

MR. SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A.

THE MAN AND HIS WORK.

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IT is not an easy task to write about an artist whose life-work is not nearly at an end, who is still in the full possession of great gifts, and is constantly seeking fresh fields for the expression of the artistic powers. Mr. Solomon J. Solomon is a young man to-day, with many working years before him. It is too early to estimate his place

countries that never fail to inspire the minds that respond readily to great impressions. In London he was to be found at Heatherley's and the R.A. Schools. He passed then to Paris and Munich, and during the term of his *Wanderjahre* visited Italy, Spain, and Morocco. The fine emotions of the Florentine School, the splendid colours of the Venetians



"YOUR HEALTH!" BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A.

A portrait picture. The late Dr. Ernest East is the host. On his right is Miss Ethel Wright, and next to her Mr. Forbes Robertson. On the left is Sir Benjamin Baker. Mr. Arthur Hacker and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones are also of the party.

among contemporary artists. One can do no more than call attention to some of his most interesting work, and point to the purposes and models that seem to inspire his brush.

The artist was born in the autumn of 1860, and educated at private schools and by private tutors. He is one of a large family, and is not the only member with a taste for painting and an appreciation for the sister arts; but he has developed his natural instincts in that direction further than the other brothers and sisters, and his student years found him at work in

have had their distinct influence upon his pictures, and he has seen great work—not as we see it in the National Gallery, with a pageant of cloudy skies beyond—but in the places where the artists wrought. Tintoretto may appeal to us in London, but how much greater does he seem in Venice! Velasquez and Rembrandt may impose their powerful personalities upon us in Trafalgar Square, but they can do infinitely more in Madrid and Amsterdam. And in the spring days of a man's career, when ambitions and hopes are at the highest, how can one overestimate



"LAUS DEO."

By SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A.

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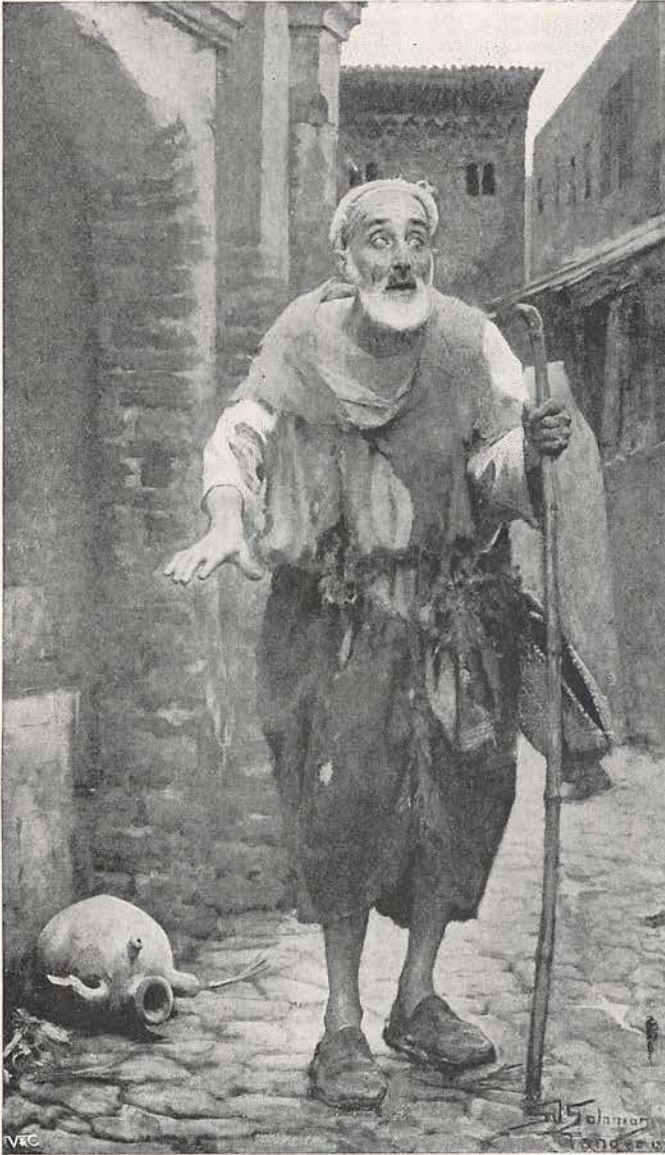


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[H. W. R. Child.

"THE BLIND BEGGAR." BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A.

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the advantage of seeing the world's greatest works in their proper setting with the associations that rightly belong to them? With regard to colour particularly, the advantage is essential. So far as Mr. Solomon is concerned, these impressions seem to have endured down to the present hour. He is a man modelled upon Old Masters, gently and kindly intolerant of new movements that seek to dispense altogether

with the literary side of painting and to seek salvation in colour and harmonious composition, in the aesthetic point of view as apart from all others. He would probably find more qualities in a Whistler nocturne than the late John Ruskin could, but he would not endeavour to do purely impressionistic work nor to devote much time to its study; it would not interest him. He can draw as well as he can paint. Perhaps he is conscious that the draughtsmanship of many of the latter-day lights is woefully to seek.

It must not be imagined that because he is not disposed to favour comparatively modern movements in art, he is readily pleased with his own work; he has no severer critic than himself. Time after time, when the works on his easel have been nearing completion—he paints large pictures with life-size figures—visitors to his studio have been surprised to find the work of weeks ruthlessly removed, because some fault visible only to the trained eye has been manifested. This painting-out is detrimental to the picture—so much, at least, is undeniable; in the inevitable mixing of colour that follows lies one of the reasons for the early fading of so many modern pictures—but Mr. Solomon is too conscientious an artist to let anything leave his studio before it represents the best that he can do; and in years

before the Royal Academy had given him the honour of an Associateship, he might be seen in Burlington House on Varnishing Day putting finishing touches to his work, working to the eleventh hour, and even a little beyond it. Happily for him, most people are far more conscious of the best qualities of his work than he appears to be. They delight in the fine drawing, clear colour, and admirable composition. They



In the collection of]

“WAITING.” BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A.

[Sir Joseph Pulley, Bart.

The first picture, as distinct from portraiture, exhibited by Mr. Solomon at the Royal Academy.

are also conscious that he has given some measure of divinity to many a female form.

Some of his brethren of the brush protest that he is too literary, that his work appeals as much by reason of the subject as the treatment; but they are not the less ready to acknowledge the cleverness of it all, the apparent facility with which the subject is expressed within the limits of the canvas; and, in truth, the apt and facile treatment of the artist's big subjects is the result of very

great and sustained endeavour. He has a sense for the dramatic in incident, a feeling for the exact moment at which a pageant becomes most pictorial; and this, surely, is the combined result of hard study, careful observation, and a fine natural gift. He has striven, too, and striven successfully, against the danger of drifting into one subject or set of subjects. He does not wish that the acute observer shall recognise his pictures by a mannerism. He does not wish to drift

into the ranks of men whose work does not vary from year to year. At the present moment he has the idea of executing a very interesting series of subject pictures that will occupy him for a long time and afford scope for work that will be to some extent experimental. The Italian training seems to be making itself felt, even now after so many other influences have been experienced.

It is not only as a painter of big dramatic pictures that Mr. Solomon J. Solomon must be reckoned with. As a portrait painter he has achieved a large measure of success, and has been particularly happy in the treatment of some of his sitters. The picture of the

sitter's attitude and expression never fail to reveal to the observer something of his or her character. Israel Zangwill, Sir George Fandel Phillips, Colonel Goldsmid, and Mr. J. H. Levy have inspired the painter to some of his best efforts in portraiture—perhaps he is more successful in painting men than women. It would sometimes seem that the purely feminine side of a lady's portrait is over-emphasised, that the living, thinking woman is less than her frocks and frills.

Turning to the artist's best known works, one is struck by the keen appreciation for classicism and mediævalism. Had he lived in the days when pageantry was real and



"SAMSON." BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A.

From the picture in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

great actress, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, attracted the attention and received the praise of the most discriminating critics; and while it was being painted Israel Zangwill was a frequent visitor to the artist's studio. Mrs. Campbell was not always a punctual sitter, and Mr. Solomon utilised his spare time in painting a very characteristic portrait of the novelist. The artist has been fortunate in the majority of his sitters; most of them have been men or women of more than average mental development, and their most characteristic attitudes and expressions have been recorded. If there is nothing audaciously clever in the portrait painting, it is never undistinguished; the composition is invariably clever, and the

genuine, devised by artists and displayed before an art-loving people, he would have taken high place in any company. His tastes are quite catholic. The Bible and the Iliad serve alike to provide him with subjects. Now and again his brush brings back for us some brief glimpse of a golden age, or suggests for a space the Sicily of Theocritus, or some scene born of the days of knight-errantry. Even when he deals with modern subjects the treatment is inclined to be idealistic—his eye seeks for beauty and insists upon getting it. He could make a Lord Mayor's Show have something in common with a Roman general's triumph. Perhaps his long sojourn among the Masters, who



"ECHO AND NARCISSUS." BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON. A.R.A.
The large etching of this is published by Messrs. Clifford, Haymarket.



KING CHARLES I. IN THE CITY.

From the painting by Solomon J. Solomon, A.R.A., in the Royal Exchange.

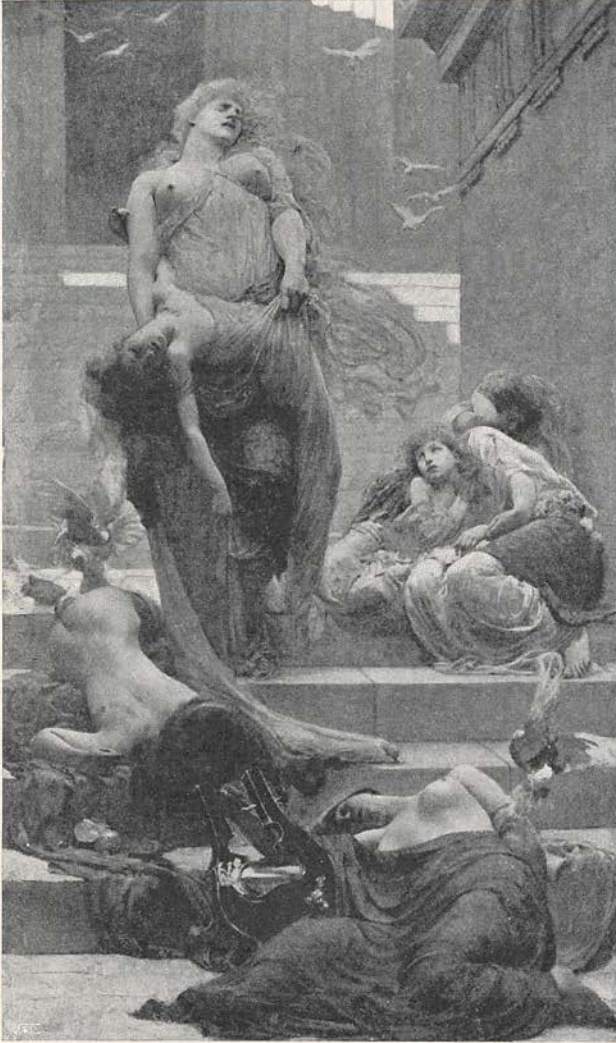


"ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE CITY." BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A.
Sir George Faudel Phillips, Lord Mayor.

only depicted the noble and dignified side of life, has given him the profound distaste for all that is ugly or sordid, though he has remained free from the sentimentality that has disfigured, or, at least, weakened, the work of certain followers of the beautiful, whose pictures have a quality that is so often summed up as "decadence."

Mr. Solomon is a robust and healthy worker and thinker, a man who prepares for the work of the studio by taking a canter in the

Park, whose life is full of varied interests. No amount of hard study can make him a recluse or dull his interest in the many affairs that concern all branches of professional life. In part to his initiative the Jewish community owes the Maccabean Society, a plucky attempt to bring together professional Judaism in London for social purposes. He was its first president, and the greater part of the club's success is due to him.



"NIOBE." BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A.

These matters may seem to be beside the mark, but in truth they are not; we must look at a man if we would know his work. Turning to the pages of Vasari or Cean Bermudez for the lives of the great Masters of Italy and Spain, one notes that the best painters were strong, robust, fearless men, who worked strenuously and developed body as well as mind. Germany and Holland teach us the same lesson. Many of Europe's great painters were qualified by their gifts to shine in other spheres, not a few did. It would seem that a sense of the joy of life is no small part of the artist's equipment.

Turning to the pictures reproduced here,

it must be remembered in the first place that photography is a poor medium for the representation of a picture's merits. Very often a photograph hardens and coarsens flesh painting, and by ignoring the colour makes the relative values false, by which I mean to say that the colour scheme may soften that the camera renders all too prominently. In Mr. Solomon's work the colour is of great importance, but a photograph will give us no hint of it. In the picture "Waiting," which is reproduced here, the side light distracts the attention and is out of proportion, because the camera cannot deal with the canvas adequately, though it is no more than fair to Messrs. Dixon and Sons, the well-known photographers, to say that their work represents the best possible achievement of the camera.

In the picture "Your Health!" we see an animated group of diners drinking to the health of the late Dr. Ernest Hart. One seems to recognise among the guests Sir Benjamin Baker, Mr. Arthur Hacker, A.R.A., Mr. Forbes Robertson, Mr. Jerome K. Jerome, and other interesting folk. The grouping is natural and effective; the drawing, of the academic French kind, is very good; the weakness, if any, lies in the characterisation; the women are all alike—they might be sisters. Here again the clever effects of colour, the handling of the table lights is well-nigh lost in reproduction.

"The Blind Beggar," one of the painter's earlier works now published for the first time, is a very powerful piece of work. It presents a picture familiar enough to all who know Morocco and the Moorish ministrations of justice. Some offence against the laws, perhaps an insignificant theft, has led to the deliberate blinding of the unhappy beggar who strays through the dark alleys of the city calling upon the true believers for the charity that "delivereth from death." Of all the pitiful sights that come to the traveller in Sunset Land, there is none more painful than this, and there are few more common.

In every town, from Tanja of the Nazarenes in the north, to Marrakusha-al-Hamra in the south, one meets the blind men, sometimes sitting at the city gate like Bartimæus of old, at other times in the shadows amid the city's darkest corners, so silent and motionless that they seem to belong less to the living than to the dead. Only on the great market days do they face the sun in the outer Sök and move among the wayfarers, crying for alms "in the name of Allah the One," and getting their greatest assistance from the poorest of the poor, who hand them a few filthy little copper coins called "flus," of which a handful are worth a penny.

"King Charles in the City" is a very brilliant piece of painting, a searching and final test of the painter's capacity for doing unfamiliar work well. The treatment is simple, yet dignified; the tendency to over-modelling that may be observed in some of the artist's work is happily absent; the composition and the brush-work are alike entitled to very high praise. It is a wall picture designed to fill a given space, but these limitations have not kept the artist from accomplishing a work that shows him at his best.

"On the Threshold of the City" is a work in which the painter triumphs over very many difficulties. It is no easy task to invest the Lord Mayor's Show with any special dignity—the City Father, the Justice, "in fair round belly with good capon lin'd," seldom lends himself to dignified treatment. Sir George Faudel Phillips, the Mayor on this occasion, happens to be a man in whom the physical traditions of the alderman are not preserved, and for once the group is redeemed from the commonplace. A realistic piece of work, photographic in some aspects,



Photo by]

[Robinson, Redhill.

MR. SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, A.R.A., AT WORK IN HIS STUDIO.

if you like, and treated on popular lines, but clever and pictorial.

"Samson," "Niobe," "Laus Deo," "Echo and Narcissus" are all specimens of the painter's most characteristic work, strong in literary and dramatic interest, painted with that interest well in mind, bold, vigorous, striking pictures with many admirable points. Under these circumstances detailed criticism is not called for. Their literary side is preserved, and that must suffice.