

Snow Statues.

BY THOMAS E. CURTIS.

From Photographs by Alexandre, Brussels.

YOU will be interested at once to know that these statues are genuine artistic efforts, and not mere specimens of the small boy's handiwork. They are made by the young art-students of Brussels, exhibited in the Royal Park of that beautiful city for an admission fee of twenty-five centimes, and are annually visited by enormous crowds, the money going towards the support of the school from which the students come.

When I say "annually," I mean, of course, when a heavy fall of snow, followed by just sufficient warmth in the sun to make the snow pliable, has taken place. Some winters the clerk of the weather goes back on art, and then the students have no show. But when conditions are favourable, there is general jubilation. The Parc Royale belongs to the King, but it is not long before the necessary permission is forthcoming by which the students are allowed to transform the park into an atelier, shutting out for three whole days the people who ordinarily make the park their pleasure ground. No one, in fact, is allowed inside the gates, except the students and their masters, and these, during three days, work ceaselessly preparing the statues for exhibition. On the fourth day the gates are thrown open, and everybody comes to see.

The best things in several exhibitions are shown in these pages. One year in a corner of the park stood a massive head, the neck resting on the ground, for all the world as



THE DANDY.

if the man had been decapitated, and the most effective part left as a warning to the young. A huge monocle, made of painted tin, stood in the left eye, and from the mouth protruded the butt of a cigar. The statue was instantly recognised as a very clever presentation of the dandy, and was one of the great successes of the exhibition.

The artists, it seems, have a fondness for the comic. "The Three Jolly Boys" caused a great deal of fun, which was certainly the best



THE THREE JOLLY BOYS.



THE PRIEST.

tribute to its success as a piece of modelling. The men were supported in their rickety condition by a rough mound of snow, and the life and movement in the statue were widely noted. Another extremely difficult subject is shown in the first illustration on this page. It is called "The Priest," and represents a holy father, clad in his cassock, reclining on a couch and reading. The couch, of course, is nothing more than one of the garden-seats in the park, and the foot disease with which the priest is evidently troubled is the dreadful gout. A more effective use of the garden-seat is shown below, in our illustration of "The Law and the Vagabond." This was probably the most popular thing in last year's exhibition, for the subject was excellently treated, and the sentiment of the thing appealed, as it always appeals, directly to the hearts of the



THE PRAYING MAN.



THE LAW AND THE VAGABOND.

people. The contrast between the well-clothed guardian of the peace and the ragged, attenuated outcast was very striking.

The students are allowed to take any subject they like, and all the professors do during the first three days is to walk round, criticise, and keep warm. The students carry all the snow—for, of course, it takes a deal of snow to make a statue. Most of it is obtained in the very natural way by starting a snow-ball, and rolling it until you have collected all you want. The modelling is the coldest

part of the work, but so well is the snow moulded, that the figures seem as if they were cut in stone.

On the last day of the preparation the watering-pot is in great demand. The use of water on the snow gives to the statue a glossy, adamant surface, which goes far towards winning a prize and preventing the work of art from melting into nothingness. It was the skilful use of *aqua* that made "The Praying Man" such a success. He looked as if cut in alabaster. At night, the lamp behind him cast down a reflection which turned him into a brilliant combination of sparkling colour. The students, I may add, make a point of modelling near

a lamp-post, because the light gives additional attractiveness to their work when night comes on and the park is full of visitors.

Animal subjects are among the most popular, and some of the statues are really ambitious. The artists create new groups out of their own imagination, or else copy a group by some noted sculptor like



THE ELEPHANT.

get an excellent reproduction of the elephant's head, with his long, fleshy ears, and his shining tusks. The artists were putting the finishing touches to the elephant while the photograph was being taken.

How comical are the bears below, resting on the bench with wisdom in their eyes. And how admirably the snow suggests the furry white coat so characteristic of a Polar bear. One of them rests on a stick, a picture of ease and grace. Their eyes and nostrils are made with lumps of coal, and in the mouth of the left-hand bear is a pipe, from which



THE ELEPHANT TRAINER.

Thorwaldsen. The elephant is the favourite animal, although lions and bears press him very hard. On this page is reproduced the massive group showing "The Elephant Trainer" at work with two elephants, one of whom is resting with his fore-paws on the back of the other. The trainer, in clown's dress, stands by, with a whip in his hand, guiding the movements of the majestic brutes, as they go through their various tricks. The detail in this group is not so clearly marked as in the snow-sculpture of the single elephant, shown at the top of the next column. Here we



THE BEARS.



THE LIONS.

he is puffing peacefully. This was one of the best groups in the exhibition.

The lion is much in evidence, particularly near the entrance to the park, where the resplendent guardians of the law, with cocked hats and swords, stand at your elbow and direct you to the ticket-office before they let you enter. In summer, a broad path starts from the gate on the Rue Royale, and leads straight across the park; but in winter this is covered with snow, and in its place is a narrow path guarded on either



THE GOOD SAMARITAN.



THE DOG AND MEDAL.

side by long rows of lions in every attitude which imagination may suggest. Two of these lions are seen in the illustration at the top of this page, and the grand effect of a row of these majestic figures may be easily imagined.

Variety in the lion sculptures is shown by varied positions. In the case of dogs, which are also favourite subjects, variety is sought in reproducing all the different kinds of dogs known to man. Mastiffs, greyhounds, pointers, setters, schipperkes, Newfoundlands, terriers, bulldogs, pugs, St. Bernards, poodles, and all the other kinds are to

be found throughout the park, all in different grades of excellence, and all lending interest to the unique exhibition. An effective subject is that of "The Dog and Medal," shown on this page. The medal has a local significance in Brussels, much the same as it has in London, where it is sometimes put upon the dog's breast as an advertisement of life-saving societies. There were over half-a-dozen of these dogs in last winter's show.

Many of the artists make a point of modelling in snow the subjects which they already modelled in clay for the local exhibitions. Such a work is reproduced here, representing the Good Samaritan performing his errand of mercy. The merit of the sculpture is undoubtedly the grace and naturalness of the bending figure at the head



PIERROT.

of the prostrate man. It is hard to believe that this is, indeed, snow, and not marble, so effectively is the figure moulded. Often, moreover, the exhibition of such groups results advantageously to the artists, for the visitors, who crowd round, are not slow in picking out the bad points of the work. One artist, who is remarkably clever at snow-modelling, told me that he often tried a new subject at these exhibitions simply in order to see, from its effect on the crowd, whether the subject had in it the element of popularity or not.

The French have an undying fondness for Pierrot, his misdeeds and amours, and no French exhibition of any sort whatever would be complete without some representation of this typical character of French pantomime. Pierrot dresses in loose white clothes, and appears with a whitened face. He is an unredeemable

thief, willing to commit any crime, incapable of a good action, and devoid of moral sense. His merry face is shown at the top of this page. Below we find him with the object of his adoration, Columbine, known to Italian, French, and English pantomime. In both statues the character of Pierrot is cleverly



THE EQUESTRIENNE.

shown, but the Columbine is not so successful, except in one particular. This is the skilful method by which the artist has suggested the gauzy material of Columbine's dress. In the photograph it is clearly shown, but much is lost in the reproduction.

Less successful is "The Equestrienne," which is shown above. She is rather stodgy, and looks unfinished. The artist, moreover, certainly, acknowledged failure when he wound around the equestrienne's slender waist the bit of white ribbon,



PIERROT AND COLUMBINE.



THE BEADLE.

which we see so prominently in the illustration. A cleverer artist would have done this with the snow, and not with a *bit of stuff* bought at the nearest shop.

While the people are walking round looking at the various exhibits a band plays inspiring selections, and part of the money collected at the gates goes towards the support of this band. Even at the insignificant sum of twenty-five centimes, the total amount is very considerable. In the evening the park is illuminated by thousands of lanterns, the general character of the decoration being shown in several of our illustrations, notably in "Pierrot and Columbine." No wonder



BACCHUS.

the people of Brussels flock to see the snow statues, for the park, with its carpet of white, its brilliant lights, and its scattered monuments of sparkling snow, is a perfect fairy-land.

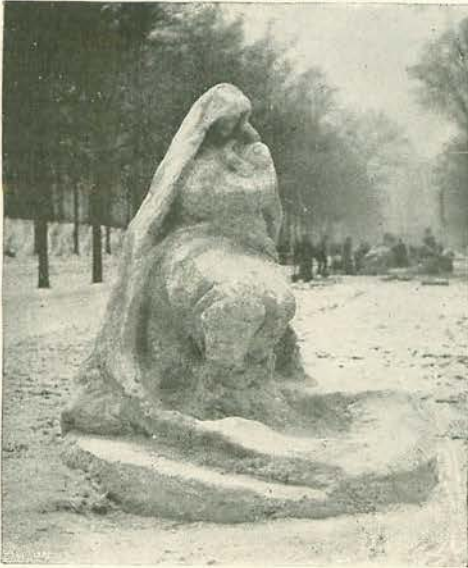
The accompanying statue shows a beadle, called in French "le Suisse." He rests against a huge mound of snow, and his pose is admirable. The expression on the face is, perhaps, more successful in this subject than in any other we have shown, except, perhaps, in the "dandy," with which the article opened. The beadle, moreover, has a waist which, as a lady who saw the statue remarked, "any wife would be proud of in her husband." Another successful treatment of the human features is shown in the "Bacchus," which represents the King of Bibulosity on top of a barrel with a mug of beer in his hand. It is hardly worth while to question the mythologic rela-



THE SOLDIER AND HIS SWEETHEART.

tionship between Bacchus and beer, because the fine points of the statue would be lost if we were too finicky. Note the well-fed proportions of His Majesty, the lines of his flowing cape, his able legs, and the naturalness of the barrel on which he rests in regal dignity. "He's riding horseback," said a little Brussels urchin, as I was looking at this figure. "But, mamma," he added, "what a funny-looking horse!"

'Tis love, they say, that makes the world go round, and the Tommy Atkins of the Belgian army is quite as great an adept in that direction as our own Tommies. The sculptor of "The Soldier and His Sweetheart" has caught the young lieutenant in one of his



CHARITY.

moments of bliss, and the fair maid, of bulky frame, with her coal-black eyes, is to be noticed leaning forward with rapt attention as the honeyed words issue from her lover's lips. With such a moustache and such beautiful buttons (made of coal), it is no wonder that the maid has lost her heart. Seriously, however, this statue was immensely popular, and was visited by crowds.

A portion of the money taken at the gates is also distributed in prizes, which are awarded either for a good copy of some well-known work or for an original design. A committee of judges is selected from the ranks of the professors, and this committee is supposed not to have had anything to do in the preparation of the sculptures. In order that no favouritism may be shown, one or two outsiders are usually asked to join the committee. When the exhibits are ready, these gentlemen are the first to enter the gates, and they immediately begin inspecting the works in order that the prizes may be awarded before the thaw sets in.

In past seasons, many of the prizes have gone to sculptors who took "Charity" as their subject. This is a great favourite, and the two reproductions on this page show that the sculptures are sometimes wonderfully well done. The first "Charity" shows a female figure with a child clasped tightly in her arms, and carrying from her head downwards a long and gracefully-clinging robe, disappearing in the roughly-hewn base. The second "Charity" is more ambitious. Two children are nestling in her arms, the folds of her

dress partly covering two other infants in the nude. So effective was this statue that, from afar, it really looked like marble. The best proof of its success was the prize awarded to it.

In this article we have not space to show all the snow-sculptures exhibited, and have selected from the lot those which show artistic endeavour, whether the subject be humorous or serious. The little Brussels manikin, of which all the world has heard, is always in evidence. Nearly all the benches in the park are utilized by the students for recumbent figures or for humorous subjects, such as the soldier courting and the "Law and the Vagabond." One of the benches, for instance, contained an old peasant woman who has fallen asleep in one corner, while a dog, crouching at her feet, watches his mistress for a signal to leave. Several sculptures are reproductions of Millet's peasants; and religious subjects, such as the descent from the Cross, are very popular. Another sculpture showed the Belgian milk-woman, with her cart and the hard-working dog underneath, pulling for all he was worth. Then there are Venuses, Apollos, Daphnes, Narcissuses, Jupiters, Neptunes, Helens, and countless Roman gods, all striving for a prize. These mythological subjects are not, however, usually very successful, as it is almost impossible to reproduce in snow the successful marbles of the world. The result, therefore, is caricature, and not reality.



CHARITY.



KING LEOPOLD II.

When it comes, however, to reproductions of the human face, the result is different, as several of our illustrations show. Here a good likeness is easily obtainable, and few of the heads of Napoleon which are at times to be seen in the park are unsuccessful. Last winter one of the best sculptures was the bust of Leopold II., King of the Belgians, shown at the top of this page. The bust was mounted on a rectangular pedestal, supported by lions. Those who have a photograph of the King may compare it with the snow statue, in order to see how the two compare, and the likeness will be found very striking.

Leopold is a popular subject, by the way. The young Emperor of Germany is also to be seen in the parks, at some distance, it is true, from Bismarck, whose magnificent head lends itself finely to the snow-sculptors' tools. Humbert of Italy, with his wonderful moustaches, had a place in a recent exhibition; and in one corner of the park, a massive and nameless head seemed to rise out of the ground, and with a knowing, yet enigmatic, face gazed straight away into the distance. Some people called it Neptune, others said it was the Sphinx, and still others said it was Kruger. It certainly looked like Kruger, and we reproduce it herewith in order that its identity may be once and for all established.

The keen interest which the Brussels sculptors take in the exhibition of their snow statues led me to think that modelling in snow was, perhaps, not unknown to our own artists, and that many an able finger might have been frozen in the dim past during the construction of great works of art—which disappeared in the thaw. Several inquiries were made on the subject, which showed that nearly every sculptor of eminence had at some time or other dabbled in snow; and among the

letters which we received was the following humorous and kindly one from the celebrated sculptor, Mr. Hamo Thornycroft, R.A. :—

2A, Melbury Road, Kensington, W.

DEAR SIR,—Yes, I have modelled in snow. It is too tempting a medium for a sculptor not to have frozen his fingers by handling it.

The subject of my most successful attempt in this particular art was a statue of Queen Elizabeth. Considering the material, the subject was a good one; the well-known high frill around the neck was effective, and supported the head admirably. The work was inspiring, but the clay was horribly cold.

As with the Colossus of Rhodes, no photograph was ever taken of it. No critic ever saw it; and it remains only in the memory of a select few—and is closely associated with an attack of influenza brought on by undue exposure.

Yours faithfully,

26th March, 1897.

HAMO THORNYCROFT.



KRUGER.