

## Literature.

The prompt mention in our list of "Books of the Week" will be considered by us an equivalent to their publishers for all volumes received. The interests of our readers will guide us in the selection of works for further notice.

### A HISTORY OF FRENCH PAINTING.\*

THE vast influence of the contemporary art of France and especially the influence it is exerting in molding American art gives timeliness and importance to Mrs. Stranahan's elegant volume on the history of French painting. We find in its pages the logical development of this art in France, step by step, from the fourth century to the present day. The fecundity of modern French art is so enormous and it has become so much a positive source of wealth to the nation as well as of pride, that one is liable to fall into the error of considering it a sudden development, following after a long period of comparative inactivity. The philosophical handling of the subject in the volume before us reveals instead of this a protracted and continuous evolution of which each stage indicated the national aptitude and genuine achievement. With the pictorial arts of England this is the case. Until the last century English art expression had been confined to architecture and decorative sculpture. But it has been quite otherwise with France, and there is no finer example in the history of art of the laws which underlie the growth of a national school than the progress of painting in that country by a steady march over a period of a thousand years.

The history of French painting, as exhibited by Mrs. Stranahan, naturally divides itself into five general periods, with, of course, numerous subdivisions. The first continued until the fifteenth century, representing native tendencies rather than foreign influences. It included tapestries and mural decorations, miniatures which also embraced illuminations, followed by much taste in glass painting and later by panels and easel paintings. A prominent patron of this period, himself an artist, was the "good King René," of Provence. Examples of his work are still to be found at Villeneuve-des-Avignon, at Aix and at the Cluny Museum of Paris. Jean Fouquet, Jean Péal, and Jean Bourdichon were leaders toward the close of the longest period of French painting which led up to the period when French art came strongly under the influence of the great Renaissance school of Italy. This second period continued during the sixteenth century and may be considered perhaps the most important in the development of French pictorial art, because it still continues to display to some degree the results of the influence of Italian painting, at that time so potential in molding French taste and genius. Francis I aided these influences by importing Italian painters to his court, including that Shakespeare of modern painters, Leonardo da Vinci. And this leads us to observe that it was at this period that official direction and patronage of art began in France on a distinctly systematic basis. Whatever may be urged against such patronage, there is no question that French painting owes more for its success to that impulse than to any other. By its powerful aid it has been able to follow a steady path both in the line of instruction and of growing achievement. Francis I united the rival schools of Tours and Paris under the name of the School of Fontainebleau. Jean Cousin and the Clouets, of whom Jean, known as Messire Janet, were prominent figures in this period of Gallic art. He held the office of painter in ordinary to the king. These painters had sufficient ability to offer some resistance to the overwhelming influence of Italian art, and to assert the right of native talent to original forms of expression, altho it must be admitted that

they owed their art knowledge to the Italians.

The seventeenth century, so rich in the history of French literature, the age of Molière, Corneille, Racine and Pascal, was also most important to French painting, for it included its third period of progress, which was marked by the founding in 1648 of the French Academy of Painting and Sculpture. So important is this period considered in the development of a native school that some are to inclined consider Simon Vouet its founder when, in the early part of the century, he formed an association of artists which afterward developed into the Academy and reached a position of power under the wise patronage of Colbert and the pompous munificence of Louis XIV. We are not prepared to accept so arbitrary a limit, however, for the latter artists of the preceding period undoubtedly exerted an influence in this direction without which Vouet might have failed in the full expression of the national genius for this branch of art. It may not be generally known that annual exhibitions were instituted with the founding of the French Academy. The establishment of the Academy led naturally to the endowment of the School of the Beaux Arts, the most remarkable institution for giving instruction in the fine arts since the time of Pericles. It was suggested by Lebrun, the pupil of Poussin; the idea was acted upon by Colbert, and Louis XIV, by his royal assent, gave a lasting impetus to the progress of the arts in France.

But while the importance of encouraging French painting was so clearly understood by the great men of that period, French artists had not entirely emancipated themselves from Italian influences. With the Grand Prix de Rome, or chief annual prize which requires the winner to study at Rome several years at the expense of the Government, the influence of Italian art was implied and accepted. Many of the greatest French painters of that period not only studied in Italy but lived and painted there almost altogether, men like Claude and Poussin, French by origin but Italian in their artistic instincts. Lesueur, Lebrun, Le Nain, Mignard, Regnard, Laurent and Bourdon are also among the noted men of an age that gave place to a more frivolous and corrupt but not less brilliant school, that of Louis XV and the eighteenth century.

The school of this period was more naturally French than any that had preceded it; its painters indicated an impulse to emancipate their art from foreign influences and to create a national school by reproducing the actual life around them. Mythology and allegory began to give place to genre. Even in the depicting of the gross vices then running riot in the land, the painters repeated what they saw. This might indicate a low moral standard, but it was more in the direction of true painting than imitation of the arts of other countries. Chardin, Matteau, Madame Le Brun, Boucher and Vien are but a few of the numerous names which distinguish a period which was naturally one of transition, leading to a period which opened with the severe classicism of David and Ingres, the stern idealism of Prud'hon, the vivid romanticism of Gericault and Delacroix.

It is an attractive feature of the volume before us that it is not absorbed in the classical period of French art, but brings us face to face with the striking development of French painting in the present century. Tho we are here on familiar ground, the subject is too vast to be discussed in a few paragraphs. Notwithstanding all that has been written and said on this topic, there yet remains enough of confusion and perplexity in the popular mind to make Mrs. Stranahan's book a welcome contribution to the illustration of the subject. We may add on our own account, that while in other matters the French are loth to borrow ideas, it is otherwise in their arts, and if we discover less of Italian influences in the later schools of France, on the other hand we see that side by side with the original self-assertion of Millet, Courbet, or Manet there is also a tendency very

evident to gain suggestions from foreign sources. Fromentin, in his masterly "*Les Maîtres d'Autrefois*" has shown how much the modern French school is indebted to the Flemish and Dutch schools, and the influence of Constable, Bonington and old Chame on recent French landscape painting are well known. But this is no disparagement, for when genius borrows it restamps the gold with its own individuality and gives us a new coinage.

Mrs. Stranahan modestly disclaims any attempt at philosophical generalization or expression, keeping within the safe limits of a straightforward statement of facts; but she has produced a most valuable compendium, agreeably written and of high importance as a work of reference. It is designed for the student quite as much as for the amateur. Dates, detailed description of great works, statements where they can be found and the other data of a good history abound. The index requires revision, as it is by no means as complete as such a work requires and deserves.

\* A HISTORY OF FRENCH PAINTING FROM ITS EARLIEST TO ITS LATEST PRACTICE, INCLUDING AN ACCOUNT OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY OF PAINTING, ITS SALONS, SCHOOLS OF INSTRUCTION AND REGULATIONS. By C. H. STRANAHAN. With Reproductions of Sixteen Representative Paintings. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. MDCCCLXXXVIII.