

"*Cross over! cross over!*" shouted Sosrus, sounding every string and playing fast in involuntary obedience to the command.

"Glory an' glory! He seein' dem visions. He preparin' to cross over Jordan!"

"De dev'l was gone," muttered the musician, feebly, and with that letting down of a reader's tone on the last page of a story, while his fingers began to move more slowly, and his body fell against the back of the bed.

"Oh, great glory! Glory an' glory! You done driv him off. De dev'l gone! dev'l gone! He carn' hinder yo' journey now. De cheryubims an' de serryufims a-guardin' you. You boun' to cross over Jordan now. Far'well, my brother, good-by, good-by," said Aunt Ceely, rushing up to him; and they all followed, with out-

stretched hands. In that instant, with a quickness that he had never shown before, Cephas pushed through the crowd, crying, "Lemme tell po' brother good-by. Po' brother! don' tell um to put me on de lef'. I gwi' wuck. Good-by, po' brother."

There was a pause as Cephas grasped the hand of Sosrus, and then the banjo-player seemed to sink in a stupor, from which he slowly roused, and he again began to finger the instrument, but the air was no longer "The Mississippi Sawyer," but it was the old negro hymn, "Lord, rocker my soul in de bosum of Abr'ham," and while he played it he sank more heavily on the humble couch, and then he struck the strings in a scattering way, then barely touched them, and finally the banjo fell from his hands, and in a few minutes he was dead.



"STRUGGLE OF LOVE."—From a painting in Mr. John A. Lowell's collection.

F. S. CHURCH.

BY GEORGE WILLIAM SHELDON.

THREE friends of Mr. F. S. Church were discussing the significance of his pictorial work. They agreed that his distinction as a painter consists in having created in a series of idyls the most beautiful women in American art: that interesting young creature who, as "The Viking's Daughter," stands on the seashore in a robe of delicate green, listening to the whispers of a sea-gull; who, as the heroine of "A Fairy Tale," walks under flowering trees in the midst of four charmed tigers; who, in "Subdued," plays a pipe to a group of lordly lions; who tells to a fair companion "Beneath the Sea" the story of a skull that has been perforated by a bullet; who puts her arms around the neck of a fawn and imparts her secret in "Confidence"; who leads as a mistress a white winged horse

in "Pegasus Captured"; who kneels on the lid of Pandora's box to prevent the escape of the mischievous elves; who sits in "Peace" beside the sheep, holding a shepherd's crook; who exercises the magic of a "Sorceress" upon a group of crocodiles; who idles on a bank with some gay-hued flamingoes; and who, as "Sibyl," extracts wisdom from the head of an Egyptian mummy. But the question was as to the spiritual import of the young woman in her relations to the animal kingdom. One of the friends in council declared that Mr. Church meant to show the power of feminine purity. All these beasts, he explained, from the most savage to the most domesticated, were held captive by the power of a good damsel; and the artist by his work had made himself a great moral teacher.



F. S. CHURCH.—From a sketch by C. Y. Turner.

The second friend, like a specialist in pathology, differed from his associates in the diagnosis of the case. He thought we should see in every work of art the largest meaning it will bear; that Mr. Church's maiden represented not only Purity, but the Heavenly Love which is to subdue all things, and which, in binding by its magic spell the earthly to the heavenly, is to include every living creature as well as man.

To the third member of the party the significance seemed to reside in the power of womanly beauty—the beauty of the ideal American woman of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For (he went on to explain) Mr. Church's creation may be called our first American woman very much in the sense that Mr. Lowell has called Abraham Lincoln our first American man. She never was incarnated until Mr. Church incarnated her. She

is a personage as distinct as she is vital, seductive, and satisfying. No model that this artist uses in his studio—and he has used many models—appears as a portrait in this series of idyls. No living woman to-day can claim that she recognizes her face and figure in the pictures signed by Mr. Church. He never made a realistic portrait of a model in his life, although he once came very near doing so in the picture of the "Sorceress" charming the crocodiles, where he had the co-operation as sitter of an interesting girl of twelve years, who was introduced to his notice by the fact that her mother once sent her on an errand to his studio while she was on her way from school; and he might easily have repeated her face during the two years that she consented to aid him. No foreign figure-painter, ancient or modern, has ever produced Mr. Church's young woman. The history of art may be searched in vain for her. To a certain extent his "Mermaid and Sea-Wolf" does suggest one of the beautiful goddesses with which the Greek genius peopled the Ionian sea, but only because Mr. Church's work has certain qualities that are Greek, or, in other words, that are fundamental. His figures have all the poetry of lines and color in dress, all the seductive undulation of robes, that characterize the Tanagra figurines. His woman is clothed in drapery rather than in gowns. Her gracious form and regular features are those of a beautiful statue of the classic period. The drawing and the color associate themselves in a tranquil harmony. While Mr. Church's art may be called classic, it is never academic.

But in its most characteristic respects his art is modern and contemporaneous. This flower of womanly beauty, which in our perishable world is the most durable expression of the ideal, has grown from the soil of to-day. She feels, as did Eugénie de Guérin, that it does her good to be going about in the midst of our enchanting nature, with blossoms, birds, and verdure all around her under the large and blue sky, but, unlike Eugénie, she never experiences the *ennui* that finds at the bottom of everything only emptiness and nothingness. The man that made such a woman has the true instinct of genius for what is really admirable, and an acquaintance with her is a lasting benefit. She stimulates the intellect, fortifies the character, and pleases the soul.

She lives according to nature, and she is modest, trustworthy, magnanimous, and equal-minded. If fiction has no reason to exist unless it is more beautiful than the reality, she has every reason to exist because she is thus beautiful; but her beauty does not recall that blossom of love, fatal to the heart, of which Æschylus speaks, nor that winsome Gigokoo of the Japanese who is the dame of Sheol. In her ingenuousness she reminds one of the young singing girls of Luca della Robbia, while, at the same time, she stands forth as an image of the intellectual movement that governs the age to which she belongs. Being our first American woman, we respect her as a unique and lovable type in a civilization where the emotions have become less simple as the heart has become more sceptical; and if, as in the "Viking's Daughter," her expression reveals, perhaps, a *nuance* of the sceptical, it is because even she can no more escape the influence of an epoch of agnosticism than could the pretty women of Boucher and Watteau the suggestion of the gay adventures, the frivolities, and the foolishnesses of the France of the eighteenth century.

A study of the genesis of Mr. Church's work, the transformations which it has assumed, is curious. At ten years of age he painted in crude water-colors on sheets of foolscap-paper a wondrous panorama of Indians, pirates, and highwaymen performing most blood-thirsty deeds. At thirteen he left his home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to work for the American Express Company, in Chicago, where he was known among his comrades as "the artistic chap," because he had a talent for drawing comic sketches with the pencil. At seventeen he entered the Federal army as a private, and served as such for three years, until the close of the war for the Union. One of his messmates speaks of him as a notable shot with the cannon, and a brave soldier, but he never had any impulse to paint battles, and his country lost a possible De Neuville. What struck his imagination most in that awful and prolonged contest was the comic side of tenting on the old camp-ground. At twenty-six, after renewing his service with the American Express Company, he worked as a draughtsman for a wood-engraver of machinery, and was considered the worst draughtsman his employer had. Walter Shirlaw, then teaching art in the Acad-



"SUBDUED."—From a sketch for picture for collection of Henry Allen.



"THE SORCERESS."—From an original painting in the collection of R. V. Reynolds.

emy of Design in Chicago, first started the amateurish young draughtsman on a serious road by introducing him to the opportunities of the life-school of that institution, and Professor Wilmarth, of the National Academy of Design, in New York—whither he had removed—followed up the advantages of such a course, while the artist supported himself by making comic sketches for *Harper's Weekly* and *Harper's Bazar*. One of these sketches, which appeared in the *Weekly* of June 21, 1873, under the title of "Latest from the Front, Our Friends the Mosquitoes," represents a group of these insects sharpening their bills on a grindstone, under the supervision of the leader of the band, while others on the right are dipping their bills in a bottle labelled "Appetizer," and others still are flying off on their mission of torment with grip-sacks and umbrellas. About this time the Elgin Watch Company awarded him a contract for illustrations for an almanac, which occupied him several years. It was not until 1875, in his thirty-second year, that he produced his first serious work—a black and white drawing entitled "Up in the Crow's Nest," representing a comely young woman standing in a rustic lookout of a Hudson River countryside, and gazing upon the scenery.

This drawing was followed rapidly by others of a serious nature, solely because his comic sketches were not so much in demand. The artist preferred the latter, but it was a question of bread and butter, and he entered upon what may be called his allegorical period. "Death" represents a drowned girl on the shore, lying flat on her back, her hands by her side, and her hair streaming along her arms. "Refuge" shows some weather-beaten birds under the arms of a Christ in a shrine during a snow-storm. "Maternity" dis-

covers some young alligators on the back of their mother. "Coming through the Rye" introduces us to a bear with a pig under each arm. In "After the Rain" we see a girl on a plaza with three storks in front of her. In the "Struggle of Love," Cupid has a string around a bird, and pulls him and the big yellow rose fastened to him. In "April Showers" a young girl is watering roses, from underneath which Cupid demurely emerges. In "Retaliation" she has succeeded in caging Cupid, and is poking him with a stick. In "Who are you?" her younger sister confronts a mermaid at the sea-side and asks the question of her. "The Witch's Daughter" sits clad in a light green dress beside an owl on the arc of a new moon. Then came the brilliant and beautiful ideal, our first American woman, of which the most characteristic examples are "The Mermaid," published in *Harper's Weekly* in March, 1883, "A Fairy Tale," which appeared as a frontispiece in this Magazine for November, 1887, and "The Viking's Daughter," which has been reproduced as a frontispiece for the present number of the same periodical—an ideal so brilliant and beautiful that few of the multitude whom it has charmed will regret the circumstances which turned the attention of the artist from the comic to the serious.

Nevertheless it is evident that nothing in Mr. Church's biography, as just related, explains the conditions that produced our first American woman. A brave soldier for more than three years, a business man, a comic illustrator, what was there in the influence of his *milieu* to bring into existence so delightful an ideal as "The Viking's Daughter," with her whispering sea-gulls? Why did he not paint the battle scenes *quorum magna*

pars fuit? Why did he prefer the comic to the serious, "Our Friends the Mosquitoes" to "The Viking's Daughter"? And how was it that when at last his comic sketches did not sell, he turned his attention to our first American woman, with such success that he himself, by this time, must be tired of his old flame, Miss Amanda Jenkins, of Podunk, who, while visiting the Aquarium, sits down on the African tortoise, thinking it a stool, her new red rose meanwhile being stolen from her bonnet by the voracious giraffe?

Perhaps on that eventful afternoon when the pretty school-girl of twelve visited his studio, and he saw her face in contrast with some bear-skin or tiger-skin hanging upon the walls, a glimmer of the subject which has since enthralled his pencil may have stolen across his imagination. For years he had been a student of wild animals at the menagerie in the Central Park, had studied their habits with the loving assiduity of a Barye, had made plaster casts of them when they were dead. The needs of his profession as a comic illustrator led him to an intimate acquaintance with these animals, and in Professor Conkling, the superintendent of the menagerie, he found a valuable friend. He made thousands of pencil

sketches of wild beasts in various attitudes. The action of the caged tiger when he sees a horse especially interested him, but the artist was obliged to wait for weeks before he caught it. Perhaps one memorable day he saw a fair young American also watching the same wild beast, and the relations of a beautiful girl to a magnificent animal began to interest him. One day, while he was painting a coast scene at Sandy Hook, a boat came in containing a bear and a peasant, and he saw them against the green trees with the light playing upon them. Perhaps his picture of a Circe and a tiger on the shore was suggested by the scene. He certainly went to Fort Hamilton to ascertain how nearly he had succeeded in getting the relation of her complexion to the sea.

For all his subjects, all his values, are based on nature, fantastic though many of them seem. The sentiment of the animal, the right feeling of his action, comes not from copying photographs, but from direct personal watching of the original, and there is not another artist who believes this truth with his heart more profoundly than Mr. Church. To possess the animal one must understand his construction and must study his motions. Many a time has Mr. Church caught the



"BENEATH THE SEA."—From an original painting in the collection of H. Walters.



"AN INTERRUPTED FEAST."

elusive little sand-pipers and sketched them from nature. He has scores of studies, made at daylight in the Central Park, of peacocks in the snow, when his water-colors froze. He has painted six or eight women's faces, one after the other, before the fit one came. In the picture of the mermaid and the polar-bear, the reddish hair and yellowish-white fur of the bear, in connection with the prismatic tints in the tail of the mermaid, and the reflections of the same on the ice, were a favorite chromatic study; and one is often reminded in his paintings of the chestnut hair and the pale green landscape tones of Memling's "Mary Magdalen."

Yet the artist never saw this picture, never entered the Louvre, never studied in the *École des Beaux Arts*, never set foot upon the soil of Europe. And if he has lost something thereby, he certainly has gained something also. The painter of our first American woman might never have seen her had he pursued the usual course of study in France; and the student of his work cannot but lay stress upon this fact of his exclusively American training. The Greek artist studied art in Greece, and the French artist studies art in France. And Millet's simple faith in nature is Church's holiest creed: "One ought to habituate himself to receiving only from nature his impressions, whatever they may be, and whatever his temperament may be. It is necessary to become impregnated, to become saturated, with her, and to think only of that which she makes us think of. The pictures that we love, are they not those that proceed

from her? Other pictures are but pendent and void."

Nor can we forget that at the time that Mr. Church was entering upon his best and most successful period—he cannot paint these idyls faster than buyers ask for them—our American Renaissance had just begun, with all its inadequacies, with all its experiments, with all its love of the sensational and the striking. Clever young Americans, fresh from the ateliers of Munich and Paris, were breaking with the traditions of our Academic art, and bubbling with enthusiasm to show to the public the latest and most stunning way of laying on paint. Surrounded by evidences of a moral sense that was low and a public taste that was vitiated, the creator of "The Viking's Daughter" turned neither to the right hand nor to the left, but, self-poised and self-contained, found in his own admiration of the beautiful and in his own study of nature the method and the inspiration of his art. Did some sibyl tell him, as Fromentin told his young pupil Humbert: "The epoch is bad. It depends upon you to give a lesson in painting, a lesson in style, a lesson in taste"? Or was it our first American woman herself that appeared in a vision, and gave him the blessedness of the man who catches sight of truth, and who recognizes a kindred spirit? Perfect his work is not. Many resources of the palette are still strangers to him. He belongs to the grand future, as well as to the present. But no other American painter has done so much as F. S. Church toward creating a national art.