Fine Arts.

AN ARTIST WHOM I KNOW.

BY SOPHIA ANTOINETTE WALKER.

HE was living, when I first knew him, in a down-town "Settlement" among the very poor, not with any idea of "doing good," but because the people there seemed more real than those whom he met up-town, more in earnest; happier, even, in their deep poverty. He worked for them for what he received through the giving: to widen and deepen his own life. The artistic temperament, perhaps, more than another, feeds itself upon deep experiences and is famished for new incitements. The difference between a great artist and his weak brother is largely a matter of his spiritual diet, and that is why one is interested to know how an artist lives.

When delicate health compelled him to come up-town among the sleek people, who show as little as possible their real nature, he was lonely. He had friends everywhere, however—musical, poetic, artistic. He knew when the best things were to be heard in drama or music, and somehow, probably because they rather than bodily food were his real necessities, he managed to hear them.

His headquarters were in a studio in our building, but his comings and goings were not to be predicted. He might arrive for Bohemian lunch, and would oftentimes start a discussion in which the daylight hours slipped unheeded by. It is interesting to see to-day what effect his way of seeing nature has had upon the painting of some of the older and more practiced men with whom he then associated. At that time he was working in black and white almost exclusively, and so successful was he that he gave work to several others. He never accepted any for himself unless he felt himself in sympathy with it, and he never worked for the money which the work brought. He was beginning to paint in his odd moments charming little sketches, memories of bright hours spent in communion with Nature, and the sky showed him more of its glories than the earth of its detailed realities. There was, and still is, an atmosphere of purity and spiritual strength about him, a nobility in his thin face lit by most beautiful eyes, a combination of ascetic, poet and appreciator of all human good which was irresistible and made him friends *everywhere, unless among those who incurred his white* wrath by some meanness.

A friend had a beautiful piece of Persian embroidery upon the studio wall which he admired greatly. Her artistic nature was hardly enlarged beyond literal rendition of still-life, and so she said to him: "I will lend it to you and you shall paint it, if you will." How mystified was she when the quiet answer came: "Thank you, I need not trouble you for it; but I will paint it some day, probably as a landscape." *For fear some reader may be as dull as she was then, it should be explained that it was not "a piece of* Persian embroidery" to him, but a suggestion of a color scheme, with certain spots of color in certain relations which suggested to him perhaps an autumn wood jutting out into a sere meadow.

After a few years, when we did not meet, we ran across *each other at a Private View.* He was looking poor and worn, but intensely alive, with that spiritualized vitality of his. The hard times had come to illustrators. He who *had given work to others had none for himself*, and he was married and had a little one. His eyes filled in response to quick sympathy, for it seemed as if the world had no use for what he could give it. But at that very Academy the tide turned. He had developed a style of painting quite his own, and of the very small landscapes he exhibited, one representing, I think, Spring plowing and sowing, the other the same oxen in a snowy road—one was actually sold! Afterward, in describing this transition period, he said: "*I painted a long time just as well as I could*, being just as much a hypocrite as anybody else, trying to paint just like everybody else; and it wasn't a success. Nothing that I did was liked, and if I did anything expressing myself, that was the worst of the lot. Then I went home one day and gave it all up. I said, 'I have tried to be good and paint as people think I ought. Now I will be just as bad as I can. I will be myself. I will paint to please myself and nobody else.' Then I began to improve and made great leaps. My payment comes in power to see more and do more. After the things are done I don't care whether any one likes them or not; they may take them or leave them." Alas, the writer is so Philistine as to be glad that people no longer "leave them."

What are they like? They are very queer, and you recognize them as his from afar. Somebody described them as *looking like encaustic tiles. They are of a wide range* of subject, often mythological, characterized by great mellowness and richness of color, and, even without the help of time, some of them might hang by the old masters. They are willfully naive in drawing, tho he could draw in the conventional, academic way if he chose. He studies the way little children draw and makes himself as a little child that he may enter into the kingdom. He has a mass of pencillings by very little children which he unfeignedly admires.

His sympathy with child life is wonderful. There is one of his pictures where a child is passing its hand dreamily over the long hair of a big white dog. One can feel, in looking at it, the nerve vibration which gives pleasure and comradeship to the twain. The children themselves follow him in his village, like the pied piper of Hamelin, begging to be "taken"; and the mercenary and vulgar is equally eliminated in his relations with his paid models. He is one of the few divinely commissioned painters of the nude, *that most beautiful creation of God which most people* rightly judge themselves unworthy to look upon in nature and in art.

In composition his sense of decoration applied to figure subjects plays astonishing pranks. If, in a certain canvas, the balance of line and color require it, he does not hesitate to slice off part of a head. A while ago a gentleman and his wife, musical people, asked him to paint their portraits with violin and piano. The result was a beautiful thing, well hung at the *American Artists'; but probably no one* who saw it thought it represented grown people. It sold there, and the buyer may be still under the impression that it is a picture of a boy and girl.

From this and other anecdotes of this paper it is doubtless suggested to the reader's mind that realism is not normal to him; yet should the mood take him he can be as literal as any one, and a likeness is quite within his possibilities. He knows his anatomy, yet willingly sacrifices an articulation to a sweeping line; for decoration is ever his dominant thought. He says painting is like music, with contrast in harmony and syncopated time; it can no more "tell a story nor be translated into words than can music at its highest."

A true artist, he is led by impulse into ways unknown and unexpected; but the results are beautiful, because they spring from a mind and heart essentially right and true. Botticelli, Burne-Jones, Rossetti are his mental kinsmen. Bishop Brooks might have been thinking of him when he wrote:

"The isolation of the artistic impulse from all moral judgments and purposes must be restrained and remedied. The whole thought of art must be enlarged and mellowed till it develops a relation to the spiritual and moral natures as well as to the *senses of mankind.*

"'He who feels contempt
For any living thing hath faculties
That he hath never used, and Thought with him
Is in its infancy.'"

PALATINE BRIDGE, N. Y.