

## OPEN LETTERS.

Impressions of the International Exhibition of 1889.

EVERY one must know by this time that the International Exhibition which recently closed in Paris far surpassed all its forerunners in size and beauty, in the variety of its attractions, and in the number of its visitors. It would indeed be too late to write about it did I mean to write descriptively. But I want only to record one or two main impressions, and this I can do better now, perhaps, than I might at an earlier day. They grow clearer and clearer as my five busy weeks in Paris fall farther behind me, as the myriad details of the great show condense somewhat into a coherent picture; and their significance is confirmed by many things I have seen in many other parts of France. In their totality these impressions mean a new and very deep sense of the vigor and vitality of the French nation, of the part it has still to play in guiding the progress of the world.

No one who visited Paris this summer could fail to feel that the immense success of her Exhibition had rehabilitated her in the eyes of Europe, had restored her to the rank she had seemed to be losing since the fall of the Empire. Once again the capital of France was unquestionably the capital of Western civilization. Here was the spot to which all eyes turned as to the focus of contemporary life. Paris this year has ruled in men's thoughts as never before since the days when Napoleon III. exalted her. And what one sees elsewhere in the great land of which she is the heart deepens the feeling that her rank will remain to her, because it deepens one's realization of the difference between the motives and methods that were efficacious under the Empire and those that have been efficacious this year. Napoleon and his agents, working for themselves, worked also for Paris and France—lamentably in the end, but for a time gloriously in more than one direction. This year Paris and France have worked for themselves. The change is full of cheering significance to all who have honored France as the world's pioneer in many paths, intellectual, political, and humanitarian, and have believed in her even when she seemed to doubt herself. It seems to me that the surest, the most important, result of this year's enterprise will be to bring new faith and energy into her own soul, and new belief into the mind of outside doubters.

If the Exhibition had been merely or chiefly a big fair, a big comparative display of commercial products, significant only of material progress, illustrative only of the ways in which money may be earned and spent, one would hardly write such words about it. But it was much more than this. To begin with, it was a place of recreation for the people, such as, surely, the world had never known before. Countless amusements were provided by day, entertainments for the eye and the ear and the mind; and at night—a most happy innovation—the grounds were open and gaily lighted. As one looked down from the balcony of the huge tower on a Sunday afternoon and saw the thronging

figures,—more than three hundred thousand, sometimes a population like that of a large city,—or, mingling with them, noted the vast preponderance of the “lower” over the “upper” classes, yet the perfect order and decorum, the good-humor, the gaiety, the intelligent curiosity, one forgot that here were things which artists and *savants* might well cross the earth to see. One thought first, that here, month after month, the people could amuse itself and profit by its amusement, and then, that a people needs play as well as labor, the circus as well as bread. And one respected and admired the nation that could prepare such a playground for itself without detriment to the more serious side of its enterprise, and could administer and make use of it so well.

In the second place, considered in its more serious aspect, Science and Art, not Trade, gave this Exhibition its character and determined its success. Never before had the strictly intellectual side of modern man's achievements been so conspicuously set forth. As President Carnot well said, it was a display of ideas rather than of things. The great buildings themselves were the objects that impressed one most—the daring science of their construction, the unprecedented degree of beauty that had been wrought with utilitarian iron and glass. Many people have laughed at the tall tower during the past year, but, I think, none who have seen it. Machinery Hall still more clearly illustrated what impossibilities are possible to-day. And as one passed from point to point, the feeling grew that the finest thing about the Exhibition was its aspect as a whole—its excellent planning, its tasteful adornment, the monumental dignity that had been appropriately combined with festal brightness and variety; and the impression it gave of being a magnificent whole, not a casual massing of independent parts. All this meant the triumph of Science and Art working hand in hand. Then in the domain of Science was the huge building filled with illustrations of the History of Labor in all ages, lands, and branches; the wonderful horticultural department; the instructive display of France's management of her waterways and forests; and that vast aggregate of varied exhibitions which came under the general head of Social Economy. Evidently all these and many more were exhibitions of ideas, not of mere things,—but how truly so, only those can understand who saw them. And with these may be named the seventy “Congresses” which gathered from week to week to discuss questions of vital human interest.

Art, however, was as conspicuous as Science. She had her part in the History of Labor, and her hand was shown in countless industrial exhibits, while the magnitude and splendor of the artistic collections proper cannot even be suggested in words. One saw the whole past century of France at its work, and, in still greater detail, the present day at its work in France and abroad. Nothing like the same panoramic view of modern endeavors and results had ever before been shown, and none could have been shown except

in Paris; for almost all that was good, and absolutely all that was best, had been produced there. Or, if there were exceptions, they showed the inspiration of French teaching and example. Of course, no other nation was represented a tenth part as fully as France, and some — like Germany — sent no "official" collection at all. But quality will tell to a careful eye, be quantity ever so small; the tendency of a school will show through the veriest "scratch" assemblage of a hundred pictures; the serious student will know if there are greater names out of sight than those he sees, and if he finds only confessed mediocrities will contrast them only with the mediocrities of other lands. Even thus judged, however, as cautiously and leniently as possible, and with the French Retrospective Collection left out of sight and only current French work considered, the rest of Europe made a poor showing compared with France. There was not a single foreign room — except, perhaps, our own, of which I shall speak again — where one felt that anything very well worth doing had been done. This might have been explained in some cases by the fragmentary nature of the collections. But Belgium was very fully represented, the Scandinavian countries too, and England not inadequately. And how, in any case, could one explain away this further fact, that in no room did one feel that anything very well worth doing had been conceived or attempted? There seemed but little proof that there must be better things at home than those one saw, or that better ones were likely soon to follow. There seemed as little of hopeful suggestion or promise as of rich and ripe success. Merit was not altogether wanting, of course. Good pictures had been painted here and attempted there; and here and there an interesting isolated personality was revealed. But a great *Art* — a collective movement marked by force, character, and accomplishment — nowhere showed itself except in the galleries of France. And true as this was of the painter's art, it was still truer of the sculptor's. The show of modern work in both departments was magnificent, but no one would have been less impressed, less charmed, less well instructed, had France exhibited alone.

This brings me to another main point of interest. As it was conspicuously in the art galleries, so it was to a lesser degree almost everywhere else. Sometimes we felt that foreign nations were the inferiors of France, sometimes we knew that they had refused to show their best in an exhibition which commemorated 1789. I need not inquire into causes more narrowly. I only want to say that, as to their general result, in very many departments the so-called International Exhibition seemed a national one. It seemed the creation of France and her colonies, and of French enterprise bringing marvelous things — like the reconstructed Cairene street — from many far-off lands. From their own point of view, the hostile governments would have been wiser not to allow France to work thus alone. They should not have given her the chance to show that, despite their hostility, she could draw enough from the outer world to make an exhibition larger, more beautiful, more varied, more interesting, instructive, and amusing, more scientific and more artistic, than had ever been made before. They should not have permitted the world to feel that even had she stood entirely alone it would have sufficed. Cold-shouldered as a republic, the Republic's stature and strength, its vitality and its

capability, were but the more clearly shown. This triumph of modern industry, art, and science meant, in fact, the triumph of France. It was a better "revenge" than could have been gained on a battlefield; for no one who saw what Paris had done could think for a moment that, under like conditions, any other city could have done the same. If there might possibly be a doubt in some directions, there could be none with regard to matters of art. Nowhere else could so artistic an *ensemble* have been achieved, nowhere else could it have been adorned with so many thousand objects of the first artistic importance.

Turning now for a moment to that Retrospective Exhibition of French art which was the crowning glory of the whole, I think I can affirm that one painter stood out above all his fellows as the incarnation of the century's best. I heard many tongues say the same thing: It is the apotheosis of Corot. No one quite knew him before; no one could fail to understand him here — his truth and strength and charm, his individuality, his variety, his quality of "style." There was nothing more purely modern than his work, nothing more purely personal, nothing more purely lovely. And no one else had so united these three qualities, interpreting at once the spirit of modern art, the poetry latent in a human soul, and the perennial value of beauty. Millet stood next him in significance and charm, yet, it seemed to me, not quite so high. He was greater in mind, no doubt, and, like Corot, a poet too. But not so purely a poet, and it is the purest poetry that will live the longest in art. Nothing was more surprising in the Retrospective Collection than the immense number of admirable portraits. Here, if I must give my vote, it will be for Bastien-Lepage. This is surely another of the immortals, and again because, while no rival painted better, none seems to have felt so strongly. We cannot call him a poet in Corot's, in Millet's way. But it means the poet's spirit still when a man paints another as Bastien did — with such evident emotion in face of the nature he saw and of the means with which he was to render it. It means the great gift of sympathy, of insight. But I should never stop if I tried to note all the painters who here impressed me most. Let me turn for an instant to those one saw in the exhibition of the French work of to-day. Are they as great as the French painters of twenty or thirty years ago? Not quite: far ahead of the rest of the world, yet in some respects behind their elder brothers. For technical excellence their results could not be overpraised; but there seems less of soul in them, less of feeling, less adoration of nature, less thought that each man should find some personal message to deliver. Of course there are exceptions, but it is of general facts I am speaking, and only in the most general way.

On the whole the French sculptors of to-day impressed one even more than the painters, and quite apart from the fact that their work was less familiar. No familiarity could lessen one's admiration for their marvelous results, or one's wonder at the long list of names that rank among the best. The general level of accomplishment was as remarkable as the variety of the problems attempted, and the personality, sincerity, and strength of their solutions. The nude in action and repose; figures of both sexes in simple, modern dress; animals of every sort; colossal groups; complicated

reliefs; the ideal, the realistic, the fanciful, the grotesque; monumental work and decorative work; the expression of infantile charm, of feminine beauty, of virile force, of decrepit age; the portrayal, not of figures merely but of ideas — everything had been essayed, and everything well done. It had not been found impossible even to blend contemporary with idealistic, symbolic figures — most difficult of tasks in view of current modes of dress. If one knew nothing of the sculptor's methods, thought nothing of the technical skill involved, the mere fact that the given conception had been so clearly incarnated was enough to astound any eye familiar with modern work in other countries. Here, too, there were no contrasts to draw between to-day and yesterday. The Retrospective Exhibition and that of current work blended together in one great stream beginning with Houdon and Rude, and wider and richer to-day than ever before. It is much in other countries if we find one or two men who even know what sculpture means. In France there is a whole race of men who know it perfectly, and can teach it to the blindest observer. One more point should be noted. We are sometimes told that sculpture is too "abstract" and "ideal" an art to be in vital relationship with modern civilization. Yet the most idealistic of these French sculptors is as modern in feeling as French; as sincere and personal as any painter could be. There has been no such work as theirs since the best bloom of the Italian Renaissance, yet they are no more like the Italians in aim or result than these were like the Greeks.

Even after seeing all that the Frenchmen had done, however, an American could walk through his own galleries without shame. They were the most satisfying, I think, after the French, and very surely the most promising. Yet only the American painters living abroad were well represented. The shipment from home very inadequately showed what is really being done at home. Taking all the works together, though, what I felt was this — and I think any careful observer who bore the youth of our art in mind must have felt the same: "Here a better foundation has been laid than we see in any other foreign room; here, more than elsewhere, we read a belief that a painter's first task is to learn to paint. The general level is already good, showing a number of capable painters, well endowed, well trained, and seriously ambitious; a few of exceptional talent and accomplishment, and one, John Sargent, who in his own line need fear no living rival. The foundation is well laid, and the prospects for further development seem good, at least in certain directions. Portraiture promises extremely well; *genre* painting only needs to be more national in subject-matter to show its strength and individuality better; and landscape gives sure signs of incarnating those very qualities which, in the French school, it threatens to lose — those personal, poetic qualities which made the glory of the French generation just extinct. The least hopeful branches are those of historical and idealistic painting and the painting of the nude."

But to note this last fact meant to note, in explanation, the general fact which was most clearly in my mind as I left the American galleries. Not talent is wanting to American artists, nor ambition, nor conscientiousness, but public appreciation. They are in the right path, and they are eager to advance, but no

one helps them, and where there is not help there is bitter hinderance, especially in what are called the "higher branches" of art. How are they to show what is in them if neither the Government nor the private citizen cares for anything they do, cares whether they do anything or not? It is not with them as it was at first with Millet and Corot and many of their fellows. The public does not reject some of them because it cares more for the work of others who work differently. It overlooks them all in favor of foreign painters who do similar things and often not half so well. An opposition founded on taste, on choice, may be overcome; one founded on indifference, on a broad prejudice, is harder to fight; and it is deadlier in its effects, for it discourages effort in all possible directions. If the public sees and dislikes your work, you may hope to change its heart. If it will not even look at it, what can you do? And yet there is so much to-day in American art that deserves to be looked at!

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#### The Evolution of the Educator.

THIRTY years ago the leaders of thought in the teaching profession worked in school-rooms. To-day they work in offices. The army idea has been adopted in the organization of educational work. The class teacher has lost his sovereignty and is become a private in a great army ruled by "educators." We witness a multiplication of positions filled by men who direct and supervise the work of teaching, but who do no teaching themselves. These educators have absorbed the executive functions of the school committee of old, and too often the thinking function of the teacher. The class teacher is given a course of study docked on all sides, with methods of teaching every subject, and a boss educator is on hand at intervals to see that all mere class teachers keep in line.

Two evils result from this condition.

Teachers in large cities, having the matter and method of their work thought out and prescribed for them, are ceasing to be *thinkers* in a professional way. One boss may do the thinking for a hundred house builders, but builders of brains should do their own thinking.

Recognition of efficiency in class teaching now comes in the form of an invitation to stop teaching a class, to step out of the school-room, to become a dispenser of educational enthusiasm, a formulator of pretty theories, a thinker for other workers. The highest price paid for school supervision is paid in the annual drawing off of good class teachers to go into the "educator" business. The influence of one superior class teacher through his or her class work is more effective for good than the platitudes and reports of a dozen educators.

It is an evil day for any profession when its highest rewards bring with them an abandonment of actual professional work. Teachers must be made to see a future of honor and profit in actual class-room work. Our great city school systems are burdened with supervising officials, and are not giving substantial recognition to acknowledged excellence in class-room work.

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