

"APPRAISED BY SMITH."*

"Mentioned in 'Smith's Catalogue Raisonné'" conveys something of the unction that the old religious lady derived from the word "Mesopotamia." It gave her comfort and inspired hope. By the same token, when the picture-dealer utters this resounding phrase in corroboration of the lineage of one of his old Dutch or Flemish masterpieces, it is supposed to bring comfort and confidence to the prospective purchaser. If on the strength of this endorsement the latter buys the picture, it will probably be a satisfaction to him to possess a copy of Smith's work for his own persual and to show to his friends. He will keep a marker at the page where the mention of his picture occurs; will compare Smith's description of the subject with his own impression of it; note the collections to which the picture has previously belonged, the engravings, if any, that have been made of it, and the prices at which it has changed hands in the past or was appraised by Smith. He will rehearse these particulars to his friends, pointing in proud conclusiveness to the printed words which to those who themselves are not writers carry such a weight of importance.

"Smith's Catalogue Raisonné" has long been at a premium. It may be only a legend of the salesroom, but I have heard of the original and only edition of nine volumes fetching as much as \$1500. A copy which lies upon my desk, borrowed for purposes of comparison, was bought at public auction for close upon \$900. The fact of its scarcity, coupled with the prevalent notion of the importance of the work, is sufficient explanation of the appearance of a new edition. This is an absolutely direct reprint of the original, reproduced page by page—apparently by photography, for even the typographical errors of the original reappear. The only variation is the insertion in the new edition of a considerable number of fairly good photogravure im-

*A CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters, with a Description of their Principal Pictures. By John Smith. New limited edition. In nine volumes, illustrated in photogravure. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

pressions of pictures described in the text. The reason for this scrupulous adherence to the form of the original is a good one, as far as it goes, since every reference that has been made to the work by volume, page, and number, can be identified as well in the new edition as in the old. The continuing value of the work as a book of reference is unimpaired. Meanwhile, this identity involves objections, to be mentioned later.

Smith—his name was John—enjoyed during the earlier part of the last century an honorable reputation as a dealer in pictures of the schools that were then popular with collectors. The vogue, as he himself states, excluded the Italian schools, and embraced pictures "of the first class" by Dutch and Flemish masters, with a partial appreciation of French art in the persons of Nicholas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, and Greuze. The first volume of his great work was published by subscription in 1829. It deals with what we reckon to-day as some of the less important *genre* painters—Gerard Dou, Pieter Van Slingelandt, Frank Mieris, Willem Van Mieris, Adrian Van Ostade, Isaac Van Ostade, and the brilliant and vivacious Philip Wouwerman. The enumeration throws an interesting light upon contemporary taste.

The author begins with an Introduction, in which he addresses himself to collectors and purchasers, urging them on the one hand not to sacrifice the value of their treasures by injudicious cleaning and restoration, and warning them on the other against the wiles of the dealer in respect of copies and faked masterpieces. All of this, barring a little flavor of the rhetorical manner, reads very modernly. "Connoisseurs" of that time, it seems, were no more immune than our own from the epidemic of fraud; perhaps our present-day victims may be able to extract from this some balm of consolation. Thus launched upon his adventure, Smith prefaces each list of pictures with a short account of the painter. The one concerning Dou is principally composed of anecdotal gossip, drawn probably from Houbraken, and of generalized statements about the "finish" of his style. When facts are involved, they cannot be accepted without examination. He gives, for example, the name of one of Dou's teachers as *Rowwhorn*, instead of Couwenhorn; and in the same volume assigns 1620 as the date of Wouwerman's birth, although that artist was baptized in Haarlem on the 24th of May, 1619. These errors are symptomatic. Whether they result from carelessness, or from necessary ignorance of the facts that later exact

study has revealed, they render the biographical portion of the work generally unreliable.

However, it is only fair to add that the claim of the work to perennial value is based upon the "Catalogue Raisonné"—the description of the pictures of each painter that had come within the purview of Smith's study. They comprise the examples at that time known to exist in the public galleries and principal private collections in England, Holland, Belgium, Germany, and France. Of these in most cases the author seems to have had first-hand knowledge and to have made the descriptions from personal observation. Meanwhile, of other examples, in galleries lying outside of his own range of travel, he frankly admits that his information has been gathered from hearsay or second-hand sources, and claims indulgence for possible or even probable errors.

Smith's first volume was so well received that he followed it by seven more, published in as many successive years, and finally, after a pause of five years, he issued a bulky Supplement. Meanwhile, in 1838, appeared another work of somewhat corresponding scope. This was Gustave Friedrich Waagen's "Art and Artists in England," better known by the title of its re-published edition (1854), "Treasures of Art in Great Britain." In his preface, Dr. Waagen, alluding to Smith's "Catalogue Raisonné," observes: "Many opinions on pictures to which we cannot assent proceed more from a regard to the possessors than from want of better judgment." To this Smith naturally takes exception, and hits back at the German. "An author," he says, "however talented, should surely have paused before pronouncing opinions on works of art of the highest importance calculated to injure valuable property; both the names of painters of high-class pictures are changed to those of inferior masters, and the state of preservation of many fine pictures is seriously misrepresented." Among the instances which Smith cites of "inferior" attribution is the "Christ Disputing with the Doctors" of the National Gallery. At that date it was assigned to Leonardo da Vinci; but subsequent criticism has confirmed the judgment of Dr. Waagen that it is the work of Luini.

It was candid of Smith to quote, in the preface to his Supplement, Dr. Waagen's criticism of himself; for the shrewd German has exposed the bias to which a picture-dealer, however honest, can scarcely help leaning. Even if only unconsciously, he is interested in flattering his patrons and in extolling the value of their posses-

sions, many of which have reached them through himself. Moreover, Smith had not the critical faculty as highly developed as Waagen. The latter's work in consequence has come better through the test of modern scientific criticism. While the two works do not cover the same ground, though in part they overlap, the Waagen is recognised to-day as the more generally serviceable.

Meanwhile both of them are being put out of decisive commission by works of later and closer criticism. Had the new edition of Smith's "Catalogue Raisonné" been brought up to date, its publication would have been hailed with genuine satisfaction; but merely to reproduce it with its original errors of commission and omission seems to be an act of dubious usefulness; the more so that a work of definite value, based upon Smith's, is now in course of being achieved. This is the catalogue of the most eminent Dutch painters of the seventeenth century, which is being compiled under the authority of the Dutch critic and historian of art, Dr. C. Hofstede de Groot. It will consist of eight or nine volumes, two of which have been already published, while a third is to be expected shortly. When this is completed, it will, in conjunction with Max Rooses' works on the painters of Antwerp, relegate Smith to a position of merely antiquarian interest.

CHARLES H. CAFFIN.