

## The Fine Arts

### Art in Chaldea and Assyria.\*

THE SECOND MEMBER in Messrs. Perrot and Chipiez's monumental history of ancient art in the countries about the Mediterranean sets before us an art less attractive in itself than that portrayed in the first. The grandeur of Egyptian temples and statues, and (on the walls of the tombs) the human interest running through the profusion of scenes from the familiar life of that fascinating land—these do not meet us in the ruins of Mesopotamia. But for historical interest this volume surpasses its predecessor, and is the most important of the series. Moreover, it is the first comprehensive survey of its subject yet presented to the world. Egypt was not the parent of a large posterity like Chaldaea-Assyria, whose science and art were taken up by the Greeks on the west and the Persians on the east, and spread by these two Aryan pupils of their Semite teacher over Europe and Asia. Chaldaean decoration of stuffs and enamelled tiles was the original author of the Persian and Arabic ornamentation that has given lessons to Europe in our century. Persons who find a coat-of-arms their pole-star in life should take a grateful interest in the people that originated the heraldry introduced by the crusaders into Europe. Here was the birthplace of astronomy and arithmetic, and we divide circle, day, year and hour into twelves and sixties because the Chaldaeans so divided them before Abraham was born. Here were created the Greek temple and its Ionic column, the Roman arch and dome. Greek mythology, decoration and sculpture received their chief impulse from the Euphrates and the Tigris, not from the Phœnicians, the pupils of the Egyptians. The Egyptian artist made a generalization, an allusion, a symbol of the human figure. The Assyrian, like his pupil the Greek, strove to reproduce the living man, in hair of scalp and beard, in muscles and sinews, in the robes enfolding the figure. As Perrot points out, while the Egyptian sculptor of gods was superior to his Assyrian rival in execution, the latter surpassed him in his ideal and came nearer the Greek, in that he did not put heads of animals on the shoulders of his gods; these he reserved for the genii or demons, and gave his gods the human form divine. We look with impatience for the work in which M. Perrot will show how Chaldaeo-Assyrian art passed from one nation of Asia Minor to another till it reached the Hellenic towns that fringed the eastern shores of the Ægean.

The special qualifications of M. Perrot for his task are well known; and he is fortunate in his associate, M. Chipiez, an architect already known for his studies in the archæology of architecture both Greek and Asiatic. His reconstruction of temples and palaces in this book are admirable for the fidelity with which the literary and monumental evidence has been followed. Our authors display scientific imagination, and gratify by their acuteness in tracing back the particular forms assumed by architecture and sculpture to the conditions in which the workers found themselves placed. Chaldaea, says M. Perrot in the opening of the book, is a plain deposited by the rivers that ever push out their alluvium farther and farther into the sea—no walls of rock on either hand, like those through which the Nile has sunk its bed. How

penetrating this one geological fact! Following our clear-sighted guides, we see how it has given the sculptor's chisel another stroke than that which formed the style of Egyptian sculpture; why the sculpture is less religious and more historical than on the Nile; why both architecture and sculpture are less grand and beautiful than in Egypt and Greece; why the palaces rose on high platforms above the cities, the temples perched on lofty towers of lessening stories; why astronomy and mathematics were born on this plain; why the column was not so conspicuous as in Egypt and Greece, but the arch and dome far more so; why the arches retreated in tunnel-vaults and did not expand in arcades; why beauty of construction had to be resigned for richness in decoration, and carving for painting on stucco and under enamel, and so on. But THE CRITIC'S aim is suggestion rather than exposition, and the reader may turn to the book to see whether the explanation of these riddles is fact or fancy.

\* History of Art in Chaldea and Assyria. By Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son.