WILLIAM M. CHASE.—From the bronze bass-relief by Augustus St. Gaudens.

WILLIAM M. CHASE, PAINTER.

BY KENYON COX.

THE qualifying word in the title of this article is not here used in its generic and merely professional sense, as signifying a producer of pictures, but in that more special and emphatic signification that distinguishes the kind and quality of an artistic talent. Of all our artists Mr. Chase is the most distinctively and emphatically a *painter*, marked for such both by his powers and by his limitations. His is not so much the art of the brain that thinks or of the imagination that conceives as of the eye that sees and the hand that records. He cares little for abstract form, less for composition, and hardly at all for thought or story; but the iridescence of a fish's back or the creamy softness of a woman's shoulder, the tender blue of a morning sky or the vivid crimson of a silken scarf—yes, or the red glow of a copper kettle or the variegated patches of clothes hung out to dry—these things he seizes upon and delights in, and renders with wonderful deftness and precision. He is, as it were, a wonderful human camera—a seeing machine—walking up and down in the world, and in the humblest things as in the finest discovering and fixing for us beauties we had else not thought of. Place him before a palace or a market stall, in Haarlem, Holland, or in Harlem, New York, and he will show us that light is everywhere, and that nature is always infinitely interesting. His art is objective and external, but all that he sees he can render, and he sees everything that has positive and independent existence. He is a technician of the breed of Hals and Velasquez; a *painter*, in a word. We have more imaginative artists, better draughtsmen, men of a subtler and more personal talent, but we have no such painter as Mr. Chase, and the world has to-day few better. It is in the hope of aiding to a wider appreciation of this fact that this article is written.

William M. Chase was born in Franklin County, Indiana, in the year 1849. In

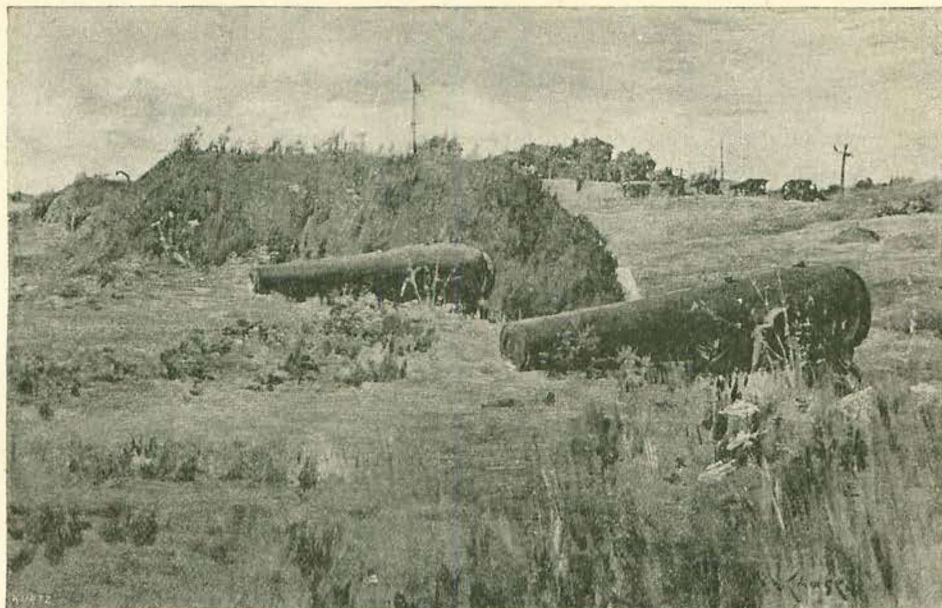
his youth he seems to have been destined for business, but in his twentieth year he decided to follow the career of art, and entered the studio of a local portrait-painter named Hayes. In 1869 he came to New York, and worked for two years at the schools of the National Academy, and in the studio of J. O. Eaton. His parents had in the mean time gone to live at St. Louis, and there in 1871 went Chase, his education finished, to begin the practice of his profession. His work at that time, mostly still-life, with an occasional portrait, he describes as conscientious but painfully hard and minute. It pleased his public and sold readily, and for a time he was a prosperous artist. Probably to his friends and admirers of that period he seems to-day a promising man gone wrong.

This stage of his career was not a long one. He met in St. Louis a Mr. John Mulvany, then recently returned from Munich, whose sketches were to him a revelation of the possibilities of direct and vigorous painting. .Under his influence he awoke to a sense of his own shortcomings, and determined to go to Munich himself and recommence his studies. He got from friends enough commissions to support him for some time, went to Munich, and laying aside his pretensions to full-fledged artisthood, entered the Academy in 1872, and worked his way up from the *antique* class. In Munich he remained six years.

It is strange to think of this nervous, energetic American in smoky, beery, bituminous Munich; of this brilliant, versatile, cosmopolitan painter as a pupil of Piloty. The stamp of Munich is hard to efface, and of the artists who have studied there most bear it, for good or for evil, during life. Yet the art of Mr. Chase is to-day far more Parisian than Bavarian, and it would be a clever analyst that should, from sight of his present work only, divine the schooling he has had. Nevertheless, the effect upon a highly organized and receptive nature of six years of training during that formative period between the ages of twenty and thirty must needs have been profound and lasting; and radical as seems at first sight the difference between Mr. Chase's earlier work and his later, it is still possible to see how the transformation may have taken place, and to trace in the work of to-day subtle signs of its origin in that of yesterday.

One's fellow-students are often one's real teachers, and many a pupil of Gérôme or Cabanel will tell you that it was from Dagnan or Bastien that he learned the most of what he knows. We must therefore remember that the Munich which influenced Mr. Chase was not the Munich of Cornelius and of Kaulbach. Piloty, strange as it may seem to-day, was himself an embodied revolution, and by the time he became director of the Academy the current of younger thought and effort had already swept far beyond him, and he had become almost as much a part of the past as his predecessors. The Munich which has left so deep an impress upon many of our artists was the Munich of which Dietz, newly made a professor, and Liebl, altogether outside of the school, were the heroes, and the band of which Mr. Chase was a member scorned Piloty and his works with the scorn of very young men for those whom they think old fogies. Mr. Chase himself, although he was remarkably successful in his academic career, and took prize after prize and medal after medal, was considered by the big-wigs of the school as a somewhat anarchical and dangerous person, and when he had attained to that highest of school rewards, a free studio, they were greatly distressed that he should still prefer his still-life and his studies to the pompous machines the production of which was, in their view, the sole end of the Academy's existence.

What we have to consider is not, then, the influence upon him of the academic theory and practice, which was as small as possible, but that of the artistic atmosphere and life of the place itself, which was very great—an influence partly good and partly bad. All Munich men are enthusiastic lovers of art and of the great old masters. There is no Salon in Munich, and little life; the painters there are not busy discussing the last sensational success or the newest *tableau à médaille;* neither are they occupied with politics, or the stage, or society, or the picture market: when they wish to see pictures they go to the galleries and study Rubens or Hals or Rembrandt; they work, while daylight lasts, before their easels, and they meet at night in some old Bavarian tavern to talk of their art over pipes and beer. Theirs is almost the only true life of the black old town, and they see and hear of and care for nothing but their own art,



"FORT HAMILTON."

their own trade; and so they become able and enthusiastic workmen, and acquire a love of painting for painting's sake that lasts them their lifetime. The galleries of Munich contain few first-class works by the great Italians, and the student's attention is naturally fixed upon the supreme technicians of Holland and Flanders, whose life his own resembles, and whose works are constantly before him. His love of art may be narrow, but it is sure to be pure and intense. The danger is that the love of painting may degenerate into the love of paint, that execution may usurp the place of more serious qualities. The Munich-trained artist is sure to handle his brush freely and well, but he is a little apt to neglect form and solidity, and to think more of brilliancy of representation than of the essential nature of the thing represented. Another fault he has also—blackness. Their exclusive contemplation of the old masters and their isolation from the current of modern painting have led the artists of Munich to ignore the advent of light in the pictures of to-day; but why they should also ignore the treasures of clearness and luminosity to be found in the best works of the Dutch school, and never absent even from the sombre canvases of Rembrandt, it is more difficult to understand. Such, however, is the fact, and an abuse of bitumen and a notion that tone is dependent upon blackness is a constant mark of your true *Münchener*.

These, then, are the characteristics of the young Munich to which Mr. Chase belonged, and of which he was no inconsiderable part: contempt of story, subject, and even of composition; true love of painting for its own sake; brilliancy and facility of handling, with some neglect of form and substance; and blackness of tone. They mark Mr. Chase's work of that time as strongly as they do that of his contemporaries. His distinction is that while they have, for the most part, retained the evil with the good, and remain to-day, wherever they may be, Munich painters, he has retained the good and dropped the evil.

His pictures of this period are well known through exhibition and reproduction. The "Court Jester," the "Turkish Page," "Ready for the Ride," and the "Dowager" were all painted while in Munich, and the "Portrait of Mr. Duveneck" was painted in Venice before his return to this country. They are all strongly stamped with the Munich style, but are vigorous and striking works. The best of them is perhaps the portrait of Duveneck, which is in many ways a re-

markable work for a young man of twenty-eight, good in character, strong and free in handling, but marred by a certain extravagance in arrangement and by the abuse of bitumen.

In 1878 Mr. Chase was asked to take charge of the painting class of the Art Students' League, and came back to New York for that purpose. In 1879 he was elected a member of the Society of American Artists. Since his return he has resided constantly in New York, but has spent most of his summers in travel and study in Europe.

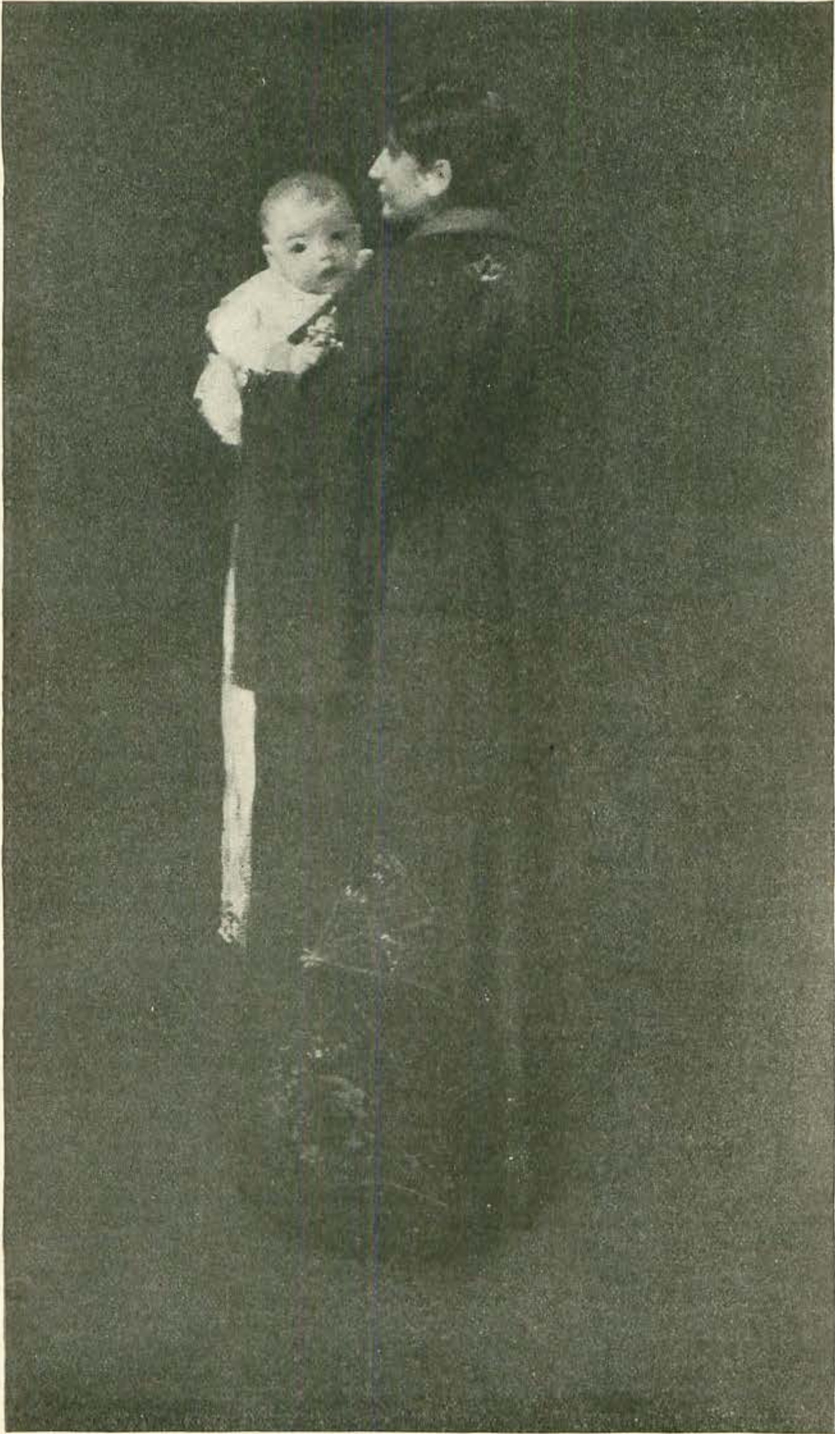
Long before he left Munich he had begun the practice of making tours to other cities for the purpose of copying in the museums, and the last year of his stay abroad he spent in Venice with Duveneck; since then he has copied Velasquez in Madrid and the Dutch masters in Holland, and has seen Salon after Salon in Paris; at home he has been brought into contact with artists brought up in the schools of Paris, and has no doubt learned something from them, as they have learned much from him. His mind and his style have broadened with his broadened opportunities, and the difference between his work of to-day and that of an earlier period is almost as the difference between day and night. And yet it was interesting, at the special exhibition of his work held at Moore's Gallery a year or more ago, to see that, although the tone had changed, the handling was still the same. Light and color were the very essence of the new work; they hardly existed in the old; yet all that was good in the work of his old Munich days remained. Here was the old healthy contempt of story and of the literary side of art; here were the old delight in the technique of painting and the old directness and freedom of manner; here were even the old tricks of the brush—the very touch was the same. Only, where the older pictures were dark the newer were light. The old love of blackness was gone, and in its place was an intense love of light and color and the open air, and with it there was a vastly increased power of subtle and unconventional composition. Mr. Chase has always been essentially a *painter:* he is now a much better painter than ever before, and a painter of pictures—not merely of studies.

Every man shows occasionally the defects of his qualities, and as it is well that a criticism should contain the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so far as the writer can give it, let us admit that now and then Mr. Chase's love of painting may lean a little too much toward the love of paint—that in his less successful efforts the interpretation may somewhat usurp the place of the thing interpreted. Let us also admit that the same quick susceptibility of temperament which is his highest quality sometimes submits him to the inspiration of another's work rather than to that of nature. "We sometimes see a Chase that's Whistlerish;" we sometimes catch an echo of Stevens or of Rico. No man can be always at his best. Mr. Chase's best is as original in vision as it is thorough in execution, and that being so, we can afford to neglect his second best.

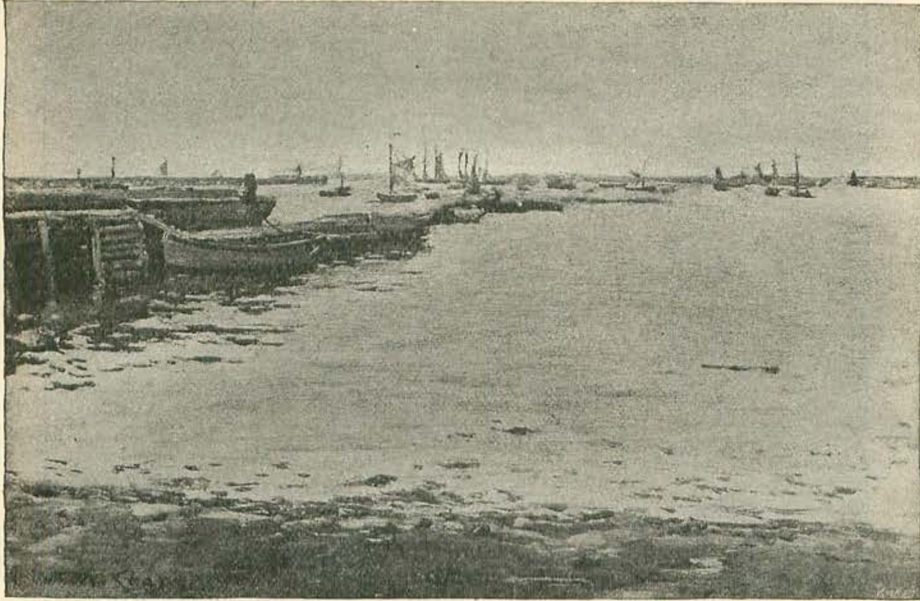
It is this best work of Mr. Chase's present style that we now come to consider. Having seen something of his development and of the steps by which he has reached it, let us try to get a clearer conception of what that style is, and examine it more in detail than we have yet done.

The first characteristic of his work that would strike a stranger to it is probably its versatility and wide range of subject. The illustrations of this article, if they served no other purpose, should be sufficient to convince one of that. In this small selection from a prodigious quantity of work we have portraits, landscapes, genre subjects, and still-life, and this variety only indicates, and by no means exhausts, the wide range of the available material from which the selection is made. Yet this variety has its distinct limits. Whatever the bodily eye can see, Mr. Chase can paint, but with the eye of the imagination he does not see. By nature and instinct he leaves to others the attempt to give form and substance to the figments of the brain. He is content to rest upon the solid earth, and finds in the manifold aspects of external nature matter that shall occupy a lifetime in its setting forth. "Within this limit is relief enough," and with an eye trained to see and a hand trained to render the shifting many-sidedness of things, one has work enough cut out for one man.

The second notable characteristic of this work is the temper of technical experiment in which it is executed. Its subjects are not more varied than are its means of expression. Oil, water-color,



"MOTHER AND CHILD."



"GOWANUS BAY."

gouache, pastel, are all in turn employed, and each with the same unerring sureness put to its best use. A canvas ten feet square or a panel five inches, a surface as rough as coffee sacking or as smooth as ivory—each is made to show that something can be done with it that can be done with nothing else.

These are the two great characteristics of your true painter wherever you find him: an impartial love for nature as it is, and an almost equal love for the tools of his art. He does not care to idealize or to torture himself in the search for the abstractly beautiful; the naturally beautiful is good enough for him, and he is contented to set himself delightful and not insoluble problems of rendition, and draws infinite pleasure from their resolution. No man has such delight in his work as he. As he does not attempt the impossible, he is spared the agony of inevitable failure. His work is the healthy exercise of highly organized and highly trained faculties, and is as natural as the free play of a child, and as pleasurable as the exercise of an athlete.

And as the labor of love gives joy to the worker, so it has the greater chance of bringing joy to the beholder. We have had enough and to spare of the false criticism that blames an artist for not being something he is not; we can hardly have enough of the true criticism that heartily enjoys what he is. In the house of art there are many mansions, and room enough for many various talents. Each in its way can give us pleasure, and there is a very high and a very true enjoyment to be gotten from art of this objective sort—an enjoyment differing in kind, but perhaps not in degree, from that afforded by more imaginative art. The executive talent, the talent of the technician, is perhaps in its highest forms as rare as any other. The mission of the technician—of the painter *par excellence*—is the high one of showing us the beauty of the commonest and humblest objects. He shows us that, rightly considered, a battered tin pan is a thing of beauty and worthy of attention in its degree, and that there is something worth noting in a rotting post by the water-side or a "white sheet bleaching on the hedge." But of all kinds of art this is the hardest to describe or to reproduce. The meaning of an allegory or the just treatment of a story the critic can expound. Before the beauty of line or the sublimity of light and shade he is helpless; but the engraver can step in to his aid, and you may measurably understand the art of form from reproduction alone. But an art that is neither literary

nor linear puzzles both critic and engraver, and neither can much help you to appreciate the simple rightness and soundness of a bit of painting. Go to the next exhibition where you can find a good piece of Mr. Chase's work, and you will understand more of it after five minutes' inspection than you would from pages of writing or of illustration. The illustrations given with this article are as good as they could be made, but the essence of the originals evaporates from the best translation into black and white. Light and color and handling are the three great qualities of such work, and illustration can give no notion of the first two, and but a faint one of the last of these, and criticism is little better off.

In the "Mother and Child," for instance, the main beauty of the canvas is indescribable in words and altogether untranslatable by engraving. How shall you be made to feel, except before the picture itself, the beauty of two tones of black, one upon the other, the charm of the pearly flesh of the child against the warmer carnation of the mother, or the tingling pleasure that one receives from the one note of vivid scarlet that cuts through this quiet harmony like a knife? How shall you be made to understand the sense of power that is conveyed by these broad, sure sweeps of the brush which delude you for the moment into the belief that painting is as easy as walking? How shall you be made to see the breadth of style, simplicity of aim, directness of method? For another instance, here is a little picture, not much above a foot square, of a woman hanging out her weekly washing. It is a pure gem in its way, but what is left of it in an engraving? The form counts for little or nothing; the whole charm of it is in the indescribable rightness of two or three values, the perfect truth of two or three notes of color; and this is enough; but it eludes reproduction as it eludes analysis, and must be seen in the original, and be seen for one's self.

"WASH-DAY."

"FISH STUDY."

I have spoken of the painter as a wandering eye, and of his mission of finding out beauty in common objects and in unexpected places. It has so happened that for two years past Mr. Chase has foregone his trips abroad, and has passed his summers in Brooklyn. And being there, he has explored Brooklyn for paintable subjects, as he had explored Amsterdam and Venice, and with somewhat astonishing results. From these explorations he has brought back a series of small pictures of parks and docks which are veritable little jewels. It is new proof, if proof were wanted, that it is not subjects that are lacking in this country, but eyes to see them with. Let no artist again complain of lack of material when such things as these are to be seen at his very door, and let the public cease complaining of the un-American quality of American art at least until they have snatched up every one of these marvellous little masterpieces. They are far and away the best things Mr. Chase has yet done, and are altogether charming. Crisp, fresh, gay, filled with light and air and color and the glitter of water and dancing of boats, or the brightness of green grass in sunshine and the blue depths of shade upon gravel-walks, brilliant with flowers and the dainty costumes of women and children, they are perfection in their way, and could not be improved upon. Two or three of them are given here in such faint transcription as printer's ink and white paper are capable of, but the sparkle and the charm cannot be put upon this page.

These pictures were a surprise, but it would seem that there is no end to the possible surprises Mr. Chase carries in his sack, and he has lately drawn forth another. Within a short time some of us have seen a few lovely pastels of the nude female figure from his hand. The delicate feeling for color and for values, the masterly handling of the material, the

charm of texture in skin or stuffs—these things we were prepared for; but we were not quite prepared for the fine and delicate drawing, the grace of undulating contour, the solid constructive merit which seemed to us a new element in his work.

Such is a brief account of the work of William M. Chase, a true artist and a born painter, whose talent, within certain defined but receding limits, is of the highest quality, and of whose merits a heartier recognition were desirable. This recognition his brother artists have long since given him, and what they think of him is best shown by his unanimous re-election, year after year, to the presidency of the Society of American Artists; but the great public is slower of perception, and seems not yet to have found out that we have in our midst a master-painter who does well all that he tries to do, and some things as well as any man living.

SLOWTOPP'S CONFESSION.

BY JOHN LILLIE.

I.

"I DON'T want to make a confounded Guy Fawkes of myself."

"But, my dear fellow, you will not: it's just the thing for you. Think what a figure you have for it: not one man in a hundred looks so like the devil as you do—long thin legs and arms, wasp waist—"

"I don't set up for a beauty."

"Oh, but you are—a perfect figure for the subject. If I had those attenuated legs and that hollow-eyed melancholy and graceful pose, I shouldn't be in such a funk about my own costume;" and Brown looked down at his well-rounded proportions with something like anxiety.

"Oh, your figure is easy enough: there's Friar Tuck, you know, or Ben Jonson, with 'mountain belly and rocky face,' Sir John Falstaff, Daniel Lambert—history abounds with interesting cases of obesity."

Brown did not deign to notice this remark, but went on:

"Well, if you don't like the devil, go as Hamlet: black tights, pointed shoes, flat cap, sword; book in your hand—copy of Shakespeare to read quotations from. Hamlet is easy and very effective."

"But you forget, my dear man, it is a masquerade, not a fancy-dress ball. Hamlet in a mask would be ludicrous."

"So he would." Brown pondered for a moment; then he conceived a new idea. "Listen to me, my boy; a suit of black, black kid gloves, black shirt and necktie and wristbands—everything black except the lining of your dress-coat; make that crimson; and with a crush hat you would be a most distingué and devilish devil."

"But there will be scores of devils, a thousand devils. Besides, if one goes as a devil, he must act the part of a devil—or of something worse. Why don't you go as a devil yourself?"

"Oh, I haven't the figure for it. There is no character in history I am so fond of, but I'm too stout, don't you see. Really, though, it's a shame for that figure of yours to be wasted. Take Mephistopheles, then; you are sure to find a dozen Fausts and Marguerites there to back you; or Lucifer, son of the morning, in a splendid crimson and gold suit, with wings. That's perfection."

I happen to possess a particularly good pair of legs, and, without being vainer than most people, I must admit that a vision of those graceful limbs encased in silken tights was not displeasing to me. There was a copy of *Paradise Lost* on my book-shelves, with Doré's illustrations, and if you happen to know that edition, you will remember what a beautiful creation the artist has made of Lucifer. We took down the book, and inspected him with an interest neither of us had ever felt before in any portion of Milton's masterpiece.

"I am afraid he is not practicable," said I, after a searching examination.

"Nonsense!" said Brown; "nothing could be easier. You don't need to follow this model exactly, but only in a general way; and with a few changes you can get up a most gorgeous Lucifer. First look at the necessary things—reduce him to his lowest terms, so to speak—and