



"CHURCHFIELD," MR. NAPIER HEMY'S HOME AT FALMOUTH.

A SEA-PAINTER AT WORK:

MR. C. NAPIER

HEMY, A.R.A.

AND HIS PICTURES.

BY

WILFRID KLICKMANN.

TO paint a masterpiece worth a thousand pounds one needs an outfit consisting of a paint box, a brush or two, and genius. Standing at Mr. Hemy's elbow in his enviable studio at Churchfield, Falmouth, in the artistic county of Cornwall, I watched while a piece of canvas was transformed with the above materials into waves—living, moving waves, a part and parcel of the ocean. For he is master of that rare gift, the art of painting *salt* waves. An optical delusion, of course, but very real. It all seemed so easy, too. Genius invariably disguises itself with attributes of ease, seeming to deprecate or deny its very existence. And in this way Mr. Hemy went on painting.

The public, with that ready facility it possesses for cataloguing its favourites, labels Mr. Hemy as a marine painter, and this title is amply justified. Yet on entering his house one is struck not so much with this fact, as that he is intensely devoted to decorative art. One feels that here is a man with a public reputation as a marine painter (albeit far removed from the school of Clarkson Stanfield and E. W. Cooke), yet he is keenly interested in forms of art other than the painting of the sea. It would be

invidious to particularise regarding the artistic interior of Churchfield. Wherever one looks the eye rests on something calculated to charm, be it wall coverings, faithful replicas of Oriental patterns, quaintly wrought tables, or cabinets elegant in design and choice in the figuring of the wood or inlay. In Mr. Hemy's travels he frequently came across good things, and, what is more, knew them when he found them. His collection of old blue china, obtained piece by piece in the Netherlands, carefully preserved and brought over to England, is quite an acquisition. In short, Churchfield is the home of an artist.

This love of decorative art already alluded to, which brought Mr. Hemy into close and valued friendship with Burne-Jones, and induced him to spend some time as a worker in



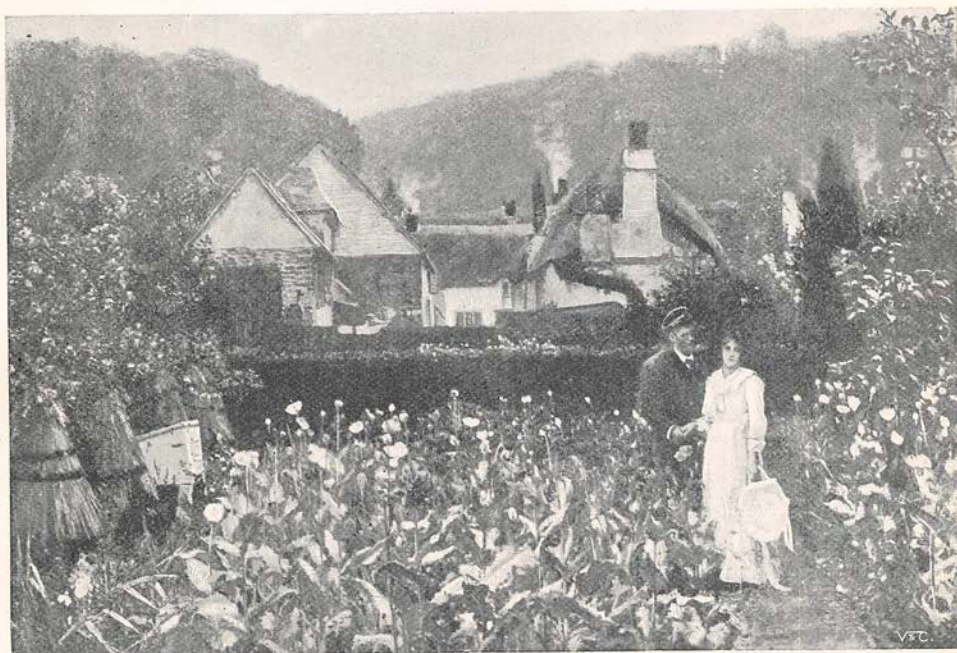
MR. HEMY AT WORK ON "SMUGGLERS," HIS CHIEF ACADEMY PICTURE FOR 1899.



MORNING AT SEA.
From the picture by C. Napier Henry, A.R.A.

William Morris's factory, appears to have been with Mr. Hemy as much a matter of temperament as his passion for the sea and ships. The gradual and life-long development of these separate branches of art is curious. It is traceable quite easily when the main outlines of the subject's life are remembered. He was born at Newcastle-on-Tyne, in 1841, and the British boy's natural taste for the sea was whetted during a voyage to Australia. At the age of ten young Hemy could have satisfied the most critical examiner concerning the design, build, rig, and component parts of a sailing-ship. Three years later, on returning to England, he attended the School

to utilise properly a natural gift for painting, long and careful study, with lessons learned and perseveringly assimilated under the guidance of a recognised master in the art, was absolutely necessary. Mr. Hemy decided to go to Antwerp. The artistic treasures of this and other Continental cities were well known to him, for in his roving days, when his vessel put into any port, he would slip away to museum or picture gallery to satisfy his longings for art. Mr. Hemy placed himself in Antwerp under Baron Leys, "the greatest painter of the century, because he is the most original," to quote Dante Gabriel's Rossetti's eulogy. Baron Leys' works are not



A LOVER FROM OVER THE SEA.
From the picture by C. Napier Hemy, A.R.A.

of Art at Newcastle, and soon afterwards commenced to train for the Dominican priesthood. The see-saw of temperament again asserted itself, and the boy ran away to sea. Parental authority fetched him back, and for a year or two the Church of Rome had a pupil more or less promising. The battle between the cloister and the sea continued, and at seventeen years of age he shipped on board a trader, but was invalided home. He abandoned the idea of joining the priesthood only in his twenty-second year, and then vigorously pursued his hobby of painting.

Very few years sufficed to show him that

familiar to the stay-at-home Britisher, but are well known on the Continent, particularly the series of frescoes in the Town Hall at Antwerp, and his large picture in the Museum of Modern Painters in Brussels. He was an exclusively aristocratic painter, and his paintings are chiefly in the hands of emperors, kings, and nobles. He was a Gothic Michael Angelo, with an exceedingly strong and vigorous style, a man with none of the sweetness or softness, charm and beauty of Burne-Jones, none of the so-called "sensuous poetry" of Rossetti; he had not the honest, fresh, "homely" realism of Millais, but he was a greater artist than all of them.



SPEARING FISH.

From the picture by C. Napier Hemy, A.R.A.

No master was ever more slavishly copied than Baron Leys was imitated by Hemy. Gothic and religious paintings were regarded by the latter as the chief desideratum of art, and the secret influence of the cloister over the sea was all but triumphant. But only for a time. Sea pictures were not wholly neglected. When, in 1870, Mr. Hemy returned to England, the same sound, unbiassed judgment with which he had condemned his own early futile efforts at Newcastle, and had betaken himself to serious study, now made him realise that he could never approach within measurable distance of Baron Leys as a painter. His critical faculty of self-examination (a relic of his Dominican student days) further told him that if he should ever achieve success, it would be as a marine painter.

It is a singular thing how many artists have studied life with the idea of entering the Church and the Catholic priesthood. Probably Mr. Hemy had no more vocation for painting these romantic pictures in imitation of Baron Leys than he had for becoming a monk. His real, natural temperament (though it took him a long time to discover it) was in favour of the sea. But the years

of artistic conflict have not been wasted. He now paints the sea, yet every picture shows by its composition, masterly treatment, rich colouring, decorative detail, and harmony, that Mr. Hemy is an artist as well as a painter. Witness that little gem, "The Millpond," in this year's Academy. Then looking from this to his *magnum opus* for 1899, "Smugglers" (a canvas seven feet long, by the way), we have a work of a wholly different character: boldly conceived and carried out with strength and breadth, yet with scrupulous attention to necessary detail. Possibly a critic whose knowledge of seamanship is limited to the handling of a boat on the Serpentine might question the correctness of the position of the near vessel; but the practised eye can appreciate the difficult piece of steering necessary to preserve the mainsail until the damaged rigging can be renewed. For correctness of detail in pictures one must copy direct from Nature, and few painters of the present day can claim credit for greater diligence and perseverance in this respect than Mr. Hemy. Like Turner, who had himself lashed to the mast of a ship, in order to witness a storm at sea, and who profited thereby, Mr. Hemy practically lives on the

water all through the summer. His floating studio, the *Vandermeer*, is in reality a well-built and sumptuously furnished yacht. It measures fifty-seven feet long over all, and has a spacious teak-built cabin-studio amidships, lighted with large windows, from which the owner successfully studies his subject, be it sea, sky, ships, atmosphere, light, shade, or effects generally. A well known and oft told tale in this connection is worth repeating. One day, when sketching in Falmouth Harbour, he ordered the men on board his model (boat) to perform certain evolutions in sailing, and at the end of half an hour to anchor near by, hoist sails, for further studies to be made, and await orders. This was beyond the understanding of a gentleman with an inquiring turn of mind on a neighbouring yacht. He punted across to the *Vandermeer* and said to Mr. Hemy, "Do you think those men are in their right minds? I've seen them sail round and round your boat a dozen times; and now the idiots have put out four anchors, one on each bow, and one over each quarter, and they've hoisted every stitch of canvas they can carry. I thought you'd like to know, for they *must* be mad."

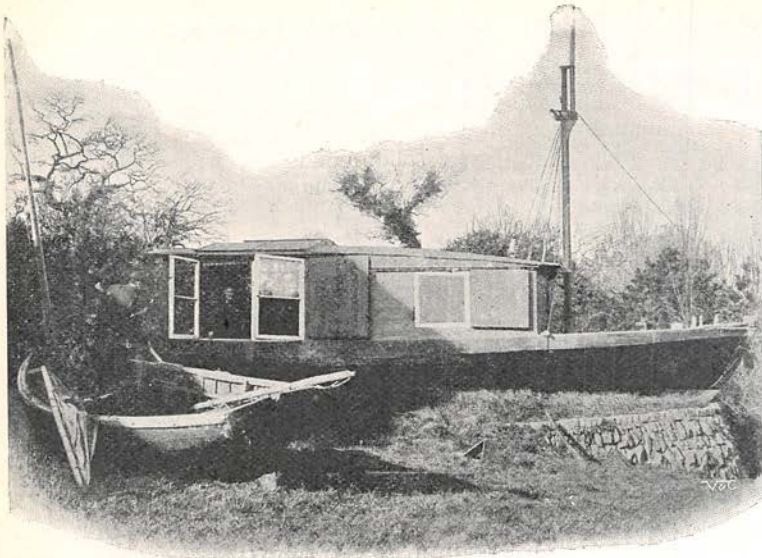
Before Mr. Hemy designed and built the *Vandermeer* he used for the same purpose an old and somewhat clumsy boat (formerly a

seine-boat), the *Vandervelde*, but she was one day blown from her moorings and wrecked off St. Mawes. She was recovered, but being now unseaworthy, was brought up to Churchfield. Here in the grounds, fixed on a solid foundation, she still serves her owner as a studio, while the lawn is frequently requisitioned and covered with boats, masts, sails, and models human or inanimate. It was the influence of Ruskin's "Modern Painters" which made Mr. Hemy adhere so conscientiously to direct work from Nature. In 1880, for the first time in his life, he painted a picture from studies, and this was the one which first brought him prominently before the public both in England and France. The picture was called "Saved!" and was bought by Albert Sandeman, Governor of the Bank of England. The artist, however, was not so satisfied as were the public, for he returned again to painting direct from Nature. Two years ago, however, he produced from studies his famous "Pilchards," now public property, hanging in the Tate Gallery, London, and bought with Chantrey Bequest Funds for £1,200. For many years previously Mr. Hemy had been accumulating studies of a well known incident of the Cornish coast: the "tucking" of a school of pilchards. Needless to say, he more than once accompanied the seine-boats out to sea. When his



A RUN HOME.

From the picture by C. Napier Hemy, A.R.A.



THE "VANDERVELDE," NOW USED AS A STUDIO IN THE GARDEN AT "CHURCHFIELD."

their happy family of ten, not only lived on pilchards and biscuits, but flourished.

The pictures reproduced in these pages, and selected as typical of Mr. Hemy's varied potentialities of style, have been specially chosen to show variety rather than to illustrate well known works by Mr. Hemy. "A Bit of Old Limehouse" is a water colour study, showing remarkable patience and skill in detail—a souvenir of years spent in and around some of

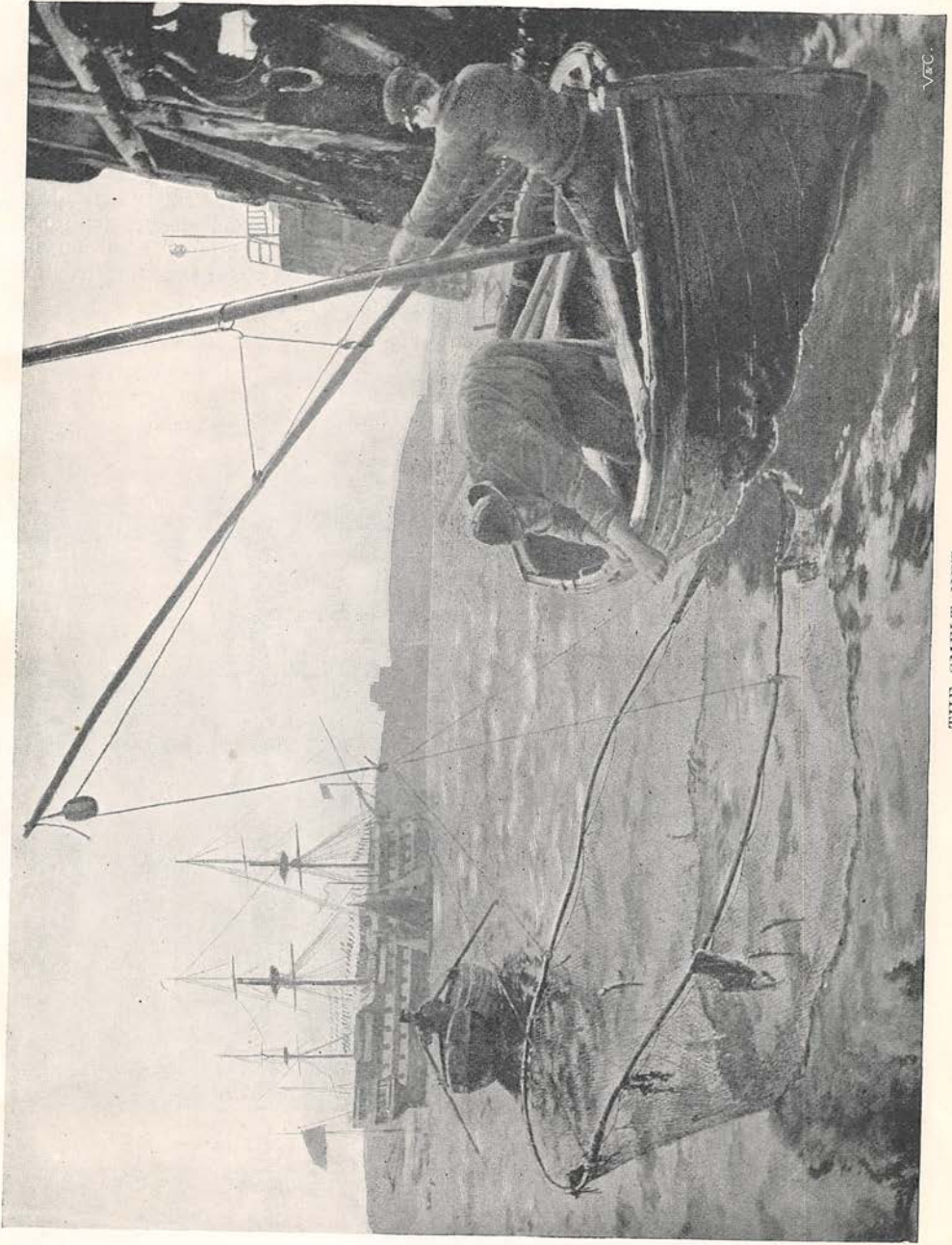
studies were completed he painted "Pilchards," a picture which has perhaps brought him more fame than any other. During the same year Mr. Palmer, of Reading biscuit repute, bought for a substantial sum Mr. Hemy's "Off for the Night." Figuratively speaking, therefore, in 1897, Mr. and Mrs. Hemy, and

Dickens' old riverside haunts. "The Old Poppy Garden" would hardly be ascribed to the same brush that painted "A Bit of Old Limehouse," did not one know the artist to be as versatile as he is original.

Another picture painted from studies was "Lost," hung in the 1897 Academy near



A BIT OF OLD LIMEHOUSE.
From the picture by C. Napier Hemy, A.R.A.



THE SMELT NET.

From the picture by C. Napier Henry, A.R.A.

"Pilchards." It is interesting to know that "Lost" narrowly escaped being sent to the Tate Gallery, instead of "Pilchards." The votes of the Royal Academicians for the Chantrey Bequest purchase were divided equally between the two, and the President's casting vote decided on the fishy subject as being the more popular of the two with the general public.

All the summer and the greater part of the winter Mr. Hemy spends face to face with Nature, and it is only when every detail has been thoroughly thought out, and many more studies made than are absolutely necessary, that he starts a picture. It would lead into a discussion on art beyond the purview of this

sketch were one to weigh the relative merits and disadvantages of painting from studies. But the example of all who have succeeded in art show that the study from Nature *must* be done in some way, and that there is no easy road or short cut to success in painting.

For years Mr. Hemy followed faithfully, with infinite patience, in the manner of the Pre-Raphaelite School, painting direct from Nature, studying every detail in this way, and without the popular but deplorable aid of mere studio inspiration. It is due to this, and this alone, that the Master to-day works with a free and unfettered hand on his pictures, portraying subjects of exciting interest and romantic story.



THE FISHERMAN'S LASSIE

From the picture by C. Napier Hemy, A.R.A.