again from memory to show his comrades in Paris the grandeur of line in these compositions which had so deeply stirred him, he laid the foundations of this stability. This quality has been of much benefit to him. Confronted by one difficult artistic problem after another, he has presented in every case solutions which, though sometimes more complete and more brilliant than others, have been uniformly sound—audacious sometimes, but always sane.

«En Route pour La Pêche» was the title of a picture of modest dimensions signed by John S. Sargent, and exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1878. It represented fisher-girls at Cancale, setting out for their work with their baskets under their arms, and was bright and pleasing in color. It bore a look of cleverness that was unmistakable, but it was no more remarkable than the first picture of many another young painter of right education. In the same year, in the American gallery of the Universal Exposition, Mr. Sargent showed a competent, well-drawn portrait of a lady. At the Salon of 1879 appeared a charming little picture of a young girl among the olive-trees at Capri, and a portrait of Carolus Duran. The latter canvas at once attracted attention, and the jury of award voted an honorable mention to the painter. In 1880 came the «Smoke of Ambergris» already mentioned, and a portrait of Mme. Pailleron, wife of the celebrated author of «Le monde où l'on s'ennuie.» In 1881 there were two portraits of young ladies, and these were of such merit that the jury decreed a medal of the second class, and so placed the artist *hors concours*. In these successive exhibits there was ample proof of artistic ability, and increasing evidence of individuality of style. In 1882 «El Jaleo,» which is now in the possession of a gentleman in Boston, and

the portrait of Miss Louise Burckhardt, which together made Sargent's Salon «exhibition,» drew so much notice that his reputation took on a quality of generally admitted excellence, and his work was considered of such distinction that he was in a fair way to become, if he had not already become, a portrait-painter of fashion in Paris. About this time the studio in the Rue Notre Dame des Champs was given up, and a new and larger one taken on the Boulevard Berthier, on the north bank of the Seine. At the Salon of 1883 a very large canvas, called «Portraits of Children,» in which four little girls were depicted in a spacious hall, evoked high praise from critics and public, more than ever confirming the opinion that Sargent's work possessed the highest sort of qualities, and that he was destined to become a great figure in modern art. In the summer of the same year at her country place at Houlgate he painted the portrait of Mme. Gauthereau, a celebrated Parisian beauty, and exhibited it at the Salon the following spring. It aroused a storm of disapproval. Mme. Gauthereau is painted full-length, in a ball gown of black, the head turned in profile to our view, and, judged merely from a reproduction, the picture is seen to be one of exquisite style. It is certainly masterly in line and general disposition; that much may be seen from a photograph. Painters who have seen the picture speak of its marvelous technical qualities, and of the sensitive drawing of the head. Some of Sargent's friends speak of it as his masterpiece, and others declare that he himself so considers it. But it was severely criticized. The admirers of Mme. Gauthereau talked in the salons and clubs of the extremely poetic type of her beauty, and of the realistic rendering of externals only that this portrait, in their opinion, presented. There was an uproar about it, in fact, and most of the critics took the side of her partizans. The great artistic merits of the work were almost entirely overlooked. That spring Sargent went to London to execute some commissions for portraits, and events have so shaped themselves in his career that he has never since had a studio in Paris.

The village of Broadway, England, is about twelve miles south of Stratford. In 1885 Sargent and other artists were spending the summer there, and their days passed pleasantly with tennis and cricket in their leisure hours. Every day an hour before the sun went down there was commotion in the little colony, for with the last rays came the time when the effect was on for



PAINTED BY JOHN S. SARGENT.

PORTRAIT OF MISS ———.

Sargent's picture of two little girls, children of the draftsman Barnard. They posed in a garden, and everybody lent a hand in lighting paper lanterns, and hanging them in the rose-bushes and shrubbery. Canvas, easel, and paint-box were brought, and all made ready. Then for twenty or thirty minutes, at most, the painter worked assiduously in the twilight. The whole day seemed to lead up to that brief period, so much did every one become interested as the picture grew and its beauty developed. It was finished, and entitled «Carnation Lily, Lily Rose.» Everybody in London saw it the next year at the New Gallery, and it was purchased by the Chantrey Fund, thus finding a permanent place in an English public collection.

The artist now found himself so successfully launched that he took a studio in the British capital, and spent the next two years in painting portraits. In the summer of 1887 he came to the United States (his second visit, for he had spent a short time in Philadelphia during the Centennial Exhibition in 1876) to paint a portrait of Mrs. Henry G. Marquand. This portrait, one of the most dignified and excellent in the long series of his works, was painted at Newport, and the following winter Sargent passed in Boston and in New York painting others. Then the painter went back to London. He returned to America in 1890, and spent nearly a year painting the portraits of Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, and Lawrence Barrett, which hang in the club-house of The Players; the «Carmencita»; the child portrait of «Beatrice»; and a number of others. In the autumn his father died in England, and he took ship from New York. The commission for the Boston decorations had been offered to him, but the order had not yet been definitely given. Just as the steamer was leaving he received the papers, and so it happened that he carried the commission with him, fittingly crowning a most successful year's work in his own country. In the winter of 1891-92 he went to Egypt, and settled down at El Fayoum, where he made a number of studies, and then returned to England. He joined Edwin A. Abbey at Fairford, where they built a studio of corrugated iron, suitable in its dimensions for the handling of large canvases, and during the next two years he worked there on his decorations, retaining his studio in London meanwhile, and painting portraits, among them being that of Miss Ellen Terry. The decorations were brought to Boston in the summer of 1895, and put in place in the library under the artist's supervision. Before returning to England in the autumn Mr. Sargent

made a visit to Biltmore, North Carolina, and painted there the portraits of Frederick Law Olmsted and the late Richard Morris Hunt for Mr. George Vanderbilt. The owner of «Biltmore» was happily inspired when he gave the commissions for these portraits of the distinguished men who created his beautiful estate, so that they might hang on his walls as memorials in time to come. Mr. Hunt's striking figure is fittingly portrayed in the courtyard of the house he built, and Mr. Olmsted's poetic face is so faithfully and sympathetically interpreted that his most intimate friends have nothing but praise for the work.

Mr. Sargent was elected a member of the Society of American Artists in 1880; he became an associate of the Royal Academy in 1893; he is a member of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, which holds the Salon of the Champ de Mars, and an associate of the National Academy of Design. When his election as an A. R. A. was talked of in London some time before it came to pass, he is said to have remarked that if it were necessary to become a British subject in order to receive this honor he preferred to do without it, as he would rather retain his American citizenship. He received the election, however, and will probably be made an academician in due time. His list of medals and exhibition honors is a choice one, but it will suffice to note here that, besides being *hors concours* at the Salon, he received a medal of honor at the Paris Exposition of 1889.

### III.

A SPECIES of conservatism generally prevents the same enthusiastic praise being given to a work by a living painter that is so often freely accorded to the creations of men who have lived in the past. Books have been written about the works of Titian, Rembrandt, Velasquez, and other great painters of portraits, but I fear that if I say that Mr. Sargent has painted one that deserves to be classed with the works of these masters I shall be thought to have overstepped the mark. Yet I feel sure that posterity will give its judgment in just about such terms. The apprehension that a living painter may, before he comes to the end of his career, fall far below the standard set by some single fine work that he has produced is in part the reason why critics shrink from unstinted praise of the work of their contemporaries. It is so easy to deride them if such a falling off occurs. But if the work justifies the highest word, is it not only fair to say it unhesitatingly? Few great artists have collapsed, but

there have been many whose work has deteriorated, and never again reached a certain high plane once attained in some supreme achievement. I do not think that there is anything in Mr. Sargent's work since he painted the «Beatrice» to lead us to imagine that he may not again paint a portrait as perfect as this, or even a finer one; but all things being considered, and the factor of personal preference being admitted in the judgment, it is the one that I choose as the best, and if limited to a single canvas, the one upon which I should rest his claim to rank with the world's great painters. This little girl, with pale golden hair tied with a pink ribbon, in a gown of silk with stripes of pink and gray, her small hands joined before her with the finger-tips touching, and the cockatoo in his high gilt cage behind her, presents an adorable picture. That the portrait is delicate and harmonious in color, that the figure and accessories are painted with facile grace and sure precision, that it is captivating in aspect, and that it is complete in the sense that nothing may be taken away, changed, or added to—it is easy to say all this, and it is easy to support the assertions before the picture. To explain its great charm is more difficult than to analyze its merits. The charm seems to lie in the marvelous excellence of the painter's handiwork, expressing, as it does so perfectly, the sweet attraction of beautiful childhood. There are other ways of painting than the manner in which this picture is painted. There are certain more naïve ways of interpreting nature, some that appeal more touchingly, perhaps, by a sort of timidity perceptible in the painter's heart, and made seductive by the justness of the final rendering; but nothing better in this particular way could well be accomplished.

Quite different from the «Beatrice,» but potent in the quality of attraction, is the «Portrait of Miss——» (shown on page 176). A characteristic expression is here so rendered in paint as to be almost startling in reality. It is also one of the best examples of his work in composition, and there is great beauty of tone in the black satin gown. In the portrait of «Joseph Jefferson as Dr. Pangloss,» the embodiment of a dramatic rôle, is a picture of live personality (see frontispiece). In that of Miss Dunham there are tenderness of color in the simple painting of the white draperies and sympathetic translation of character. We might go through the whole list of his portraits and find in almost every one of them some distinguishing quality. If we feel impelled to think of prototypes, we may

be reminded at times of Velasquez, at other times of Vandyke. The beautiful «Portrait of Mrs. Davis and Her Son,» sober and restrained in color, noble in conception, and painted with a fine swing of the brush, will suggest a comparison with the latter master, as the «Beatrice» does with Velasquez. Again Mr. Sargent turns our thoughts to the English school of the last century, as in the «Portrait of Mrs. Manson.» It bears a general resemblance to the school, but a particular resemblance to none of the painters that belong to it. It is suggestive in style only, and not in treatment; for the loose drawing and conventional construction of the famous English masters have nothing in common with the firm yet graceful strength that marks this charming work.

Mr. Sargent's great success as a painter of portraits is no doubt due to the fact that, in addition to a technical equipment of the highest order, he possesses intuitive perceptions which enable him to grasp his sitters' mental phases. His cultivated eye quickly determines the pose which naturally and easily harmonizes the physical side with the mental, and his artistic feeling dictates unerringly by what attributes of costume and surroundings the picture formed in his mind's eye may be best presented on canvas. He rarely neglects to compose his picture; that is, not only to determine the lines of the figure, but also to fill the canvas and balance it. How much this part of the art counts for in portrait-painting every intelligent painter knows; but how many fail to appreciate it, how many are satisfied with a haphazard arrangement, that suffices to bring the figure within the frame, and leaves balance and symmetry to take care of themselves, may be seen in the numerous portraits in the current exhibitions, both at home and abroad, in which good intention and serious study are shorn of their force by careless composition.

Working with a mastery of his tools and medium surpassed by none of his contemporaries, and bringing to the interpretation of his themes concentration of ideas and facility of expression, Mr. Sargent is peculiarly well fitted to paint portraits. Though he may win high honors in other walks of art, we may hope that different ambitions will never draw him away from this field, in which belong some of the world's greatest masterpieces of painting, and in which he has so clearly proved his right to rank with some of the best of those who have made it bright with their glory.

*William A. Coffin.*