

brass. The priest, in a white robe with a huge gold cross worked on the back, chants the ritual. The people respond. The women kneel in the aisles, shrouding their heads in their shawls; the surpliced acolyte swings his censer; the heavy perfume of burning incense fills the hall.

The band at the anarchists' ball is tuning up for the last dance. Young and old float to the happy strains, forgetting injustice, oppression, hatred. Children slide upon the

waxed floor, weaving fearlessly in and out between the couples—between fierce, bearded men and short-haired women with crimson-bordered kerchiefs. A Punch-and-Judy show in the corner evokes shouts of laughter.

Outside the snow is falling. It sifts silently into each nook and corner, softens all the hard and ugly lines, and throws the spotless mantle of charity over the blemishes, the shortcomings. Christmas morning will dawn pure and white.

## A RELIGIOUS PAINTER.

FRITZ VON UHDE.

BY W. LEWIS FRASER.

IT is frequently remarked by those familiar with American and European picture exhibitions, that in Europe there is always some one picture which is never without its

eager, interested crowd; while in America, although there is usually some one work around which the painters gather on account of its "painter quality"—technical





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« HOLY EVE. »

difficulties met and mastered—or artistic perception, there is seldom or never one which the laity single out and press around to admire or criticize,—rarely, as in Europe, *one* picture which is the center of attraction, *the* picture which the people talk about and go to see.

Whatever the reason, whether our people are less demonstrative, are not so easily surprised, are more stoical than the people of Europe, or whether it is owing to the absence of conventionality, traditions, schools, in our art, the difference does exist.

It would be a difficult matter for one familiar with our exhibitions for the last fifteen years to name any one picture which has produced anything more than a mild enthusiasm on the part of the laity,—made anything like the impression on the public mind such as that made on the Parisian public by Dagnan-Bouveret's picture of the « Last Supper, » or by Fritz von Uhde's « Suffer the Little Ones to Come Unto Me, and Forbid Them Not, » on the people of Munich, Berlin, and Paris. I well remember the crowd which at all times surrounded this latter picture in the

Gemäldeausstellung in Munich in 1889. In order to get a good look at it, « patience » did indeed need to « have her perfect work. » And what a thoroughly interested crowd it was! No mere throng of sight-seers, but strong partizans, ardent admirers, bitter denouncers, both professional and lay. But friend and foe among the people were pretty well agreed that the artist had told his story well; and the artists, that never had soft, diffused golden sunlight, tremulously vibrant, been better, if so well, rendered,—never pearly grays made to float more deliciously in and out amongst the flaxen hair and fresh carnations of baby heads and faces.

The painting showed Jesus of Nazareth seated on an ordinary rush-bottomed chair in a peasant school-house, which he has entered during the religious lesson. One tot, too young to know fear, nestles close to him; another, somewhat older, timorously and hesitatingly takes his proffered hand; the older children hang back, while the teacher urges them to make friends. In the background an old peasant stands, hat to his face, with bowed head, as at a funeral. The

strangeness of the picture doubtless had much to do with its effect on the non-professional public. It forced them to think; and, thinking, they saw in it a deeply devotional motive. For them Von Uhde had unmistakably and convincingly made to live again the carpenter's Son, the God-man, the Friend and Comforter of the common people. Some of them, to be sure,—and they were many,—saw only in the picture the strangeness; they shook their heads, and were far from con-

«Suffer the Little Ones» was the first of Von Uhde's pictures in this genre. It was painted in 1884, although not exhibited in Munich until five years later. His work had been of a very varied nature—soldiers, dogs, singers, peasant children; and although his later work is in the main of a religious character, it may be safely said of him that he is yet one of the most versatile of modern masters. I think it more than probable that Von Uhde's early



OWNED BY MR. CHARLES CONTELLY.

«THE WALK TO BETHLEHEM.»

ENGRAVED BY HENRY WOLF.

vinced; while others, not a few, saw in the composition but the conceit of a young man bidding for popularity through a blasphemous incongruity. I write of 1889, when Von Uhde was the innovator, and before Firlé or Beraud or L'Hermitte or Edelfelt had fallen into step with him and painted biblical characters in modern costume. No doubt these latter were conscientious; but with the example of Rembrandt, with his old burgomasters at the «Descent from the Cross,» Von Uhde could hardly be accused of originating the incongruity.

life is largely responsible for the religious character of his mature pictures, he having been born in the home of an ecclesiastical functionary in Wolkenburg, Saxony. His father was, I believe, a Lutheran clergyman. Be that as it may, his early career was at variance with the teaching of the central figure of his later painting—He who said, «Put up thy sword»; for in 1867, when but nineteen, he enlisted in the Saxon horse-guards, in which corps he remained ten years, serving through the Franco-Prussian war, and rising to the rank of

captain. It was in Munich, in 1877, that he laid down the sword for the brush, and followed the painter Makart afar off. A little later he made the acquaintance of Munkacsy, who advised him to go to Paris and "study only from nature." In that city, in 1879, he exhibited at the Salon "La Chanteuse," and, the following year, "Chiens Savants." The influence of Munkacsy is very evident in these early pictures of Von Uhde's; there is the same brilliant painting of surfaces, and an endeavor after the same swing and "go"—so much so that at this time he was regarded as Munkacsy's disciple.

Two years later his manner had changed, and Von Uhde had begun to assert himself. The "Family Concert," exhibited in 1881, is as sober, staid, and reserved as a work by Terburg or Metsu, and shows the same careful and conscientious study of nature, and is not without traces of these masters. At this time his work, without showing any of the servility of the copyist, bears evidence of his having been strongly drawn to the work of the old Dutchmen. This is especially evident in his "Scene at the Inn," and "La Couturière." With the "Seamstresses" (in the St. Louis museum), a Dutch subject painted in Holland, Von Uhde breaks away alike from the extreme soberness of the Dutchmen and the bravura of Munkacsy, and for the first time shows his ability to paint light—the distinguishing quality of his present work; and in 1883, in his "Drum Exercise," all studio tradition is thrown aside, and in this picture is shown the beginning of the new method, which later played havoc with the traditions of German art by introducing, through the secession movement, a moderate "plein-airism," combined with French naturalism and a close study of nature.

With the change of manner came his change of subject; and it is as a painter of religious ideas that he has become known so well that he may be characterized with truth as the great modern Christian painter—not a biblical painter, as he is often called. I think the word "biblical" conveys a wrong impression. It is true that he has painted biblical scenes, but these fail to convey the same emotion as his religious pictures (by "religious" I mean those pictures which transmute sacred story into modern life). The Christ-story—for this is his theme—he makes as fresh and as living as when first acted: maternity, as in the "Walk to Bethlehem"; death and mourning, as in the "Good Friday Morning"; sympathy, as in the "Last Supper"; birth, as in the "Nativity"; joy, as in the "Annunciation"; benevolence, as in the "Suffer the Little Ones";

—the story of the God-man, partaker of flesh and blood," "made like unto his brethren."

Writing to a friend about his picture "Easter Morning," Von Uhde says: "I certainly thought of the Easter morning in the Bible; but the picture is simply of three women who visited a grave in the early morning. I would not wish to force anybody to see only the biblical story in this picture. It may perhaps be easier to understand the picture as one which represents every-day life. For the artistic quality of the picture, it is of little importance whether these are the three Marys or three modern women: they have been to a grave."

It is not possible to write of the work of Von Uhde without suggesting the vexed question, Is the literary—is story-telling—a legitimate function of art? For it must be frankly admitted that he is preëminently a story-teller. His palette is a resourceful one; the mysteries of color-blending are open to him, so much so that it is difficult to imagine any form of picture-making that might not be his; but the clever, masterful putting on of paint, of which his less serious work gives abundant proof, is not obvious in his pictures; they possess no dash—no bravura. Even subtle suggestions of light-transmutations, in which he excels, are in them merely incidental; drawing is subsidiary; canvas, brushes, paint, are Von Uhde's means of conveying his meaning through the eye to the brain. Sometimes, in the mere matter of "painting," his work, to the professional eye, conveys a sense of feebleness, as though he feared to divert the mind from the subject by an exhibition of skill. In fact, I must repeat, his pictures are "literary"; and if that be a fault, Von Uhde has the consolation of knowing that for this Raphael and Angelo would not have turned their backs on him. But he is more than literary: he is a homilist, and a preacher of good quality besides. His aim has been to separate the divine Founder of Christianity from the smoke of the incense, from priestly tradition and sacerdotal enthronement, and to make him live again as he lived nineteen hundred years ago, the homeless wanderer, the Man of Sorrows. But is this the legitimate function of art? Be that as it may, I write of what Von Uhde is. If you choose to take him from the painter side alone, he is a great painter, a strong influence; for he has carried the banner of "free light," as the Germans term it, into the hide-bound realm of German art, and let the sunshine into the bitumen-tinted studios of Munich.