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Classic and Contemporary Painting and Sculpture

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FRENCH ART

\_CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY PAINTING

AND SCULPTURE\_

BY

W.C. BROWNELL

NEW YORK

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1892

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TO AUGUSTE RODIN

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I

CLASSIC PAINTING

I

More than that of any other modern people French art is a national

expression. It epitomizes very definitely the national æsthetic judgment

and feeling, and if its manifestations are even more varied than are

elsewhere to be met with, they share a certain character that is very

salient. Of almost any French picture or statue of any modern epoch

one's first thought is that it is French. The national quite overshadows

the personal quality. In the field of the fine arts, as in nearly every

other in which the French genius shows itself, the results are evident

of an intellectual co-operation which insures the development of a

common standard and tends to subordinate idiosyncrasy. The fine arts, as

well as every other department of mental activity, reveal the effect of

that social instinct which is so much more powerful in France than it is

anywhere else, or has ever been elsewhere, except possibly in the case

of the Athenian republic. Add to this influence that of the intellectual

as distinguished from the sensuous instinct, and one has, I think, the

key to this salient characteristic of French art which strikes one so

sharply and always as so plainly French. As one walks through the French

rooms at the Louvre, through the galleries of the Luxembourg, through

the unending rooms of the \_Salon\_ he is impressed by the splendid

competence everywhere displayed, the high standard of culture

universally attested, by the overwhelming evidence that France stands at

the head of the modern world æsthetically--but not less, I think, does

one feel the absence of imagination, opportunity, of spirituality, of

poetry in a word. The French themselves feel something of this. At the

great Exposition of 1889 no pictures were so much admired by them as the

English, in which appeared, even to an excessive degree, just the

qualities in which French art is lacking, and which less than those of

any other school showed traces of the now all but universal influence of

French art. The most distinct and durable impression left by any

exhibition of French pictures is that the French æsthetic genius is at

once admirably artistic and extremely little poetic.

It is a corollary of the predominance of the intellectual over the

sensuous instinct that the true should be preferred to the beautiful,

and some French critics are so far from denying this preference of

French art that they express pride in it, and, indeed, defend it in a

way that makes one feel slightly amateurish and fanciful in thinking of

beauty apart from truth. A walk through the Louvre, however, suffices to

restore one's confidence in his own convictions. The French rooms, at

least until modern periods are reached, are a demonstration that in the

sphere of æsthetics science does not produce the greatest artists--that

something other than intelligent interest and technical accomplishment

are requisite to that end, and that system is fatal to spontaneity. M.

Eugène Véron is the mouthpiece of his countrymen in asserting absolute

beauty to be an abstraction, but the practice of the mass of French

painters is, by comparison with that of the great Italians and Dutchmen,

eloquent of the lack of poetry that results from a scepticism of

abstractions. The French classic painters--and the classic-spirit, in

spite of every force that the modern world brings to its destruction,

persists wonderfully in France--show little absorption, little delight

in their subject. Contrasted with the great names in painting they are

eclectic and traditional, too purely expert. They are too cultivated to

invent. Selection has taken the place of discovery in their inspiration.

They are addicted to the rational and the regulated. Their substance is

never sentimental and incommunicable. Their works have a distinctly

professional air. They distrust what cannot be expressed; what can only

be suggested does not seem to them worth the trouble of trying to

conceive. Beside the world of mystery and the wealth of emotion forming

an imaginative penumbra around such a design as Raphael's Vision of

Ezekiel, for instance, Poussin's treatment of essentially the same

subject is a diagram.

On the other hand, qualities intimately associated with these defects

are quite as noticeable in the old French rooms of the Louvre.

Clearness, compactness, measure, and balance are evident in nearly every

canvas. Everywhere is the air of reserve, of intellectual good-breeding,

of avoidance of extravagance. That French painting is at the head of

contemporary painting, as far and away incontestably it is, is due to

the fact that it alone has kept alive the traditions of art which,

elsewhere than in France, have given place to other and more material

ideals. From the first its practitioners have been artists rather than

poets, have possessed, that is to say, the constructive rather than the

creative, the organizing rather than the imaginative temperament, but

they have rarely been perfunctory and never common. French painting in

its preference of truth to beauty, of intelligence to the beatific

vision, of form to color, in a word, has nevertheless, and perhaps \_à

fortiori\_, always been the expression of ideas. These ideas almost

invariably have been expressed in rigorous form--form which at times

fringes the lifelessness of symbolism. But even less frequently, I

think, than other peoples have the French exhibited in their painting

that contentment with painting in itself that is the dry rot of art.

With all their addiction to truth and form they have followed this ideal

so systematically that they have never suffered it to become mechanical,

merely \_formal\_--as is so often the case elsewhere (in England and among

ourselves, everyone will have remarked) in instances where form has been

mainly considered and where sentiment happens to be lacking. Even when

care for form is so excessive as to imply an absence of character, the

form itself is apt to be so distinguished as itself to supply the

element of character, and character consequently particularly refined

and immaterial. And one quality is always present: elegance is always

evidently aimed at and measurably achieved. Native or foreign, real or

factitious as the inspiration of French classicism may be, the sense of

style and of that perfection of style which we know as elegance is

invariably noticeable in its productions. So that, we may say, from

Poussin to Puvis de Chavannes, from Clouet to Meissonier, \_taste\_--a

refined and cultivated sense of what is sound, estimable, competent,

reserved, satisfactory, up to the mark, and above all, elegant and

distinguished--has been at once the arbiter and the stimulus of

excellence in French painting. It is this which has made the France of

the past three centuries, and especially the France of to-day--as we get

farther and farther away from the great art epochs--both in amount and

general excellence of artistic activity, comparable only with the Italy

of the Renaissance and the Greece of antiquity.

Moreover, it is an error to assume, because form in French painting

appeals to us more strikingly than substance, that French painting is

lacking in substance. In its perfection form appeals to every

appreciation; it is in art, one may say, the one universal language. But

just in proportion as form in a work of art approaches perfection, or

universality, just in that proportion does the substance which it

clothes, which it expresses, seem unimportant to those to whom this

substance is foreign. Some critics have even fancied, for example, that

Greek architecture and sculpture--the only Greek art we know anything

about--were chiefly concerned with form, and that the ideas behind their

perfection of form were very simple and elementary ideas, not at all

comparable in complexity and elaborateness with those that confuse and

distinguish the modern world. When one comes to French art it is still

more difficult for us to realize that the ideas underlying its

expression are ideas of import, validity, and attachment. The truth is

largely that French ideas are not our ideas; not that the French

who--except possibly the ancient Greeks and the modern Germans--of all

peoples in the world are, as one may say, addicted to ideas, are lacking

in them. Technical excellence is simply the inseparable accompaniment,

the outward expression of the kind of æsthetic ideas the French are

enamoured of. Their substance is not our substance, but while it is

perfectly legitimate for us to criticise their substance it is idle to

maintain that they are lacking in substance. If we call a painting by

Poussin pure style, a composition of David merely the perfection of

convention, one of M. Rochegrosse's dramatic canvasses the rhetoric of

technic and that only, we miss something. We miss the idea, the

substance, behind these varying expressions. These are not the less real

for being foreign to us. They are less spiritual and more material, less

poetic and spontaneous, more schooled and traditional than we like to

see associated with such adequacy of expression, but they are not for

that reason more mechanical. They are ideas and substance that lend

themselves to technical expression a thousand times more readily than do

ours. They are, in fact, exquisitely adapted to technical expression.

The substance and ideas which we desire fully expressed in color, form,

or words are, indeed, very exactly in proportion to our esteem of them,

inexpressible. We like hints of the unutterable, suggestions of

significance that is mysterious and import that is incalculable. The

light that "never was on sea or land" is the illumination we seek. The

"Heaven," not the atmosphere that "lies about us" in our mature age as

"in our infancy," is what appeals most strongly to our subordination of

the intellect and the senses to the imagination and the soul. Nothing

with us very deeply impresses the mind if it does not arouse the

emotions. Naturally, thus, we are predisposed insensibly to infer from

French articulateness the absence of substance, to assume from the

triumphant facility and felicity of French expression a certain

insignificance of what is expressed. Inferences and assumptions based on

temperament, however, almost invariably have the vice of superficiality,

and it takes no very prolonged study of French art for candor and

intelligence to perceive that if its substance is weak on the

sentimental, the emotional, the poetic, the spiritual side, it is

exceptionally strong in rhetorical, artistic, cultivated, æsthetically

elevated ideas, as well as in that technical excellence which alone,

owing to our own inexpertness, first strikes and longest impresses us.

When we have no ideas to express, in a word, we rarely save our

emptiness by any appearance of clever expression. When a Frenchman

expresses ideas for which we do not care, with which we are

temperamentally out of sympathy, we assume that his expression is

equally empty. Matthew Arnold cites a passage from Mr. Palgrave, and

comments significantly on it, in this sense. "The style," exclaims Mr.

Palgrave, "which has filled London with the dead monotony of Gower or

Harley Streets, or the pale commonplace of Belgravia, Tyburnia, and

Kensington; which has pierced Paris and Madrid with the feeble

frivolities of the Rue Rivoli and the Strada de Toledo." Upon which

Arnold observes that "the architecture of the Rue Rivoli expresses show,

splendor, pleasure, unworthy things, perhaps, to express alone and for

their own sakes, but it expresses them; whereas, the architecture of

Gower Street and Belgravia merely expresses the impotence of the

architect to express anything."

And in characterizing the turn for poetry in French painting as

comparatively inferior, it will be understood at once, I hope, that I am

comparing it with the imaginativeness of the great Italians and

Dutchmen, and with Rubens and Holbein and Turner, and not asserting the

supremacy in elevated sentiment over Claude and Corot, Chardin, and

Cazin, of the Royal Academy, or the New York Society of American

Artists. And so far as an absolute rather than a comparative standard

may be applied in matters so much too vast for any hope of adequate

treatment according to either method, we ought never to forget that in

criticising French painting, as well as other things French, we are

measuring it by an ideal that now and then we may appreciate better than

Frenchmen, but rarely illustrate as well.

II

Furthermore, the qualities and defects of French painting--the

predominance in it of national over individual force and distinction,

its turn for style, the kind of ideas that inspire its substance, its

classic spirit in fine--are explained hardly less by its historic origin

than by the character of the French genius itself. French painting

really began in connoisseurship, one may say. It arose in appreciation,

that faculty in which the French have always been, and still are,

unrivalled. Its syntheses were based on elements already in combination.

It originated nothing. It was eclectic at the outset. Compared with the

slow and suave evolution of Italian art, in whose earliest dawn its

borrowed Byzantine painting served as a stimulus and suggestion to

original views of natural material rather than as a model for imitation

and modification, the painting that sprang into existence, Minerva-like,

in full armor, at Fontainebleau under Francis I, was of the essence of

artificiality. The court of France was far more splendid than, and

equally enlightened with, that of Florence. The monarch felt his title

to Mæcenasship as justified as that of the Medici. He created,

accordingly, French painting out of hand--I mean, at all events, the

French painting that stands at the beginning of the line of the present

tradition. He summoned Leonardo, Andrea del Sarto, Rossi, Primaticcio,

and founded the famous Fontainebleau school. Of necessity it was

Italianate. It had no Giotto, Masaccio, Raphael behind it. Italian was

the best art going; French appreciation was educated and keen; its

choice between evolution and adoption was inevitable. It was very much

in the position in which American appreciation finds itself to-day. Like

our own painters, the French artists of the Renaissance found themselves

familiar with masterpieces wholly beyond their power to create, and

produced by a foreign people who had enjoyed the incomparable advantage

of arriving at their artistic apogee through natural stages of growth,

beginning with impulse and culminating in expertness.

The situation had its advantages as well as its drawbacks, certainly. It

saved French painting an immense amount of fumbling, of laborious

experimentation, of crudity, of failure. But it stamped it with an

essential artificiality from which it did not fully recover for over

two hundred years, until, insensibly, it had built up its own traditions

and gradually brought about its own inherent development. In a word,

French painting had an intellectual rather than an emotional origin. Its

first practitioners were men of culture rather than of feeling; they

were inspired by the artistic, the constructive, the fashioning, rather

than the poetic, spirit. And so evident is this inclination in even

contemporary French painting--and indeed in all French æsthetic

expression--that it cannot be ascribed wholly to the circumstances

mentioned. The circumstances themselves need an explanation, and find it

in the constitution itself of the French mind, which (owing, doubtless,

to other circumstances, but that is extraneous) is fundamentally less

imaginative and creative than co-ordinating and constructive.

Naturally thus, when the Italian influence wore itself out, and the

Fontainebleau school gave way to a more purely national art; when France

had definitely entered into her Italian heritage and had learned the

lessons that Holland and Flanders had to teach her as well; when, in

fine, the art of the modern world began, it was an art of grammar, of

rhetoric. Certainly up to the time of Géricault painting in general held

itself rather pedantically aloof from poetry. Claude, Chardin, what may

be called the illustrated \_vers de société\_ of the Louis Quinze

painters--of Watteau and Fragonard--even Prudhon, did little to change

the prevailing color and tone. Claude's art is, in manner, thoroughly

classic. His \_personal\_ influence was perhaps first felt by Corot. He

stands by himself, at any rate, quite apart. He was the first thoroughly

original French painter, if indeed one may not say he was the first

thoroughly original modern painter. He has been assigned to both the

French and Italian schools--to the latter by Gallophobist critics,

however, through a partisanship which in æsthetic matters is ridiculous;

there was in his day no Italian school for him to belong to. The truth

is that he passed a large part of his life in Italy and that his

landscape is Italianate. But more conspicuously still, it is

ideal--ideal in the sense intended by Goethe in saying, "There are no

landscapes in nature like those of Claude." There are not, indeed.

Nature has been transmuted by Claude's alchemy with lovelier results

than any other painter--save always Corot, shall I say?--has ever

achieved. Witness the pastorals at Madrid, in the Doria Gallery at Rome,

the "Dido and Æneas" at Dresden, the sweet and serene superiority of the

National Gallery canvases over the struggling competition manifest in

the Turners juxtaposed to them through the unlucky ambition of the great

English painter. Mr. Ruskin says that Claude could paint a small wave

very well, and acknowledges that he effected a revolution in art, which

revolution "consisted mainly in setting the sun in heavens." "Mainly" is

delightful, but Claude's excellence consists in his ability to paint

visions of loveliness, pictures of pure beauty, not in his skill in

observing the drawing of wavelets or his happy thought of painting

sunlight. Mr. George Moore observes ironically of Mr. Ruskin that his

grotesque depreciation of Mr. Whistler--"the lot of critics" being "to

be remembered by what they have failed to understand"--"will survive his

finest prose passage." I am not sure about Mr. Whistler. Contemporaries

are too near for a perfect critical perspective. But assuredly Mr.

Ruskin's failure to perceive Claude's point of view--to perceive that

Claude's aim and Stanfield's, say, were quite different; that Claude, in

fact, was at the opposite pole from the botanist and the geologist whom

Mr. Ruskin's "reverence for nature" would make of every landscape

painter--is a failure in appreciation than to have shown which it would

be better for him as a critic never to have been born. It seems hardly

fanciful to say that the depreciation of Claude by Mr. Ruskin, who is a

landscape painter himself, using the medium of words instead of

pigments, is, so to speak, professionally unjust.

"Go out, in the springtime, among the meadows that slope from the

shores of the Swiss lakes to the roots of their lower mountains. There,

mingled with the taller gentians and the white narcissus, the grass

grows deep and free; and as you follow the winding mountain paths,

beneath arching boughs all veiled and dim with blossom--paths that

forever droop and rise over the green banks and mounds sweeping down in

scented undulation, steep to the blue water, studded here and there with

new-mown heaps, filling the air with fainter sweetness--look up toward

the higher hills, where the waves of everlasting green roll silently

into their long inlets among the shadows of the pines."

Claude's landscape is not Swiss, but if it were it would awaken in the

beholder a very similar sensation to that aroused in the reader of this

famous passage. Claude indeed painted landscape in precisely this way.

He was perhaps the first--though priority in such matters is trivial

beside pre-eminence--who painted \_effects\_ instead of \_things\_. Light

and air were his material, not ponds and rocks and clouds and trees and

stretches of plain and mountain outlines. He first generalized the

phenomena of inanimate nature, and in this he remains still unsurpassed.

But, superficially, his scheme wore the classic aspect, and neither his

contemporaries nor his successors, for over two hundred years,

discovered the immense value of his point of view, and the puissant

charm of his way of rendering nature.

Poussin, however, was the incarnation of the classic spirit, and perhaps

the reason why a disinterested foreigner finds it difficult to

appreciate the French estimate of him is that no foreigner, however

disinterested, can quite appreciate the French appreciation of the

classic spirit in and for itself. But when one listens to expressions of

admiration for the one French "old master," as one may call Poussin

without invidiousness, it is impossible not to scent chauvinism, as one

scents it in the German panegyrics of Goethe, for example. He was a very

great painter, beyond doubt. And as there were great men before

Agamemnon there have been great painters since Raphael and Titian, even

since Rembrandt and Velasquez. He had a strenuous personality, moreover.

You know a Poussin at once when you see it. But to find the suggestion

of the infinite, the Shakespearian touch in his work seems to demand the

imaginativeness of M. Victor Cherbuliez. When Mr. Matthew Arnold

ventured to remark to Sainte-Beuve that he could not consider Lamartine

as a very important poet, Sainte-Beuve replied: "He was important to

us." Many critics, among them one severer than Sainte-Beuve, the late

Edmond Scherer, have given excellent reasons for Lamartine's absolute as

well as relative importance, and perhaps it is a failure in

appreciation on our part that is really responsible for our feeling that

Poussin is not quite the great master the French deem him. Assuredly he

might justifiably apply to himself the "Et-Ego-in-Arcadia" inscription

in one of his most famous paintings. And the specific service he

performed for French painting and the relative rank he occupies in it

ought not to obscure his purely personal qualities, which, if not

transcendent, are incontestably elevated and fine.

His qualities, however, are very thoroughly French qualities--poise,

rationality, science, the artistic dominating the poetic faculty, and

style quite outshining significance and suggestion. He learned all he

knew of art, he said, from the Bacchus Torso at Naples. But he was

eclectic rather than imitative, and certainly used the material he found

in the works of his artistic ancestors as freely and personally as

Raphael the frescos of the Baths of Titus, or Donatello the fragments of

antique sculpture. From his time on, indeed, French painting dropped its

Italian leading-strings. He might often suggest Raphael--and any painter

who suggests Raphael inevitably suffers for it--but always with an

individual, a native, a French difference, and he is as far removed in

spirit and essence from the Fontainebleau school as the French genius

itself is from the Italian which presided there. In Poussin, indeed,

the French genius first asserts itself in painting. And it asserts

itself splendidly in him.

We who ask to be moved as well as impressed, who demand satisfaction of

the susceptibility as well as--shall we say rather than?--interest of

the intelligence, may feel that for the qualities in which Poussin is

lacking those in which he is rich afford no compensation whatever. But I

confess that in the presence of even that portion of Poussin's

magnificent accomplishment which is spread before one in the Louvre, to

wish one's self in the Stanze of the Vatican or in the Sistine Chapel,

seems to me an unintelligent sacrifice of one's opportunities.

III

It is a sure mark of narrowness and defective powers of perception to

fail to discover the point of view even of what one disesteems. We talk

of Poussin, of Louis Quatorze art--as of its revival under David and its

continuance in Ingres--of, in general, modern classic art as if it were

an art of convention merely; whereas, conventional as it is, its

conventionality is--or was, certainly, in the seventeenth century--very

far from being pure formulary. It was genuinely expressive of a certain

order of ideas intelligently held, a certain set of principles

sincerely believed in, a view of art as positive and genuine as the

revolt against the tyrannous system into which it developed. We are

simply out of sympathy with its aim, its ideal; perhaps, too, for that

most frivolous of all reasons because we have grown tired of it.

But the business of intelligent criticism is to be in touch with

everything. "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner," as the French

ethical maxim has it, may be modified into the true motto of æsthetic

criticism, "Tout comprendre, c'est tout justifier." Of course, by

"criticism" one does not mean pedagogy, as so many people constantly

imagine, nor does justifying everything include bad drawing. But as

Lebrun, for example, is not nowadays held up as a model to young

painters, and is not to be accused of bad drawing, why do we so entirely

dispense ourselves from comprehending him at all? Lebrun is, perhaps,

not a painter of enough personal importance to repay attentive

consideration, and historic importance does not greatly concern

criticism. But we pass him by on the ground of his conventionality,

without remembering that what appears conventional to us was in his case

not only sincerity but aggressive enthusiasm. If there ever was a

painter who exercised what creative and imaginative faculty he had with

an absolute gusto, Lebrun did so. He interested his contemporaries

immensely; no painter ever ruled more unrivalled. He fails to interest

us because we have another point of view. We believe in our point of

view and disbelieve in his as a matter of course; and it would be

self-contradictory to say, in the interests of critical catholicity,

that in our opinion his may be as sound as our own. But to say that he

has no point of view whatever--to say, in general, that modern classic

art is perfunctory and mere formulary--is to be guilty of what has

always been the inherent vice of protestantism in all fields of mental

activity.

Nowhere has protestantism exhibited this defect more palpably than in

the course of evolution of schools of painting. Pre-Raphaelitism is

perhaps the only exception, and pre-Raphaelitism was a violent and

emotional counter-revolution rather than a movement characterized by

catholicity of critical appreciation. Literary criticism is certainly

full of similar intolerance; though when Gautier talks about Racine, or

Zola about "Mes Haines," or Mr. Howells about Scott, the polemic temper,

the temper most opposed to the critical, is very generally recognized.

And in spite of their admirable accomplishment in various branches of

literature, these writers will never quite recover from the misfortune

of having preoccupied themselves as critics with the defects instead of

the qualities of what is classic. Yet the protestantism of the

successive schools of painting against the errors of their predecessors

has something even more crass about it. Contemporary painters and

critics thoroughly alive, and fully in the contemporary æsthetic

current, so far from appreciating modern classic art sympathetically,

are apt to admire the old masters themselves mainly on technical

grounds, and not at all to enter into their general æsthetic attitude.

The feeling of contemporary painters and critics (except, of course,

historical critics) for Raphael's genius is the opposite of cordial. We

are out of touch with the "Disputa," with angels and prophets seated on

clouds, with halos and wings, with such inconsistencies as the "Doge

praying" in a picture of the marriage of St. Catherine, with the mystic

marriage itself. Raphael's grace of line and suave space-filling shapes

are mainly what we think of; the rest we call convention. We are become

literal and exacting, addicted to the pedantry of the prescriptive, if

not of the prosaic.

Take such a picture as M. Edouard Detaille's "Le Rêve," which won him so

much applause a few years ago. M. Detaille is an irreproachable realist,

and may do what he likes in the way of the materially impossible with

impunity. Sleeping soldiers, without a gaiter-button lacking,

bivouacking on the ground amid stacked arms whose bayonets would prick;

above them in the heavens the clash of contending ghostly

armies--wraiths born of the sleepers' dreams. That we are in touch with.

No one would object to it except under penalty of being scouted as

pitiably literal. Yet the scheme is as thoroughly conventional--that is

to say, it is as closely based on hypothesis universally assumed for the

moment--as Lebrun's "Triumph of Alexander." The latter is as much a true

expression of an ideal as Detaille's picture. It is an ideal now become

more conventional, undoubtedly, but it is as clearly an ideal and as

clearly genuine. The only point I wish to make is, that Lebrun's

painting--Louis Quatorze painting--is not the perfunctory thing we are

apt to assume it to be. That is not the same thing, I hope, as

maintaining that M. Bouguereau is significant rather than insipid.

Lebrun was assuredly not a strikingly original painter. His crowds of

warriors bear a much closer resemblance to Raphael's "Battle of

Constantine and Maxentius" than the "Transfiguration" of the Vatican

does to Giotto's, aside from the important circumstance that the

difference in the latter instance shows development, while the former

illustrates mainly an enfeebled variation. But there is unquestionably

something of Lebrun in Lebrun's work--something typical of the age whose

artistic spirit he so completely expressed.

To perceive that Louis Quatorze art is not all convention it is only

necessary to remember that Lesueur is to be bracketed with Lebrun. All

the sympathy which the Anglo-Saxon temperament withholds from the

histrionism of Lebrun is instinctively accorded to his gentle and

graceful contemporary, who has been called--\_faute de mieux\_, of

course--the French Raphael. Really Lesueur is as nearly conventional as

Lebrun. He has at any rate far less force; and even if we may maintain

that he had a more individual point of view, his works are assuredly

more monotonous to the scrutinizing sense. It is impossible to recall

any one of the famous San Bruno series with any particularity, or,

except in subject, to distinguish these in the memory from the sweet and

soft "St. Scholastica" in the \_Salon Carré\_. With more sapience and less

sensitiveness, Bouguereau is Lesueur's true successor, to say which is

certainly not to affirm a very salient originality of the older painter.

He had a great deal of very exquisite feeling for what is refined and

elevated, but clearly it is a moral rather than an æsthetic delicacy

that he exhibits, and æsthetically he exercises his sweeter and more

sympathetic sensibility within the same rigid limits which circumscribe

that of Lebrun. He has, indeed, less invention, less imagination, less

sense of composition, less wealth of detail, less elaborateness, no

greater concentration or sense of effect; and though his color is more

agreeable, perhaps, in hue, it gets its tone through the absence of

variety rather than through juxtapositions and balances. The truth is,

that both equally illustrate the classic spirit, the spirit of their age

\_par excellence\_ and of French painting in general, in a supreme degree,

though the conformability of the one is positive and of the other

passive, so to say; and that neither illustrates quite the subserviency

to the conventional which we, who have undoubtedly just as many

conventions of our own, are wont to ascribe to them, and to Lebrun in

particular.

IV

Fanciful as the Louis Quinze art seems, by contrast with that of Louis

Quatorze, it, too, is essentially classic. It is free enough--no one, I

think, would deny that--but it is very far from individual in any

important sense. It has, to be sure, more personal feeling than that of

Lesueur or Lebrun. The artist's susceptibility seems to come to the

surface for the first time. Watteau, Fragonard--Fragonard especially,

the exquisite and impudent--are as gay, as spontaneous, as careless, as

vivacious as Boldini. Boucher's goddesses and cherubs, disporting

themselves in graceful abandonment on happily disposed clouds, outlined

in cumulus masses against unvarying azure, are as unrestrained and

independent of prescription as Monticelli's figures. Lancret, Pater,

Nattier, and Van Loo--the very names suggest not merely freedom but a

sportive and abandoned license. But in what a narrow round they move!

How their imaginativeness is limited by their artificiality! What a

talent, what a genius they have for artificiality. It is the era \_par

excellence\_ of dilettantism, and nothing is less romantic than

dilettantism. Their evident feeling--and evidently genuine feeling--is

feeling for the factitious, for the manufactured, for what the French

call the \_confectionné\_. Their romantic quality is to that of the modern

Fontainebleau group as the exquisite \_vers de société\_ of Mr. Austin

Dobson, say, is to the turbulent yet profound romanticism of Heine or

Burns. Every picture painted by them would go as well on a fan as in a

frame. All their material is traditional. They simply handle it as

\_enfants terribles\_. Intellectually speaking, they are painters of a

silver age. Of ideas they have almost none. They are as barren of

invention in any large sense as if they were imitators instead of, in a

sense, the originators of a new phase. Their originality is arrived at

rather through exclusion than discovery. They simply drop pedantry and

exult in irresponsibility. They are hardly even a school.

Yet they have, one and all, in greater or less degree, that distinct

quality of charm which is eternally incompatible with routine. They are

as little constructive as the age itself, as anything that we mean when

we use the epithet Louis Quinze. Of everything thus indicated one

predicates at once unconsciousness, the momentum of antecedent thought

modified by the ease born of habit; the carelessness due to having one's

thinking done for one and the license of proceeding fancifully,

whimsically, even freakishly, once the lines and limits of one's action

have been settled by more laborious, more conscientious philosophy than

in such circumstances one feels disposed to frame for one's self. There

is no break with the Louis Quatorze things, not a symptom of revolt;

only, after them the deluge! But out of this very condition of things,

and out of this attitude of mind, arises a new art, or rather a new

phase of art, essentially classic, as I said, but nevertheless imbued

with a character of its own, and this character distinctly charming.

Wherein does the charm consist? In two qualities, I think, one of which

has not hitherto appeared in French painting, or, indeed, in any art

whatever, namely, what we understand by cleverness as a distinct element

in treatment--and color. Color is very prominent nowadays in all writing

about art, though recently it has given place, in the fashion of the

day, to "values" and the realistic representation of natural objects as

the painter's proper aim. What precisely is meant by color would be

difficult, perhaps, to define. A warmer general tone than is achieved by

painters mainly occupied with line and mass is possibly what is oftenest

meant by amateurs who profess themselves fond of color. At all events,

the Louis Quinze painters, especially Watteau, Fragonard, and Pater--and

Boucher has a great deal of the same feeling--were sensitive to that

vibration of atmosphere that blends local hues into the \_ensemble\_ that

produces tone. The \_ensemble\_ of their tints is what we mean by color.

Since the Venetians \_this\_ note had not appeared. They constitute, thus,

a sort of romantic interregnum--still very classic, from an intellectual

point of view--between the classicism of Lebrun and the still greater

severity of David. Nothing in the evolution of French painting is more

interesting than this reverberation of Tintoretto and Tiepolo.

By cleverness, as exhibited by the Louis Quinze painters, I do not mean

mere technical ability, but something more inclusive, something relating

quite as much to attitude of mind as to dexterity of treatment. They

conceive as cleverly as they execute. There is a sense of confidence and

capability in the way they view, as well as in the way they handle,

their light material. They know it thoroughly, and are thoroughly at one

with it. And they exploit it with a serene air of satisfaction, as if

it were the only material in the world worth handling. Indeed, it is

exquisitely adapted to their talent. So little significance has it that

one may say it exists merely to be cleverly dealt with, to be

represented, distributed, compared, and generally utilized solely with

reference to the display of the artist's jaunty skill. It is, one may

say, merely the raw material for the production of an effect, and an

effect demanding only what we mean by cleverness; no knowledge and love

of nature, no prolonged study, no acquaintance with the antique, for

example, no philosophy whatever--unless poco-curantism be called a

philosophy, which eminently it is not. To be adequate to the

requirements--rarely very exacting in any case--made of one, never to

show stupidity, to have a great deal of taste and an instinctive feeling

for what is elegant and refined, to abhor pedantry and take gayety at

once lightly and seriously, and beyond this to take no thought, is to be

clever; and in this sense the Louis Quinze painters are the first, as

they certainly are the typical, clever artists.

In Louis Quinze art the subject is more than effaced to give free swing

to technical cleverness; it is itself contributory to such cleverness,

and really a part of it. The artists evidently look on life, as they

paint their pictures, as the web whereon to sketch exhibitions of skill

in the composition of sensation-provoking combinations--combinations,

thus, provoking sensations of the lightest and least substantial kind.

When you stand before one of Fragonard's bewitching models, modishly

modified into a great--or rather a little--lady, you not only note the

color--full of tone on the one hand and of variety on the other, besides

exhibiting the happiest selective quality in warm and yet delicate hues

and tints; you not only, furthermore, observe the clever touch just

poised between suggestion and expression, coquettishly suppressing a

detail here, and emphasizing a characteristic there; you feel, in

addition, that the entire object floats airily in an atmosphere of

cleverness; that it is but a bit, an example, a miniature type of an

environment wholly attuned to the note of cleverness--of competence,

facility, grace, elegance, and other abstract but not at all abstruse

qualities, quite unrelated to what, in any profound sense, at least, is

concrete and vitally significant. Artificiality so permeated the Louis

Quinze epoch, indeed, that one may say that nature itself was

artificial--that is to say, all the nature Louis Quinze painters had to

paint; at least all they could have been called upon to think of

painting. What a distinction is, after all, theirs! To have created out

of nothing, or next to nothing, something charming, and enduringly

charming; something of a truly classic inspiration without dependence

at bottom on the real and the actual; something as little indebted to

facts and things as a fairy tale, and withal marked by such qualities as

color and cleverness in so eminent a degree.

The Louis Quinze painters may be said, indeed, to have had the romantic

temperament with the classic inspiration. They have audacity rather than

freedom, license modified by strict limitation to the lines within which

it is exercised. But there can be no doubt that this limitation is more

conspicuous in their charmingly irresponsible works than is, essentially

speaking, their irresponsibility itself. They never give their

imagination free play. Sportive and spontaneous as it appears, it is

equally clear that its activities are bounded by conservatory confines.

Watteau, born on the Flemish border, is almost an exception. Temperament

in him seems constantly on the verge of conquering tradition and

environment. Now and then he seems to be on the point of emancipation,

and one expects to come upon some work in which he has expressed himself

and attested his ideality. But one is as constantly disappointed. His

color and his cleverness are always admirable and winning, but his

import is perversely--almost bewitchingly--slight. What was he thinking

of? one asks, before his delightful canvases; and one's conclusion

inevitably is, certainly as near nothing at all as can be consistent

with so much charm and so much real power. As to Watteau, one's last

thought is of what he would have been in a different æsthetic

atmosphere, in an atmosphere that would have stimulated his really

romantic temperament to extra-traditional flights, instead of confining

it within the inexorable boundaries of classic custom; an atmosphere

favorable to the free exercise of his adorable fancy, instead of

rigorously insistent on conforming this, so far as might be, to

customary canons, and, at any rate, restricting its exercise to material

\_à la mode\_. A little landscape in the La Caze collection in the Louvre,

whose romantic and truly poetic feeling agreeably pierces through its

elegance, is eloquent of such reflections.

V

With Greuze and Chardin we are supposed to get into so different a

sphere of thought and feeling that the change has been called a "return

to nature"--that "return to nature" of which we hear so much in

histories of literature as well as of the plastic arts. The notion is

not quite sound. Chardin is a painter who seems to me, at least, to

stand quite apart, quite alone, in the development of French painting,

whereas there could not be a more marked instance of the inherence of

the classic spirit in the French æsthetic nature than is furnished by

Greuze. The first French painter of \_genre\_, in the full modern sense of

the term, the first true interpreter of scenes from humble life--of

lowly incident and familiar situations, of broken jars and paternal

curses, and buxom girls and precocious children--he certainly is. There

is certainly nothing \_régence\_ about him. But the beginning and end of

Greuze's art is convention. He is less imaginative, less romantic, less

real than the painting his replaced. That was at least a mirror of the

ideals, the spirit, the society, of the day. A Louis Quinze fan is a

genuine and spontaneous product of a free and elastic æsthetic impulse

beside one of his stereotyped sentimentalities.

The truth is, Greuze is as sentimental as a bullfinch, but he has hardly

a natural note in his gamut. Nature is not only never his model, she is

never his inspiration. He is distinctively a literary painter; but this

description is not minute enough. His conventions are those not merely

of the \_littérateur\_, but of the extremely conventional \_littérateur\_.

An artless platitude is really more artificial than a clever paradox; it

doesn't even cast a side-light on the natural material with which it

deals. Greuze's \_genre\_ is really a \_genre\_ of his own--his own and that

of kindred spirits since. It is as systematic and detached as the art of

Poussin. The forms it embodies merely have more natural, more familiar

associations. But compare one of his compositions with those of the

little Dutch and Flemish masters, for truth, feeling, nature handled

after her own suggestions, instead of within limits and on lines imposed

upon her from without. By the side of Van Ostade or Brauer, for example,

one of Greuze's bits of humble life seems like an academic composition,

quite out of touch with its subject, and, except for its art, absolutely

lifeless and insipid.

In a word, his choice of subjects, of \_genre\_, is really no disguise at

all of his essential classicality. Both ideally and technically, in the

way he conceives and the way he handles his subject, he is only

superficially romantic or real. His literature, so to speak, is as

conventional as his composition. One may compare him to Hogarth, though

both as a moralist and a technician \_a longo intervallo\_, of course. He

is assuredly not to be depreciated. His scheme of color is clear if not

rich, his handling is frank if not unctuous or subtly interesting, his

composition is careful and clever, and some of his heads are admirably

painted--painted with a genuine feeling for quality. But his merits as

well as his failings are decidedly academic, and as a romanticist he is

really masquerading. He is much nearer to Fragonard than he is to

Edouard Frère even.

Chardin, on the other hand, is the one distinguished exception to the

general character of French art in the artificial and intellectual

eighteenth century. He is as natural as a Dutchman, and as modern as

Vollon. As you walk through the French galleries of the Louvre, of all

the canvases antedating our own era his are those toward which one feels

the most sympathetic attraction, I think. You note at once his

individuality, his independence of schools and traditions, his personal

point of view, his preoccupation with the object as he perceives it.

Nothing is more noteworthy in the history of French art, in the current

of which the subordination of the individual genius to the general

consensus is so much the rule, than the occasional exception--now of a

single man, now of a group of men, destined to become in its turn a

school--the occasional accent or interruption of the smooth course of

slow development on the lines of academic precedent. Tyrannical as

academic precedent is (and nowhere has it been more tyrannical than in

French painting) the general interest in æsthetic subjects which a

general subscription to academic precedent implies is certainly to be

credited with the force and genuineness of the occasional protestant

against the very system that has been powerful enough to popularize

indefinitely the subject both of subscription and of revolt. Without

some such systematic propagandism of the æsthetic cultus as from the

first the French Institute has been characterized by, it is very

doubtful if, in the complexity of modern society, the interest in

æsthetics can ever be made wide enough, universal enough, to spread

beyond those immediately and professionally concerned with it. The

immense impetus given to this interest by a central organ of authority,

that dignifies the subject with which it occupies itself and draws

attention to its value and its importance, has, \_à priori\_, the manifest

effect of leading persons to occupy themselves with it, also, who

otherwise would never have had their attention drawn to it. It would

scarcely be an exaggeration to say, in other words, that but for the

Institute there would not be a tithe of the number of names now on the

roll of French artists. When art is in the air--and nothing so much as

an academy produces this condition--the chances of the production of

even an unacademic artist are immensely increased.

So in the midst of the Mignardise of Louis Quinze painting it is only

superficially surprising to find a painter of the original force and

flavor of Chardin. His wholesome and yet subtle variations from the art

\_à la mode\_ of his epoch might have been painted in the Holland of his

day, or in our day anywhere that art so good as Chardin's can be

produced, so far as subject and moral and technical attitude are

concerned. They are, in quite accentuated contra-distinction from the

works of Greuze, thoroughly in the spirit of simplicity and directness.

One notes in them at once that moral simplicity which predisposes

everyone to sympathetic appreciation. The special ideas of his time seem

to pass him by unmoved. He has no community of interest with them. While

he was painting his still life and domestic genre, the whole fantastic

whirl of Louis Quinze society, with its æsthetic standards and

accomplishments--accomplishments and standards that imposed themselves

everywhere else--was in agitated movement around him without in the

least affecting his serene tranquillity, his almost sturdy composure.

There can rarely have been such an instance as he affords of an artist's

selecting from his environment just those things his own genius needed,

and rejecting just what would have hampered or distracted him. He is as

sane, as unsentimental, as truthful and unpretending as the most literal

and unimaginative Dutchman of his time or before it; but he has also

that feeling for style, and that instinct for avoiding the common and

unclean which always seem to prevent French painters from "sinking with

their subject," as Dutch painters have been said to do. He seems never

to let himself go either in the direction of Greuze's literary and

sentimental manipulation of his homely material, or in the direction of

supine satisfaction with this material, unrelieved and unelevated by an

individual point of view, illustrated by the Brauers and Steens and

Ostades. One perceives that what he cared for was really art itself, for

the æsthetic aspect and significance of the life he painted.

Affectionate as his interest in it evidently was, he as evidently

thought of its artistic potentialities, its capability of being treated

with refinement and delicacy, and of being made to serve the ends of

beauty equally well with the conventionally beautiful material of his

fan-painting contemporaries. He looked at the world very originally

through and over those round, horn-bowed spectacles of his, with a very

shrewd and very kindly and sympathetic glance, too; quite untinctured

with prejudice or even predisposition. One can read his artistic

isolation in his countenance with a very little exercise of fancy.

VI

It is the fashion to think of David as the painter of the Revolution and

the Empire. Really he is Louis Seize. Historical critics say that he had

no fewer than four styles, but apart from obvious labels they would be

puzzled to tell to which of these styles any individual picture of his

belongs. He was from the beginning extremely, perhaps absurdly,

enamoured of the antique, and we usually associate addiction to the

antique with the Revolutionary period. But perhaps politics are slower

than the æsthetic movement; David's view of art and practice of painting

were fixed unalterably under the reign of philosophism. Philosophism, as

Carlyle calls it, is the ruling spirit of his work. Long before the

Revolution--in 1774--he painted what is still his most characteristic

picture--"The Oath of the Horatii." His art developed and grew

systematized under the Republic and the Empire; but Napoleon, whose

genius crystallized the elements of everything in all fields of

intellectual effort with which he occupied himself, did little but

formally "consecrate," in French phrase, the art of the painter of "The

Oath of the Horatii" and the originator and designer of the "Fête" of

Robespierre's "Être Suprême." Spite of David's subserviency and that of

others, he left painting very much where he found it. And he found it in

a state of reaction against the Louis Quinze standards. The break with

these, and with everything \_régence\_, came with Louis Seize, Chardin

being a notable exception and standing quite apart from the general

drift of the French æsthetic movement; and Greuze being only a

pseudo-romanticist, and his work a variant of, rather than reactionary

from, the artificiality of his day. Before painting could "return to

nature," before the idea and inspiration of true romanticism could be

born, a reaction in the direction of severity after the artificial yet

irresponsible riot of the Louis Quinze painters was naturally and

logically inevitable. Painting was modified in the same measure with

every other expression in the general \_recueillement\_ that followed the

extravagance in all social and intellectual fields of the Louis Quinze

epoch. But in becoming more chaste it did not become less classical.

Indeed, so far as severity is a trait of classicality--and it is only an

associated not an essential trait of it--painting became more classical.

It threw off its extravagances without swerving from the artificial

character of its inspiration. Art in general seemed content with

substituting the straight line for the curve--a change from Louis Quinze

to Louis Seize that is very familiar even to persons who note the

transitions between the two epochs only in the respective furniture of

each; a Louis Quinze chair or mirror, for example, having a flowing

outline, whereas a Louis Seize equivalent is more rigid and rectilinear.

David is artificial, it is to be pointed out, only in his \_ensemble\_. In

detail he is real enough. And he always has an \_ensemble\_. His

compositions, as compositions, are admirable. They make a total

impression, and with a vigor and vividness that belong to few

constructed pictures. The canvas is always penetrated with

David--illustrates as a whole, and with completeness and comparative

flawlessness, his point of view, his conception of the subject. This, of

course, is the academic point of view, the academic conception. But, as

I say, his detail is surprisingly truthful and studied. His

picture--which is always nevertheless a picture--is as inconceivable, as

traditional in its inspiration, as factitious as you like; his figures

are always sapiently and often happily exact. His portraits are

absolutely vital characterizations. And in general his sculptural sense,

his self-control, his perfect power of expressing what he deemed worth

expressing, are really what are noteworthy in his pictures, far more

than their monotonous coloration and the coldness and unreality of the

pictures themselves, considered as moving, real, or significant

compositions. In admiration of these it is impossible for us nowadays to

go as far as even the romanticist, though extremely catholic, Gautier.

They leave us cold. We have a wholly different ideal, which in order to

interest us powerfully painting must illustrate--an ideal of more

pertinence and appositeness to our own moods and manner of thought and

feeling.

Ingres, a painter of considerably less force, I think, comes much nearer

to doing this. He is more elastic, less devoted to system. Without being

as free, as sensitive to impressions as we like to see an artist of his

powers, he escapes pedantry. His subject is not "The Rape of the

Sabines," but "The Apotheosis of Homer," academic but not academically

fatuitous. To follow the inspiration of the Vatican Stanze in the

selection and treatment of ideal subjects is to be far more closely in

touch with contemporary feeling as to what is legitimate and proper in

imaginative painting, than to pictorialize an actual event with a

systematic artificiality and conformity to abstractions that would

surely have made the sculptor of the Trajan column smile. Yet I would

rather have "The Rape of the Sabines" within visiting distance than "The

Apotheosis of Homer." It is better, at least solider, painting. The

painter, however dominated by his theory, is more the master of its

illustration than Ingres is of the justification of his admiration for

Raphael. The "Homer" attempts more, but it is naturally not as

successful in getting as effective a unity out of its greater

complexity. It is in his less ambitious pictures that the genius of

Ingres is unmistakably evident--his heads, his single figures, his

exquisite drawings almost in outline. His "Odalisque" of the Louvre is

not as forceful as David's portrait of Madame Récamier, but it is a

finer thing. I should like the two to have changed subjects in this

instance. His "Source" is beautifully drawn and modelled. In everything

he did distinction is apparent. Inferior assuredly to David when he

attempted the grand style, he had a truer feeling for the subtler

qualities of style itself. All his works are linearly beautiful

demonstrations of his sincerity--his sanity indeed--in proclaiming that

drawing is "the probity of art."

With a few contemporary painters and critics, whose specific penetration

is sometimes in curious contrast with their imperfect catholicity, he

has recently come into vogue again, after having been greatly neglected

since the romantic outburst. But he belongs completely to the classic

epoch. Neither he nor his refined and sympathetic pupil, Flandrin, did

aught to pave the way for the modern movement. Intimations of the

shifting point of view are discoverable rather in a painter of far

deeper poetic interest than either, spite of Ingres's refinement and

Flandrin's elevation--in Prudhon. Prudhon is the link between the last

days of the classic supremacy and the rise of romanticism. Like Claude,

like Chardin, he stands somewhat apart; but he has distinctly the

romantic inspiration, constrained and regularized by classic principles

of taste. He is the French Correggio in far more precise parallelism

than Lesueur is the French Raphael. With a grace and lambent color all

his own--a beautiful mother-of-pearl and opalescent tone underlying his

exquisite violets and graver hues; a color-scheme, on the one hand, and

a sense of design in line and mass more suave and graceful than anything

since the great Italians, on the other--he recalls the lovely

chiaro-oscuro of the exquisite Parmesan as it is recalled in no other

modern painter. Occupying, as incontestably he does, his own niche in

the pantheon of painters, he nevertheless illustrates most distinctly

and unmistakably the slipping away of French painting from classic

formulas as well as from classic extravagance, and the tendency to new

ideals of wider reach and greater tolerance--of more freedom,

spontaneity, interest in "life and the world"--of a definitive break

with the contracting and constricting forces of classicism. During its

next period, and indeed down to the present day, French painting will

preserve the essence of its classic traditions, variously modified from

decade to decade, but never losing the quality in virtue of which what

is French is always measurably the most classic thing going; but of this

next period certainly Prudhon is the precursor, who, with all his

classic serenity, presages its passion for "storms, clouds, effusion,

and relief."

II

ROMANTIC PAINTING

I

When we come to Scott after Fielding, says Mr. Stevenson, "we become

suddenly conscious of the background." The remark contains an admirable

characterization of romanticism; as distinguished from classicism,

romanticism is consciousness of the background. With Gros, Géricault,

Paul Huet, Michel, Delacroix, French painting ceased to be abstract and

impersonal. Instead of continuing the classic detachment, it became

interested, curious, and catholic. It broadened its range immensely, and

created its effect by observing the relations of its objects to their

environment, of its figures to the landscape, of its subjects to their

suggestions even in other spheres of thought; Delacroix, Marilhat,

Decamps, Fromentin, in painting the aspect of Orientalism, suggested,

one may almost say, its sociology. For the abstractions of classicism,

its formula, its fastidious system of arriving at perfection by

exclusions and sacrifices, it substituted an enthusiasm for the concrete

and the actual; it revelled in natural phenomena. Gautier was never

more definitely the exponent of romanticism than in saying "I am a man

for whom the visible world exists." To lines and curves and masses and

their relations in composition, succeeds as material for inspiration and

reproduction the varied spectacle of the external world. With the early

romanticists it may be said that for the first time the external world

"swims into" the painter's "ken." But, above all, in them the element of

personality first appears in French painting with anything like general

acceptance and as the characteristic of a group, a school, rather than

as an isolated exception here and there, such as Claude or Chardin. The

"point of view" takes the place of conformity to a standard. The painter

expresses himself instead of endeavoring to realize an extraneous and

impersonal ideal. What he himself personally thinks, how he himself

personally feels, is what we read in his works.

It is true that, rightly understood, the romantic epoch is a period of

evolution, and orderly evolution at that, if we look below the surface,

rather than of systematic defiance and revolt. It is true that it recast

rather than repudiated its inheritance of tradition. Nevertheless there

has never been a time when the individual felt himself so free, when

every man of any original genius felt so keenly the exhilaration of

independence, when the "schools" of painting exercised less tyranny

and, indeed, counted for so little. If it be exact to speak of the

"romantic school" at all, it should be borne in mind that its adherents

were men of the most marked and diverse individualities ever grouped

under one standard. The impressionists, perhaps, apart, individuality is

often spoken of as the essential characteristic of the painters of the

present day. But beside the outburst of individuality at the beginning

of the romantic epoch, much of the painting of the present day seems

both monotonous and eccentric--the variation of its essential monotony,

that is to say, being somewhat labored and express in comparison with

the spontaneous multifariousness of the epoch of Delacroix and Decamps.

In the decade between 1820 and 1830, at all events, notwithstanding the

strength of the academic tradition, painting was free from the thraldom

of system, and the imagination of its practitioners was not challenged

and circumscribed by the criticism that is based upon science. Not only

in the painter's freedom in his choice of subject, but in his way of

treating it, in the way in which he "takes it," is the revolution--or,

as I should be inclined to say, rather, the evolution--shown. And as

what we mean by personality is, in general, made up far more of emotion

than of mind--there being room for infinitely more variety in feeling

than in mental processes among intelligent agents--it is natural to

find the French romantic painters giving, by contrast with their

predecessors, such free swing to personal feeling that we may almost sum

up the origin of the romantic movement in French painting in saying that

it was an ebullition of emancipated emotion. And, to go a step farther,

we may say that, as nothing is so essential to poetry as feeling, we

meet now for the first time with the poetic element as an inspiring

motive and controlling force.

The romantic painters were, however, by no means merely emotional. They

were mainly imaginative. And in painting, as in literature, the great

change wrought by romanticism consisted in stimulating the imagination

instead of merely satisfying the sense and the intellect. The main idea

ceased to be as obviously accentuated, and its natural surroundings were

given their natural place; there was less direct statement and more

suggestion; the artist's effort was expended rather upon perfecting the

\_ensemble\_, noting relations, taking in a larger circle; a suggested

complexity of moral elements took the place of the old simplicity, whose

multifariousness was almost wholly pictorial. Instead of a landscape as

a tapestry background to a Holy Family, and having no pertinence but an

artistic one, we have Corot's "Orpheus."

II

Géricault and Delacroix are the great names inscribed at the head of the

romantic roll. They will remain there. And the distinction is theirs not

as awarded by the historical estimate; it is personal. In the case of

Géricault perhaps one thinks a little of "the man and the moment"

theory. He was, it is true, the first romantic painter--at any rate the

first notable romantic painter. His struggles, his steadfastness, his

success--pathetically posthumous--have given him an honorable eminence.

His example of force and freedom exerted an influence that has been

traced not only in the work of Delacroix, his immediate inheritor, but

in that of the sculptor Rude, and even as far as that of Millet--to all

outward appearance so different in inspiration from that of his own

tumultuous and dramatic genius. And as of late years we look on the

stages of any evolution as less dependent on individuals than we used

to, doubtless just as Luther was confirmed and supported on his way to

the Council at Worms by the people calling on him from the house-tops

not to deny the truth, Géricault was sustained and stimulated in the

face of official obloquy by a more or less considerable æsthetic

movement of which he was really but the leader and exponent. But his

fame is not dependent upon his revolt against the Institute, his

influence upon his successors, or his incarnation of an æsthetic

movement. It rests on his individual accomplishment, his personal value,

the abiding interest of his pictures. "The Raft of the Medusa" will

remain an admirable and moving creation, a masterpiece of dramatic vigor

and vivid characterization, of wide and deep human interest and truly

panoramic grandeur, long after its contemporary interest and historic

importance have ceased to be thought of except by the æsthetic

antiquarian. "The Wounded Cuirassier" and the "Chasseur of the Guard"

are not documents of æsthetic history, but noble expressions of artistic

sapience and personal feeling.

What, I think, is the notable thing about both Géricault and Delacroix,

however, as exponents, as the initiators, of romanticism, is the way in

which they restrained the impetuous temperament they share within the

confines of a truly classic reserve. Closely considered, they are not

the revolutionists they seemed to the official classicism of their day.

Not only do they not base their true claims to enduring fame upon a

spirit of revolt against official and academic art--a spirit essentially

negative and nugatory, and never the inspiration of anything permanently

puissant and attractive--but, compared with their successors of the

present day, in whose works individual preference and predilection seem

to have a swing whose very freedom and irresponsible audacity extort

admiration--compared with the confident temerariousness of what is known

as \_modernité\_, their self-possession and sobriety seem their most

noteworthy characteristics. Compared with the "Bar at the

Folies-Bergère," either the "Raft of the Medusa" or the "Convulsionists

of Tangiers" is a classic production. And the difference is not at all

due to the forty years' accretion of Protestantism which Manet

represents as compared with the early romanticists. It is due to a

complete difference in attitude. Géricault imbued himself with the

inspiration of the Louvre. Delacroix is said always to have made a

sketch from the old masters or the antique a preliminary to his own

daily work. So far from flaunting tradition, they may be said to have,

in their own view, restored it; so far from posing as apostles of

innovation, they may almost be accused of "harking back"--of steeping

themselves in what to them seemed best and finest and most authoritative

in art, instead of giving a free rein to their own unregulated emotions

and conceptions.

Géricault died early and left but a meagre product. Delacroix is \_par

excellence\_ the representative of the romantic epoch. And both by the

mass and the quality of his work he forms a true connecting link

between the classic epoch and the modern--in somewhat the same way as

Prudhon does, though more explicitly and on the other side of the line

of division. He represents culture--he knows art as well as he loves

nature. He has a feeling for what is beautiful as well as a knowledge of

what is true. He is pre-eminently and primarily a colorist--he is, in

fact, the introducer of color as a distinct element in French painting

after the pale and bleak reaction from the Louis Quinze decorativeness.

His color, too, is not merely the prismatic coloration of what had

theretofore been mere chiaro-oscuro; it is original and personal to such

a degree that it has never been successfully imitated since his day.

Withal, it is apparently simplicity itself. Its hues are apparently the

primary ones, in the main. It depends upon no subtleties and refinements

of tints for its effectiveness. It is significant that the absorbed and

affected Rossetti did not like it; it is too frank and clear and open,

and shows too little evidence of the morbid brooding and hysterical

forcing of an arbitrary and esoteric note dear to the English

pre-Raphaelites. It attests a delight in color, not a fondness for

certain colors, hues, tints--a difference perfectly appreciable to

either an unsophisticated or an educated sense. It has a solidity and

strength of range and vibration combined with a subtle sensitiveness,

and, as a result of the fusion of the two, a certain splendor that

recalls Saracenic decoration. And with this mastery of color is united a

combined firmness and expressiveness of design that makes Delacroix

unique by emphasizing his truly classic subordination of informing

enthusiasm to a severe and clearly perceived ideal--an ideal in a sense

exterior to his purely personal expression. In a word, his chief

characteristic--and it is a supremely significant trait in the

representative painter of romanticism--is a poetic imagination tempered

and trained by culture and refinement. When his audacities and

enthusiasms are thought of, the directions in his will for his tomb

should be remembered too: "Il n'y sera placé ni emblème, ni buste, ni

statue; mon tombeau sera copié très exactement sur l'antique, ou

Vignoles ou Palladio, avec des saillies très prononcées, contrairement à

tout ce qui se fait aujourd'hui en architecture." "Let there be neither

emblem, bust, nor statue on my tomb, which shall be copied very

scrupulously after the antique, either Vignola or Palladio, with

prominent projections, contrary to everything done to-day in

architecture." In a sense all Delacroix is in these words.

III

Delacroix's color deepens into an almost musical intensity occasionally

in Decamps, whose oriental landscapes and figures, far less important

intellectually, far less \_magistrales\_ in conception, have at times, one

may say perhaps without being too fanciful, a truly symphonic quality

that renders them unique. "The Suicide" is like a chord on a violin. But

it is when we come to speak of the "Fontainebleau Group," in especial, I

think, that the æsthetic susceptibility characteristic of the latter

half of the nineteenth century feels, to borrow M. Taine's introduction

to his lectures on "The Ideal in Art," that the subject is one only to

be treated in poetry.

Of the noblest of all so-called "schools," Millet is perhaps the most

popular member. His popularity is in great part, certainly, due to his

literary side, to the sentiment which pervades, which drenches, one may

say, all his later work--his work after he had, on overhearing himself

characterized as a painter of naked women, betaken himself to his true

subject, the French peasant. A literary, and a very powerful literary

side, Millet undoubtedly has; and instead of being a weakness in him it

is a power. His sentimental appeal is far from being surplusage, but, as

is not I think popularly appreciated, it is subordinate, and the fact

of its subordination gives it what potency it has. It is idle to deny

this potency, for his portrayal of the French peasant in his varied

aspects has probably been as efficient a characterization as that of

George Sand herself. But, if a moral instead of an æsthetic effect had

been Millet's chief intention, we may be sure that it would have been

made far less incisively than it has been. Compare, for example, his

peasant pictures with those of the almost purely literary painter Jules

Breton, who has evidently chosen his field for its sentimental rather

than its pictorial value, and whose work is, perhaps accordingly, by

contrast with Millet's, noticeably external and superficial even on the

literary side. When Millet ceased to deal in the Correggio manner with

Correggiesque subjects, and devoted himself to the material that was

really native to him, to his own peasant genius--whatever he may have

thought about it himself, he did so because he could treat this material

\_pictorially\_ with more freedom and less artificiality, with more zest

and enthusiasm, with a deeper sympathy and a more intimate knowledge of

its artistic characteristics, its pictorial potentialities. He is, I

think, as a painter, a shade too much preoccupied with this material, he

is a little too philosophical in regard to it, his pathetic struggle for

existence exaggerated his sentimental affiliations with it somewhat, he

made it too exclusively his subject, perhaps. We gain, it may be, at his

expense. With his artistic gifts he might have been more fortunate, had

his range been broader. But in the main it is his pictorial handling of

this material, with which he was in such acute sympathy, that

distinguishes his work, and that will preserve its fame long after its

humanitarian and sentimental appeal has ceased to be as potent as it now

is--at the same time that it has itself enforced this appeal in the

subordinating manner I have suggested. When he was asked his intention,

in his picture of a maimed calf borne away on a litter by two men, he

said it was simply to indicate the sense of weight in the muscular

movement and attitude of the bearers' arms.

His great distinction, in fine, is artistic. His early painting of

conventional subjects is not without significance in its witness to the

quality of his talent. Another may paint French peasants all his life

and never make them permanently interesting, because he has not Millet's

admirable instinct and equipment as a painter. He is a superb colorist,

at times--always an enthusiastic one; there is something almost

unregulated in his delight in color, in his fondness for glowing and

resplendent tone. No one gets farther away from the academic grayness,

the colorless chiaro-oscuro of the conventional painters. He runs his

key up and loads his canvas, occasionally, in what one may call not so

much barbaric as uncultivated and elementary fashion. He cares so much

for color that sometimes, when his effect is intended to be purely

atmospheric, as in the "Angélus," he misses its justness and fitness,

and so, in insisting on color, obtains from the color point of view

itself an infelicitous--a colored--result. Occasionally he bathes a

scene in yellow mist that obscures all accentuations and play of values.

But always his feeling for color betrays him a painter rather than a

moralist. And in composition he is, I should say, even more

distinguished. His composition is almost always distinctly elegant. Even

in so simple a scheme as that of "The Sower," the lines are as fine as

those of a Raphael. And the way in which balance is preserved, masses

are distributed, and an organic play of parts related to each other and

each to the sum of them is secured, is in all of his large works so

salient an element of their admirable excellence, that, to those who

appreciate it, the dependence of his popularity upon the sentimental

suggestion of the raw material with which he dealt seems almost

grotesque. In his line and mass and the relations of these in

composition, there is a severity, a restraint, a conformity to

tradition, however personally felt and individually modified, that

evince a strong classic strain in this most unacademic of painters.

Millet was certainly an original genius, if there ever was one. In spite

of, and in open hostility to, the popular and conventional painting of

his day, he followed his own bent and went his own way. Better, perhaps,

than any other painter, he represents absolute emancipation from the

prescribed, from routine and formulary. But it would be a signal mistake

to fail to see, in the most characteristic works of this most personal

representative of romanticism, that subordination of the individual whim

and isolated point of view to what is accepted, proven, and universal,

which is essentially what we mean by the classic attitude. One may

almost go so far as to say, considering its reserve, its restraint and

poise, its sobriety and measure, its quiet and composure, its

subordination of individual feeling to a high sense of artistic decorum,

that, romantic as it is, unacademic as it is, its most incontestable

claim to permanence is the truly classic spirit which, however modified,

inspires and infiltrates it. Beside some of the later manifestations of

individual genius in French painting, it is almost academic.

In Corot, anyone, I suppose, can see this note, and it would be

surplusage to insist upon it. He is the ideal classic-romantic painter,

both in temperament and in practice. Millet's subject, not, I think, his

treatment--possibly his wider range--makes him seem more deeply serious

than Corot, but he is not essentially as nearly unique. He is unrivalled

in his way, but Corot is unparalleled. Corot inherits the tradition of

Claude; his motive, like Claude's, is always an effect, and, like

Claude's, his means are light and air. But his effect is a shade more

impalpable, and his means are at once simpler and more subtle. He gets

farther away from the phenomena which are the elements of his

\_ensemble\_, farther than Claude, farther than anyone. His touch is as

light as the zephyr that stirs the diaphanous drapery of his trees.

Beside it Claude's has a suspicion, at least, of unctuousness. It has a

pure, crisp, vibrant accent, quite without analogue in the technic of

landscape painting. Taking technic in its widest sense, one may speak of

Corot's shortcomings--not, I think, of his failures. It would be

difficult to mention a modern painter more uniformly successful in

attaining his aim, in expressing what he wishes to express, in conveying

his impression, communicating his sensations.

That a painter of his power, a man of the very first rank, should have

been content--even placidly content--to exercise it within a range by no

means narrow, but plainly circumscribed, is certainly witness

of limitation. "Delacroix is an eagle, I am only a skylark," he remarked

once, with his characteristic cheeriness. His range is not, it is true,

as circumscribed as is generally supposed outside of France. Outside of

France his figure-painting, for example, is almost unknown. We see

chiefly variations of his green and gray arbored pastoral--now idyllic,

now heroic, now full of freshness, the skylark quality, now of grave and

deep harmonies and wild, sweet notes of transitory suggestion. Of his

figures we only know those shifting shapes that blend in such classic

and charming manner with the glades and groves of his landscapes. Of his

"Hagar in the Wilderness," his "St. Jerome," his "Flight into Egypt,"

his "Democritus," his "Baptism of Christ," with its nine life-size

figures, who, outside of France, has even heard? How many foreigners

know that he painted what are called architectural subjects

delightfully, and even \_genre\_ with zest?

But compared with his landscape, in which he is unique, it is plain that

he excels nowhere else. The splendid display of his works in the

Centenaire Exposition of the great World's Fair of 1889, was a

revelation of his range of interest rather than of his range of power.

It was impossible not to perceive that, surprising as were his essays in

other fields to those who only knew him as a landscape painter, he was

essentially and integrally a painter of landscape, though a painter of

landscape who had taken his subject in a way and treated it in a manner

so personal as to be really unparalleled. Outside of landscape his

interest was clearly not real. In his other works one notes a certain

\_débonnaire\_ irresponsibility. He pursued nothing seriously but

out-of-doors, its vaporous atmosphere, its crisp twigs and graceful

branches, its misty distances and piquant accents, what Thoreau calls

its inaudible panting. His true theme, lightly as he took it, absorbed

him; and no one of any sensitiveness can ever regret it. His powers,

following the indication of his true temperament, his most genuine

inspiration, are concentrated upon the very finest thing imaginable in

landscape painting; as, indeed, to produce as they have done the finest

landscape in the history of art, they must have been.

There are, however, two things worth noting in Corot's landscape, beyond

the mere fact that, better even than Rousseau, he expresses the essence

of landscape, dwells habitually among its inspirations, and is its

master rather than its servant. One is the way in which he poetizes, so

to speak, the simplest stretches of sward and clumps of trees, and long

clear vistas across still ponds, with distances whose accents are

pricked out with white houses and yellow cows and placid fishers and

ferrymen in red caps, seen in glimpses through curtains of sparse,

feathery leafage--or peoples woodland openings with nymphs and fawns,

silhouetted against the sunset glow, or dancing in the cool gray of

dusk. A man of no reading, having only the elements of an education in

the general sense of the term, his instinctive sense for what is refined

was so delicate that we may say of his landscapes that, had the Greeks

left any they would have been like Corot's. And this classic and

cultivated effect he secured not at all, or only very incidentally,

through the force of association, by dotting his hillsides and vaporous

distances with bits of classic architecture, or by summing up his

feeling for the Dawn in a graceful figure of Orpheus greeting with

extended gesture the growing daylight, but by a subtle interpenetration

of sensuousness and severity resulting in precisely the sentiment fitly

characterized by the epithet classic. The other trait peculiar to

Corot's representation of nature and expression of himself is his color.

No painter ever exhibited, I think, quite such a sense of refinement in

so narrow a gamut. Green and gray, of course, predominate and set the

key, but he has an interestingly varied palette on the hither side of

splendor whose subtleties are capable of giving exquisite pleasure.

Never did anyone use tints with such positive force. Tints with Corot

have the vigor and vibration of positive colors--his lilacs, violets,

straw-colored hues, his almost Quakerish coquetry with drabs and slates

and pure clear browns, the freshness and bloom he imparted to his tones,

the sweet and shrinking wild flowers with which as a spray he sprinkled

his humid dells and brook margins. But Corot's true distinction--what

gives him his unique position at the very head of landscape art, is

neither his color, delicate and interesting as his color is, nor his

classic serenity harmonizing with, instead of depending upon, the chance

associations of architecture and mythology with which now and then he

decorates his landscapes; it is the blithe, the airy, the truly

spiritual way in which he gets farther away than anyone from both the

actual pigment that is his instrument, and from the phenomena that are

the objects of his expression--his ethereality, in a word. He has

communicated his sentiment almost without material, one may say, so

ethereally independent of their actual analogues is the interest of his

trees and sky and stretch of sward. This sentiment, thus mysteriously

triumphant over color or form, or other sensuous charm, which

nevertheless are only subtly subordinated, and by no manner of means

treated lightly or inadequately, is as exalted as any that has in our

day been expressed in any manner. Indeed, where, outside of the very

highest poetry of the century, can one get the same sense of elation, of

aspiring delight, of joy unmixed with regret--since "the splendor of

truth" which Plato defined beauty to be, is more animating and consoling

than the "weary weight of all this unintelligible world," is depressing

to a spirit of lofty seriousness and sanity?

\* \* \* \* \*

Dupré and Diaz are the decorative painters of the Fontainebleau group.

They are, of modern painters, perhaps the nearest in spirit to the old

masters, pictorially speaking. They are rarely in the grand style,

though sometimes Dupré is restrained enough to emulate if not to achieve

its sobriety. But they have the \_bel air\_, and belong to the aristocracy

of the painting world. Diaz, especially, has almost invariably the

patrician touch. It lacks the exquisiteness of Monticelli's, in which

there is that curiously elevated detachment from the material and the

real that the Italians--and the Provençal painter's inspiration and

method, as well as his name and lineage, suggest an Italian rather than

a French association--exhibit far oftener than the French. But Diaz has

a larger sweep, a saner method. He is never eccentric, and he has a

dignity that is Iberian, though he is French rather than Spanish on his

æsthetic side, and at times is as conservative as Rousseau--without,

however, reaching Rousseau's lofty simplicity except in an occasional

happy stroke. Both he and Dupré are primarily colorists. Dupré sees

nature through a prism. Diaz's groups of dames and gallants have a

jewel-like aspect; they leave the same impression as a tangle of

ribbons, a bunch of exotic flowers, a heap of gems flung together with

the felicity of haphazard. In general, and when they are in most

completely characteristic mood, it is not the sentiment of nature that

one gets from the work of either painter. It is not even \_their\_

sentiment of nature--the emotion aroused in their susceptibilities by

natural phenomena. What one gets is their personal feeling for color and

design--their decorative quality, in a word.

The decorative painter is he to whom what is called "subject," even in

its least restricted sense and with its least substantial suggestions,

is comparatively indifferent. Nature supplies him with objects; she is

not in any intimate degree his subject. She is the medium through which,

rather than the material of which, he creates his effects. It is her

potentialities of color and design that he seeks, or at any rate, of all

her infinitely numerous traits, it is her hues and arabesques that

strike him most forcibly. He is incurious as to her secrets and calls

upon her aid to interpret his own, but he is so independent of her, if

he be a decorative painter of the first rank--a Diaz or a Dupré--that

his rendering of her, his picture, would have an agreeable effect, owing

to its design or color or both, if it were turned upside down.

Decorative painting in this sense may easily be carried so far as to

seem incongruous and inept, in spite of its superficial attractiveness.

The peril that threatens it is whim and freak. Some of Monticelli's,

some of Matthew Maris's pictures, illustrate the exaggeration of the

decorative impulse. After all, a painter must get his effect, whatever

it be and however it may shun the literal and the exact, by rendering

things with pigments. And some of the decorative painters only escape

things by obtruding pigments, just as the \_trompe-l'oeil\_ or optical

illusion painters get away from pigments by obtruding things. It is the

distinction of Diaz and Dupré that they avoid this danger in most

triumphant fashion. On the contrary, they help one to see the decorative

element in nature, in "things," to a degree hardly attained elsewhere

since the days of the great Venetians. Their predilection for the

decorative element is held in leash by the classic tradition, with its

reserve, its measure, its inculcation of sobriety and its sense of

security. Dupré paints Seine sunsets and the edge of the forest at

Fontainebleau, its "long mysterious reaches fed with moonlight," in a

way that conveys the golden glow, the silvery gleam, the suave outline

of spreading leafage, and the massive density of mysterious boscage with

the force of an almost abstract acuteness. Does nature look like this?

Who knows? But in this semblance, surely, she appeared to Dupré's

imagination. And doubtless Diaz saw the mother-of-pearl tints in the

complexion of his models, and is not to be accused of artificiality,

but to be credited with a true sincerity of selection in juxtaposing his

soft corals and carnations and gleaming topaz, amethyst, and sapphire

hues. The most exacting literalist can hardly accuse them of solecism in

their rendering of nature, true as it is that their decorative sense is

so strong as to lead them to impose on nature their own sentiment

instead of yielding themselves to absorption in \_hers\_, and thus, in

harmonious and sympathetic concert with her, like Claude and Corot,

Rousseau and Daubigny, interpreting her subtle and supreme significance.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rousseau carried the fundamental principle of the school farther than

the others--with him interest, delight in, enthusiasm for nature became

absorption in her. Whereas other men have loved nature, it has been

acutely remarked, Rousseau was in love with her. It was felicitously of

him, rather than of Dupré or Corot, that the naif peasant inquired, "Why

do you paint the tree; the tree is there, is it not?" And never did

nature more royally reward allegiance to her than in the sustenance and

inspiration she furnished for Rousseau's genius. You feel the point of

view in his picture, but it is apparently that of nature herself as well

as his own. It is not the less personal for this. On the contrary, it

is extremely personal, and few pictures are as individual, as

characteristic. Occasionally Diaz approaches him, as I have said, but

only in the very happiest and exceptional moments, when the dignity of

nature as well as her charm seems specially to impress and impose itself

upon the less serious painter. But Rousseau's selection seems

instinctive and not sought out. He knows the secret of nature's

pictorial element. He is at one with her, adopts her suggestions so

cordially and works them out with such intimate sympathy and

harmoniousness, that the two forces seem reciprocally to reinforce each

other, and the result gains many fold in power from their subtle

co-operation. His landscapes have in this way a Wordsworthian

directness, simplicity, and severity. They are not troubled and dramatic

like Turner's. They are not decorative like Dupré's, they have not the

solemn sentiment of Daubigny's, or the airy aspiration and fairy-like

blitheness of Corot's. But there is in them "all breathing human

passion;" and at times, as in "Le Givre," they rise to majesty and real

grandeur because they are impregnated with the sentiment, as well as are

records of the phenomena, of nature, and one may say of Rousseau,

paraphrasing Mr. Arnold's remark about Wordsworth, that nature seems

herself to take the brush out of his hand and to paint for him "with her

own bare, sheer, penetrating power." Rousseau, however, is French, and

in virtue of his nativity exhibits always what Wordsworth's treatment of

nature exhibits only occasionally, namely, the Gallic gift of style. It

is rarely as felicitous as in Corot, in every detail of whose every

work, one may almost say, its informing, co-ordinating, elevating

influence is distinctly to be perceived; but it is always present as a

factor, as a force dignifying and relieving from all touch, all taint of

the commonness that is so often inseparably associated with art whose

absorption in nature is listlessly unthinking instead of enthusiastic

and alert. In Rousseau, too, in a word, we have the classic strain, as

at least a psychological element, and note as one source of his power

his reserve and restraint, his perfect self-possession.

In Daubigny a similar attitude toward nature is obvious, but with a

sensible difference. Affection for, rather than absorption in her, is

his inspiration. Daubigny stands somewhat apart from the Fontainebleau

group, with whom nevertheless he is popularly and properly associated,

for though he painted Normandy mainly, he was spiritually of the

Barbizon kindred. He stands, however, somewhat apart from French

painting in general, I think. There is less style, more sentiment, more

poetry in his landscapes than in those of his countrymen who are to be

compared with him. Beyond what is admirable in them there is something

attaching as well. He drew and engraved a good deal, as well as painted.

He did not concentrate his powers enough, perhaps, to make as signal and

definite a mark as otherwise he might have done. He is a shade

desultory, and too spontaneous to be systematic. One must be systematic

to reach the highest point, even in the least material spheres. But

never have the grave and solemn aspects of landscape found a sweeter and

serener spirit to interpret them. In some of his pictures there is a

truly religious feeling. His frankness recalls Constable's, but it is

more distinguished in being more spiritual. He has not Diaz's elegance,

nor Corot's witchery, nor Rousseau's power, but nature is more

mysteriously, more mystically significant to him, and sets a deeper

chord vibrating within him. He is a sensitive instrument on which she

plays, rather than a magician who wins her secrets, or an observer whose

generalizing imagination she sets in motion. The design of some of his

important works, notably that of his last \_Salon\_ picture, is very

distinguished, and in one of his large canvases representing a road like

that from Barbizon through the level plain to Chailly, there is the

spirit and sentiment of all the summer evenings that ever were. But he

has distinctly less power than the strict Fontainebleau group. He has,

in force, less affinity with them than Troyon has, whose force is often

magnificent, and whose landscape is so sweet, often, and often so strong

as well, that one wonders a little at his fondness for cattle--in spite

of the way in which he justifies it by being the first of cattle

painters. And neither Daubigny nor Troyon, nor, indeed, Rousseau

himself, often reaches in dramatic grandeur the lofty landscape of

Michel, who, with Paul Huet (the latter in a more strictly historical

sense) were so truly the forerunners and initiators of the romantic

landscape movement, both in sentiment and chronology, in spite of their

Dutch tradition, as to make the common ascription of its debt to

Constable, whose aid was so cordially welcomed in the famous Salon of

1824, a little strained.

IV

But quite aside from the group of poetic painters which stamped its

impress so deeply upon the romantic movement at the outset, that to this

day it is Delacroix and Millet, Decamps and Corot whom we think of when

we think of the movement itself, the classic tradition was preserved all

through the period of greatest stress and least conformity by painters

of great distinction, who, working under the romantic inspiration and

more or less according to what may be called romantic methods,

nevertheless possessed the classic temperament in so eminent a degree

that to us their work seems hardly less academic than that of the

Revolution and the Empire. Not only Ingres, but Delaroche and Ary

Scheffer, painted beside Géricault and Delacroix. Ary Scheffer was an

eloquent partisan of romanticism, yet his "Dante and Beatrice" and his

"Temptation of Christ" are admirable only from the academic point of

view. Delaroche's "Hemicycle" and his many historical tableaux are

surely in the classic vein, however free they may seem in subject and

treatment by contrast with the works of David and Ingres. They leave us

equally cold, at all events, and in the same way--for the same reason.

They betray the painter's preoccupation with art rather than with

nature. They do, in truth, differ widely from the works which they

succeeded, but the difference is not temperamental. They suggest the

French phrase, \_plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose\_. Gérôme, for

example, feels the exhilaration of the free air of romanticism fanning

his enthusiasm. He does not confine himself, as, born a decade or two

earlier, certainly he would have done, to classic subject. He follows

Decamps and Marilhat to the Orient, which he paints with the utmost

freedom, so far as the choice of theme is concerned--descending even to

the \_danse du ventre\_ of a Turkish café. He paints historical pictures

with a realism unknown before his day. He is almost equally famous in

the higher class of \_genre\_ subjects. But throughout everything he does

it is easy to perceive the academic point of view, the classic

temperament. David assuredly would never have chosen one of Gérôme's

themes; but had he chosen it, he would have treated it in much the same

way. Allowance made for the difference in time, in general feeling of

the æsthetic environment, the change in ideas as to what was fit subject

for representation and fitting manner of treating the same subject, it

is hardly an exaggeration to say that Ingres would have sincerely

applauded Gérôme's "Cleopatra" issuing from the carpet roll before

Cæsar. And if he failed to perceive the noble dramatic power in such a

work as the "Ave, Cæsar, morituri te salutant," his failure would

nowadays, at least among intelligent amateurs, be ascribed to an

intolerance which it is one of the chief merits of the romantic movement

to have adjudged absurd.

It is a source of really æsthetic satisfaction to see everything that is

attempted as well done as it is in the works of such painters as

Bouguereau and Cabanel. Of course the feeling that denies them large

importance is a legitimate one. The very excellence of their technic,

its perfect adaptedness to the motive it expresses, is, considering the

insignificance of the motive, subject for criticism; inevitably it

partakes of the futility of its subject-matter. Of course the personal

value of the man, the mind, behind any plastic expression is, in a

sense, the measure of the expression itself. If it be a mind interested

in "pouncet-box" covers, in the pictorial setting forth of themes whose

illustration most intimately appeals to the less cultivated and more

rudimentary appreciation of fine art--as indisputably the Madonnas and

Charities and Oresteses and Bacchus Triumphs of M. Bouguereau do--one

may very well dispense himself from the duty of admiring its

productions. Life is short, and more important things, things of more

significant import, demand attention. The grounds on which the works of

Bouguereau and Cabanel are admired are certainly insufficient. But they

are experts in their sphere. What they do could hardly be better done.

If they appeal to a \_bourgeois\_, a philistine ideal of beauty, of

interest, they do it with a perfection that is pleasing in itself. No

one else does it half so well. To minds to which they appeal at all,

they appeal with the force of finality; for these they create as well as

illustrate the type of what is admirable and lovely. It is as easy to

account for their popularity as it is to perceive its transitory

quality. But not only is it a mark of limitation to refuse all interest

to such a work as, for example, M. Cabanel's "Birth of Venus," in the

painting of which a vast deal of technical expertness is enjoyably

evident, and which in every respect of motive and execution is far above

similar things done elsewhere than in France; it is a still greater

error to confound such painters as M. Cabanel and M. Bouguereau with

other painters whose classic temperament has been subjected to the

universal romantic influence equally with theirs, but whose production

is as different from theirs as is that of the thorough and pure

romanticists, the truly poetic painters.

The instinct of simplification is an intelligent and sound one. Its

satisfaction is a necessary preliminary to efficient action of any kind,

and indeed the basis of all fruitful philosophy. But in criticism this

instinct can only be satisfied intelligently and soundly by a

consideration of everything appealing to consideration, and not at all

by heated and wilful, or superior and supercilious, exclusions.

Catholicity of appreciation is the secret of critical felicity. To

follow the line of least resistance, not to take into account those

elements of a problem, those characteristics of a subject, to which,

superficially and at first thought, one is insensitive, is to dispense

one's self from a great deal of particularly disagreeable industry, but

the result is only transitorily agreeable to the sincere intelligence.

It is in criticism, I think, though no doubt in criticism alone,

preferable to lose one's self in a maze of perplexity--distressing as

this is to the critic who appreciates the indispensability of

clairvoyance in criticism--rather than to reach swiftly and simply a

conclusion which candor would have foreseen as the inevitable and

unjudicial result of following one's own likes and whims, and one's

contentment with which must be alloyed with a haunting sense of

insecurity. In criticism it is perhaps better to keep balancing

counter-considerations than to determine brutally by excluding a whole

set of them because of the difficulty of assigning them their true

weight. In this way, at least, one preserves the attitude of poise, and

poise is perhaps the one essential element of criticism. In a word, that

catholicity of sensitiveness which may be called mere impressionism,

behind which there is no body of doctrine at all, is more truly critical

than intolerant depreciation or unreflecting enthusiasm. "The main thing

to do," says Mr. Arnold, in a significant passage, "is to get one's self

out of the way and let humanity judge."

It is temptingly simple to deny all importance to painters who are not

poetic painters. And the temptation is especially seductive when the

prosaic painters are paralleled by such a distinguished succession of

their truly poetic brethren as are the painters of the romantic epoch

who are possessed of the classic temperament. But real criticism

immediately suggests that prose has its place in painting as in

literature. In literature we do not insist even that the poets be

poetic. Poetic is not the epithet that would be applied, for instance,

to French classic verse or the English verse of the eighteenth century,

compared with the poetry, French or English, which we mean when we speak

of poetry. Yet no one would think of denying the value of Dryden or even

of Boileau. No one would even insist that, distinctly prosaic as are the

qualities of Boileau--and I should say his was a crucial instance--he

would have done better to abjure verse. And painting, in a wide sense,

is just as legitimately the expression of ideas in form and color as

literature is the expression of ideas in words. It is perfectly plain

that Meissonier was not especially enamoured of beauty, as Corot, as

Troyon, as Decamps was. But nothing could be less critical than to deny

Meissouier's importance and the legitimate interest he has for every

educated and intelligent person, in spite of his literalness and his

insensitiveness to the element of beauty, and indeed to any truly

pictorial significance whatever in the wide range of subjects that he

essayed, with, in an honorable sense, such distinguished success.

Especially in America, I think, where of recent years we have shown an

Athenian sensitiveness to new impressions, the direct descendants of the

classic period of French painting have suffered from the popularity of

the Fontainebleau group. Their legitimate attachment to art, instead of

the Fontainebleau absorption in nature, has given them a false

reputation of artificiality. But the prose element in art has its

justification as well as the poetic, and it is witness of a narrow

culture to fail in appreciation of its admirable accomplishment. The

academic wing of the French romantic painting is marked precisely by a

breadth of culture that is itself a source of agreeable and elevated

interest. The neo-Grec painters are thoroughly educated. They lack the

picturesque and unexpected note of their poetic brethren--they lack the

moving and interpreting, the elevating and exquisite touch of these;

nay, they lack the penetrating distinction that radiates even from

rusticity itself when it is inspired and transfigured as it appears in

such works as those of Millet and Rousseau. But their distinction is not

less real for being the distinction of cultivation rather than

altogether native and absolute. It is perhaps even more marked, more

pervasive, more directly associated with the painter's aim and effect.

One feels that they are familiar with the philosophy of art, its history

and practice, that they are articulate and eclectic, that for being less

personal and powerful their horizon is less limited, their purely

intellectual range, at all events, and in many cases their æsthetic

interest, wider. They have more the cultivated man's bent for

experimentation, for variety. They care more scrupulously for

perfection, for form. With a far inferior sense of reality and far less

felicity in dealing with it, their sapient skill in dealing with the

abstractions of art is more salient. To be blind to their successful

handling of line and mass and movement, is to neglect a source of

refined pleasure. To lament their lack of poetry is to miss their

admirable rhetoric; to regret their imperfect feeling for decorativeness

is to miss their delightful decorum.

V

As one has, however, so often occasion to note in France--where in every

field of intellectual effort the influence of schools and groups and

movements is so great that almost every individuality, no matter how

strenuous, falls naturally and intimately into association with some one

of them--there is every now and then an exception that escapes these

categories and stands quite by itself. In modern painting such

exceptions, and widely different from each other as the poles, are

Couture and Puvis de Chavannes. Better than in either the true

romanticists with the classic strain, or the academic romanticists with

the classic temperament, the blending of the classic and romantic

inspirations is illustrated in Couture. The two are in him, indeed,

actually fused. In Puvis de Chavannes they appear in a wholly novel

combination; his classicism is absolutely unacademic, his romanticism

unreal beyond the verge of mysticism, and so preoccupied with visions

that he may almost be called a man for whom the actual world does \_not\_

exist--in the converse of Gautier's phrase. His distinction is wholly

personal. He lives evidently on an exceedingly high plane--dwells

habitually in the delectable uplands of the intellect. The fact that his

work is almost wholly decorative is not at all accidental. His talent,

his genius if one chooses, requires large spaces, vast dimensions. There

has been a great deal of rather profitless discussion as to whether he

expressly imitates the \_primitifs\_ or reproduces them sympathetically.

But really he does neither; he deals with their subjects occasionally,

but always in a completely modern, as well as a thoroughly personal,

way. His color is as original as his general treatment and composition.

He had no schooling, in the École des Beaux Arts sense. A brief period

in Henri Scheffer's studio, three months under Couture, after he had

begun life in an altogether different field of effort, yielded him all

the explicit instruction he ever had. His real study was done in Italy,

in the presence of the old masters of Florence. With this equipment he

revolutionized modern decoration, established, at any rate, a new

convention for it. His convention is a little definite, a little bald.

One may discuss it apart from his own handling of it, even. It is a

shade too express, too confident, too little careless both of tradition

and of the typical qualities that secure permanence. In other hands one

can easily imagine how insipid it might become. It has too little body,

its scheme is too timorous, too vaporous to be handled by another. Puvis

de Chavannes will probably have few successful imitators. But one must

immediately add that if he does not found a school, his own work is,

perhaps for that reason, at all events in spite of it, among the most

important of the day. Quite unperturbed by current discussions, which

are certainly of the noisiest by which the current of artistic

development was ever deflected, he has kept on his way, and has finally

won all suffrages for an æsthetic expression that is really antagonistic

to the general æsthetic spirit of his time.

Puvis de Chavannes is, perhaps, the most interesting figure in French

painting to-day. Couture is little more than a name. It is curious to

consider why. Twenty years ago he was still an important figure. He had

been an unusually successful teacher. Many American painters of

distinction, especially, were at one time his pupils--Hunt, La Farge,

George Butler. He theorized as much, as well--perhaps even better

than--he painted. His "Entretiens d'atelier" are as good in their way as

his "Baptism of the Prince Imperial." He had a very distinguished

talent, but he was too distinctly clever--clever to the point of

sophistication. In this respect he was distinctly a man of the

nineteenth century. His great work, "Romains de la Décadence," created

as fine an effect at the Centenary Exhibition of the Paris World's Fair

in 1889 as it does in the Louvre, whence it was then transferred, but it

was distinctly a decorative effect--the effect of a fine panel in the

general mass of color and design; it made a fine centre. It remains his

greatest performance, the performance upon which chiefly his fame will

depend, though as painting it lacks the quality and breadth of "Le

Fauconnier," perhaps the most interesting of his works to painters

themselves, and of the "Day-Dreams" of the New York Metropolitan Museum

of Art. Its permanent interest perhaps will be the historical one, due

to the definiteness with which it assigns Couture his position in the

evolution of French painting. It shows, as everything of Couture shows,

the absence of any pictorial feeling so profound and personal as to make

an impression strong enough to endure indefinitely. And it has not, on

the other hand, the interest of reality--that faithful and enthusiastic

rendering of the external world which gives importance to and fixes the

character of the French painting of the present day.

Had Regnault lived, he would have more adequately--or should I say more

plausibly?--marked the transition from romanticism to realism.

Temperamentally he was clearly a thorough romanticist--far more so, for

instance, than his friend Fortuny, whose intellectual reserve is always

conspicuous. He essayed the most vehement kind of subjects, even in the

classical field, where he treated them with truly romantic truculence.

He was himself always, moreover, and ideally cared as little for nature

as a fairy-story teller. In this sense he was more romantic than the

romanticists. His "Automedon," his portrait of General Prim, even his

"Salome," are wilful in a degree that is either superb or superficial,

as one looks at them; but at any rate they are romantic \_à outrance\_. At

the same time it was unmistakably the aspect of things rather than their

significance, rather than his view of them, that appealed to him. He was

farther away from the classic inspiration than any other romanticist of

his fellows; and at the same time he cared for the external world more

on its own account and less for its suggestions, than any painter of

equal force before Courbet and Bastien-Lepage. The very fact that he was

not, intellectually speaking, wholly \_dans son assiette\_, as the French

say, shows that he was a genius of a transitional moment. One's final

thought of him is that he died young, and one thinks so not so much

because of the dramatic tragedy of his taking off by possibly the last

Prussian bullet fired in the war of 1870-71, as because of the

essentially experimental character of his painting. Undoubtedly he would

have done great things. And undoubtedly they would have been different

from those that he did; probably in the direction--already indicated in

his most dignified performance--of giving more consistency, more vivid

definiteness, more reality, even, to his already striking conceptions.

III

REALISTIC PAINTING

I

To an intelligence fully and acutely alive, its own time must, I think,

be more interesting than any other. The sentimental, the scholastic, the

speculative temperament may look before or after with longing or regret;

but that sanity of mind which is practical and productive must find its

most agreeable sensations in the data to which it is intimately and

inexorably related. The light upon Greek literature and art for which we

study Greek history, the light upon Roman history for which we study

Latin literature and art, are admirable to us in very exact proportion

as we study them for our ends. To every man and every nation that really

breathes, true vitality of soul depends upon saying to one's self, with

an emotion of equivalent intensity to the emotion of patriotism

celebrated in Scott's familiar lines, This is my own, my native era and

environment. Culture is impossible apart from cosmopolitanism, but

self-respect is more indispensable even than culture. French art alone

at the present time possesses absolute self-respect. It possesses this

quality in an eminent, in even an excessive degree; but it possesses it,

and in virtue of it is endued with a preservative quality that saves it

from the emptiness of imitation and the enervation of dilettantism. It

has, in consequence, escaped that recrudescence of the primitive and

inchoate known in England and among ourselves as pre-Raphaelitism. It

has escaped also that almost abject worship of classic models which

Winckelmann and Canova made universal in Germany and Italy--not to speak

of its echoes elsewhere. It has always stood on its own feet, and,

however lacking in the higher qualities of imaginative initiative, on

the one hand, and however addicted to the academic and the traditional

on the other, has always both respected its æsthetic heritage and

contributed something of its own thereto.

Why should not one feel the same quick interest, the same instinctive

pride in his time as in his country? Is not sympathy with what is

modern, instant, actual, and apposite a fair parallel of patriotism?

Neglect of other times in the "heir of all the ages" is analogous to

chauvinism, and indicative of as ill-judged an attitude as that of

provincial blindness to other contemporary points of view and systems of

philosophy than one's own. Culture is equally hostile to both, and in

art culture is as important a factor as it is in less special fields of

activity and endeavor. But in art, as elsewhere, culture is a means to

an actual, present end, and the pre-Raphaelite sentiment that dictates

mere reproduction of what was once a genuine expression is as sterile as

servile imitation of exotic modes of thought, dress, and demeanor is

universally felt to be. The past--the antique, the renaissance, the

classic, and romantic ideals are to be used, not adopted; in the spirit

of Goethe, at once the most original of modern men and the most

saturated with culture, exhibited in his famous saying: "Nothing do I

call my own which having inherited I have not reconquered for myself."

It would indeed be a singular thing were the field of æsthetics the only

one uninvaded by the scientific spirit of the time. The one force

especially characteristic of our era is, I suppose, the scientific

spirit. It is at any rate everywhere manifest, and it possesses the best

intellects of the century. \_A priori\_ one may argue about its hostility,

essential or other, to the artistic, the constructive spirit; but to do

so is at the most to beat the air, to waste one's breath, to Ruskinize,

in a word. Interest in life and the world, instead of speculation or

self-expression, is the "note" of the day. The individual has withered

terribly. He is supplanted by the type. Materialism has its positive

gospel; it is not at all the formulated expression of Goethe's "spirit

that denies." Nature has acquired new dignity. She cannot be studied too

closely, nor too long. The secret of the universe is now pursued through

observation, as formerly it was through fasting and prayer. Nothing is

sacred nowadays because everything receives respect. If absolute beauty

is now smiled at as a chimera, it is because beauty is perceived

everywhere. Whatever is may not be right--the maxim has too much of an

\_ex cathedra\_ sound--but whatever is is interesting. Our attitude is at

once humbler and more curious. The sense of the immensity, the

immeasurableness of things, is more intimate and profound. What one may

do is more modestly conceived; what might be done, more justly

appreciated. There is less confidence and more aspiration. The artist's

eye is "on the object" in more concentrated gaze than ever heretofore.

If his sentiment, his poetry, is no longer "inevitable," as Wordsworth

complained Goethe's was not, it is more reverent, at any rate more

circumspect. If he is less exalted he is more receptive--he is more

alive to impressions for being less of a philosopher. If he scouts

authority, if even he accepts somewhat weakly the thraldom of dissent

from traditional standards and canons, it is because he is convinced

that the material with which he has to deal is superior to all canons

and standards. If he esteems truth more than beauty, it is because what

he thinks truth is more beautiful in his eyes than the stereotyped

beauty he is adjured to attain. In any case, the distinction of the

realistic painters--like that of the realists in literature, where,

also, it need not be said, France has been in the lead--is measurably to

have got rid of solecisms; to have made, indeed, obvious solecisms, and

solecisms of conception as well as of execution, a little ridiculous. It

is, to be sure, equally ridiculous to subject romantic productions to

realistic standards, to blind one's self to the sentiment that saturates

such romantic works as Scott's and Dumas's, or Géricault's and Diaz's,

and is wholly apposite to its own time and point of view. The great

difficulty with a principle is that it is universal, and that when we

deal with facts of any kind whatever, universality is an impossible

ideal. Scott and Géricault are, nowadays, in what we have come to deem

essentials, distinctly old-fashioned. It might be well to try and

imitate them, if imitation had any salt in it, which it has not; or if

it were possible to do what they did with their different inspiration,

which it is not. Mr. Stevenson is, I think, an example of the danger of

essaying this latter in literature, just as a dozen eminent painters of

less talent--for no one has so much talent as Mr. Stevenson--are

examples in painting. But there are a thousand things, not only in the

technic of the romanticists but in their whole attitude toward their art

and their material, that are nowadays impossible to sincere and

spontaneous artists. Details which have no importance whatever in the

\_ensemble\_ of the romantic artist are essential to the realist. Art does

not stand still. Its canons change. There is a constant evolution in its

standards, its requirements. A conventional background is no more an

error in French classic painting than in tapestry; a perfunctory scheme

of pure chiaro-oscuro is no blemish in one of Diaz's splendid forest

landscapes; such phenomena in a work of Raffaelli or Pointelin would

jar, because, measured by the standards to which modern men must,

through the very force of evolution itself, subscribe, they can but

appear solecisms. In a different set of circumstances, under a different

inspiration, and with a different artistic attitude, solecisms they

certainly are not. But, as Thackeray makes Ethel Newcome say, "We belong

to our belongings." Our circumstances, inspiration, artistic attitude,

are involuntary and possess us as our other belongings do.

In Gautier's saying, for instance, "I am a man for whom the visible

world exists," which I have quoted as expressing the key-note of the

romantic epoch, it is to be noted that the visible world is taken as a

spectacle simply--significant, suggestive or merely stimulant, in

accordance with individual bent. Gautier and the romanticists generally

had little concern for its structure. To many of them it was indeed

rather a canvas than a spectacle even--just as to many, if not to most,

of the realists it is its structure rather than its significance that

altogether appeals; the romanticists in general sketched their ideas and

impressions upon it, as the naturalists have in the main studied its

aspects and constitution, careless of the import of these, pictorially

or otherwise. Indeed one is tempted often to inquire of the latter, Why

so much interest in what apparently seems to you of so little import?

Are we never to have your skill, your observation, your amassing of

"documents" turned to any account? Where is the realistic tragedy,

comedy, epic, composition of any sort? Courbet's "Cantonniers," Manet's

"Bar," or Bastien-Lepage's "Joan of Arc," perhaps. But what is

indisputable is, that we are irretrievably committed to the present

general æsthetic attitude and inspiration, and must share not only the

romanticists' impatience with academic formulæ and conventions, but the

realists' devotion to life and the world as they actually exist. The

future may be different, but we are living in the present, and what is

important is, after all, to live. It is also so difficult that not to

take the line of least resistance is fatuity.

II

It is at least an approximation to ascribe the primacy of realism to

Courbet, though ascriptions of the kind are at best approximations. Not

only was he the first, or among the first, to feel the interest and

importance of the actual world as it is and for what it is rather than

for what it suggests, but his feeling in this direction is intenser than

that of anyone else. Manet was preoccupied with the values of objects

and spaces. Bastien-Lepage, while painting these with the most

scrupulous fidelity, was nevertheless always attentive to the

significance and import of what he painted. Courbet was a pure

pantheist. He was possessed by the material, the physical, the actual.

He never varies it a hair's-breadth. He never lifts it a fraction of a

degree. But by his very absorption in it he dignifies it immensely. He

illustrates magnificently its possibilities. He brings out into the

plainest possible view its inherent, integral, æsthetic quality,

independent of any extraneity. No painter ever succeeded so well with so

little art, one is tempted to say. Beside his, the love of nature which

we ascribe to the ordinary realist is a superficial emotion. He had the

\_sentiment\_ of reality in the highest degree; he had it intensely. If he

did not represent nature with the searching subtlety of later painters,

he is certainly the forerunner of naturalism. He has absolutely no

ideality. He is blind to all intimations of immortality, all unearthly

voices.

Yet it would be wholly an error to suppose him a mere literalist. No one

is farther removed from the painstaking, grubbing imitators of detail so

justly denounced and ridiculed by Mr. Whistler. He has the generalizing

faculty in very distinguished degree, and in very large measure. Every

trait of his talent, indeed, is large, manly; but for a certain

qualification--which must be made--one might add, Olympian. This

qualification perhaps may be not unfairly described as earthiness--never

an agreeable trait, and one to which probably is due the depreciation of

Courbet that is so popular even among appreciative critics. It is easy

to characterize Courbet as brutal and material, but what is easy is

generally not exact. What one glibly stigmatizes as brutality and

grossness may, after all, be something of a particularly strong savor,

enjoyed by the painter himself with a gusto too sterling and instinctive

to be justifiably neglected, much less contemned. The first thing to do

in estimating an artist's accomplishment, which is to place one's self

at his point of view, is, in Courbet's case, unusually difficult. We are

all dreamers, more or less--in more or less desultory fashion--and can

all appreciate that prismatic turn of what is real and actual into a

position wherein it catches glints of the imagination. The imagination

is a universal touchstone. The sense of reality is a special, an

individual faculty. When one is poetizing in an amateur, a dilettante

way, as most of us poetize, a picture of Courbet, which seems to flaunt

and challenge the imagination in virtue of its defiant reality, its

insistence on the value and significance of the prosaic and the actual,

appears coarse and crude. It is not, however. It is very far from that.

It is rather elemental than elementary--in itself a prodigious

distinction. No modern painter has felt more intensely and reproduced

more vigorously the sap that runs through and vivifies the various forms

of natural phenomena. To censure his shortcomings, to regret his

imaginative incompleteness, is to miss him altogether.

It is easy to say he had all the coarseness without the sentiment of the

French peasantry, whence he sprang; that his political radicalism

attests a lack of the serenity of spirit indispensable to the sincere

artist; that he had no conception of the beautiful, the exquisite--the

fact remains that he triumphs over all his deficiencies, and in very

splendid fashion. He is, in truth, of all the realists for whom he

discovered the way, and set the pace, as it were, one of the two

naturalistic painters who have shown in any high degree the supreme

artistic faculty--that of generalization. However impressive Manet's

picture may be; however brilliant Monet's endeavor to reproduce sunlight

may seem; however refined and elegant Degas's delicate selection of

pictorial material--for broad and masterful generalization, for enduing

what he painted with an interest deeper than its surface and underlying

its aspect, Courbet has but one rival among realistic painters. I mean,

of course, Bastien-Lepage.

There is an important difference between the two. In Courbet the

sentiment of reality dominates the realism of the technic; in

Bastien-Lepage the technic is realistically carried infinitely farther,

but the sentiment quite transcends realism. Imagine Courbet essaying a

"Jeanne d'Arc!" Bastien-Lepage painting Courbet's "Cantonniers" would

not have stopped, as Courbet has done, with expressing their vitality,

their actual interest, but at the same time that he represented them in

far greater technical completeness he would also have occupied himself

with their psychology. He is indeed quite as distinctly a psychologist

as he is a painter. His favorite problem, aside from that of technical

perfection, which perhaps equally haunted him, is the rendering of that

resigned, bewildered, semi-hypnotic, vaguely and yet intensely longing

spiritual expression to be noted by those who have the eyes to see it in

the faces and attitudes now of the peasant laborer, now of the city

pariah. All his peasant women are potentially Jeannes d'Arc--"Les

Foins," "Tired," "Petite Fauvette," for example. The "note" is still

more evident in the "London Bootblack" and the "London Flower-girl," in

which the outcast "East End" spiritlessness of the British capital is

caught and fixed with a Zola-like veracity and vigor. Such a phase as

this is not so much pictorial or poetic, as psychological.

Bastien-Lepage's happiness in rendering it is a proof of the exceeding

quickness and sureness of his observation; but his preoccupation with it

is equally strong proof of his interest in the things of the mind as

well as in those of the senses. This is his great distinction, I think.

He beats the realist on his own ground (except perhaps Monet and his

followers--I remember no attempt of his to paint sunlight), but he is

imaginative as well. He is not, on the other hand, to be in anywise

associated with the romanticists. Degas's acid characterization of him,

as "the Bouguereau of the modern movement," is only just, if we remember

what very radical and fundamental changes the "modern movement" implies

in general attitude as well as in special expression. I should be

inclined, rather, to apply the analogy to M. Dagnan-Bouveret, though

here, too, with many reserves looking mainly to the difference between

true and vapid sentiment.

It is interesting to note, however, the almost exclusively intellectual

character of this imaginative side of Bastien-Lepage. He does not view

his material with any apparent sympathy, such as one notes, or at all

events divines, in Millet. Both were French peasants; but whereas

Millet's interest in his fellows is instinctive and absorbing,

Bastien-Lepage's is curious and detached. If his pictures ever succeed

in moving us, it is impersonally, in virtue of the camera-like scrutiny

he brings to bear on his subject, and the effectiveness with which he

renders it, and of the reflections which we institute of ourselves, and

which he fails to stimulate by even the faintest trace of a loving touch

or the betrayal of any sympathetic losing of himself in his theme. You

feel just the least intimation of the \_doctrinaire\_, the systematic

aloofness of the spectator. In moral attitude as well as in technical

expression he no more assimilates the various phases of his material, to

reproduce them afterward in new and original combination, than he

expresses the essence of landscape in general, as the Fontainebleau

painters do even in their most photographic moments. Both his figures

and his landscapes are clearly portraits--typical and not merely

individual, to be sure, but somehow not exactly creations. His skies are

the least successful portions of his pictures, I think; one must

generalize easily to make skies effective, and perhaps it is not

fanciful to note the frequency of high horizons in his work.

The fact remains that Bastien-Lepage stands at the head of the modern

movement in many ways. His friend, M. André Theuriet, has shown, in a

brochure published some years ago, that he was himself as interesting as

his pictures. He took his art very seriously, and spoke of it with a

dignity rather uncommon in the atmosphere of the studios, where there is

apt to be more enthusiasm than reflection. I recall vividly the

impatience with which he once spoke to me of painting "to show what you

can do." His own standard was always the particular ideal he had formed,

never within the reach of his ascertained powers. And whatever he did,

one may say, illustrates the sincerity and elevation of this remark,

whether one's mood incline one to care most for this psychological

side--undoubtedly the more nearly unique side--of his work, or for such

exquisite things as his "Forge" or the portrait of Mme Sarah Bernhardt.

Incontestably he has the true tradition, and stands in the line of the

great painters. And he owes his permanent place among them not less to

his perception that painting has a moral and significant, as well as a

representative and decorative sanction, than to his perfect harmony with

his own time in his way of illustrating this--to his happy fusion of

aspect admirably rendered with profound and stimulating suggestion.

III

Of the realistic landscape painters, the strict impressionists apart,

none is more eminent than M. Cazin, whose work is full of interest, and

if at times it leaves one a little cold, this is perhaps an affair of

the beholder's temperament rather than of M. Cazin's. He is a thoroughly

original painter, and, what is more at the present day, an imaginative

one. He sees in his own way the nature that we all see, and paints it

not literally but personally. But his landscapes invariably attest,

above all, an attentive study of the phenomena of light and air, and

their truthfulness is the more marked for the personality they

illustrate. The impression they make is of a very clairvoyant and

enthusiastic observation exercised by an artist who takes more pleasure

in appreciation than in expression, whose pleasure in his expression is

subordinate to his interest in the external world, and in large measure

confined to the delight every artist has in technical felicity when he

can attain it. Their skies are beautifully observed--graduated in value

with delicate verisimilitude from the horizon up, and wind-swept, or

drenched with mist, or ringing clear, as the motive may dictate. All

objects take their places with a precision that, nevertheless, is in

nowise pedantic, and is perfectly free. Cazin's palette is, moreover, a

thoroughly individual one. It is very pure, and if its range is not

great, it is at any rate not grayed into insipidity and ineffectualness,

but is as positive as if it were more vivid. A distinct air of elegance,

a true sense of style, is noteworthy in many of his pictures; not only

in the important ones, but occasionally when the theme is so slight as

to need hardly any composition whatever--the mere placing of a tree, its

outline, its relation to a bank or a roadway, are often unmistakably

distinguished. Cazin is not exclusively a landscape painter, and though

the landscape element in all his works is a dominant one, even in his

"Hagar and Ishmael in the Desert," and his "Judith Setting out for

Holofernes's Camp" (in which latter one can hardly identify the heroine

at all), the fact that he is not a landscape painter, pure and simple,

like Harpignies and Pointelin, perhaps accounts for his inferiority to

them in landscape sentiment. In France it is generally assumed that to

devote one's self exclusively to any one branch of painting is to betray

limitations, and there are few painters who would not resent being

called landscapists. Something, perhaps, is lost in this way. It

witnesses a greater pride in accomplishment than in instinctive bent.

But however that may be, Cazin never penetrates to the sentiment of

nature that one feels in such a work as Harpignies's "Moonrise," for

example, or in almost any of Pointelin's grave and impressive

landscapes. Hardly less truthful, I should say, though perhaps less

intimately and elaborately real (a romanticist would say less

superficially real) than Cazin's, the work of both these painters is

more pictorial. They have a quicker sense for the beautiful, I think.

They feel very certainly much more deeply the suggestiveness of a scene.

They are not so \_débonnaires\_ in the presence of their problems. In a

sense, for that reason, they understand them better. There is very

little feeling of the desert, the illimitable space, where, according to

Balzac, God is and man is not, in the "Hagar and Ishmael;" indeed there

seems to have been no attempt on the part of the painter to express any.

True as his sand-heap is, you feel somehow that there may be a

kitchen-garden or the entrance to a coal-mine on the other side of it,

or a little farther along. And the landscape of the "Judith," fine as

its sweep is, and admirable as are the cool tone and clear distance of

the picture, might really be that of the "south meadow" of some

particular "farm" or other.

The contrast which Guillaumet presents to Fromentin affords a very

striking illustration of the growth of the realistic spirit in recent

years. Fromentin is so admirable a painter that I can hardly fancy any

appreciative person wishing him different. His devoted admirer and

biographer, M. Louis Gonse, admits, and indeed expressly records,

Fromentin's own lament over the insufficiency of his studies. Fond as he

was of horses, for instance, he does not know them as a draughtsman with

the science of such a conventional painter in many other respects as

Schreyer. But it is not in the slightly amateurish nature of his

technical equipment--realized perfectly by himself, of course, as the

first critic of the technic of painting among all who have ventured upon

the subject--that his painting differs from Guillaumet's. It is his

whole point of view. His Africa is that of the critic, the

\_littérateur\_, the \_raffiné\_. Guillaumet's is Africa itself. You feel

before Guillaumet's Luxembourg canvases, as in looking over the

slightest of his vivid memoranda, that you are getting in an acute and

concentrated form the sensations which the actual scenes and types

rendered by the painter would stimulate in you, supposing, of course,

that you were sufficiently sensitive. Fromentin, in comparison, is

occupied in picture-making--giving you a beautifully colored and highly

intelligent pictorial report as against Guillaumet's actual

reproduction. There is no question as to which of the two painters has

the greater personal interest; but it is just as certain that for

abiding value and enduring charm personal interest must either be

extremely great or else yield to the interest inherent in the material

dealt with, an interest that Guillaumet brings out with a felicity and a

puissance that are wholly extraordinary, and that nowadays meet with a

readier and more sympathetic recognition that even such delicate

personal charm as that of Fromentin.

IV

So thoroughly has the spirit of realism fastened upon the artistic

effort of the present that temperaments least inclined toward interest

in the actual feel its influences, and show the effects of these. The

most recalcitrant illustrate this technically, however rigorously they

may preserve their point of view. They paint at least more

circumspectly, however they may think and feel. An historical painter

like Jean Paul Laurens, interested as he is in the memorable moments and

dramatic incidents of the past, and exhibiting as he does, first of all,

a sense of what is ideally forceful and heroic, is nevertheless clearly

concerned for the realistic value of his representation far more than a

generation ago he would have been. When Luminais paints a scene from

Gaulish legend, he is not quite, but nearly, as careful to make it

pictorially real as he is to have it dramatically effective. M. François

Flameng, expanding his book illustration into a mammoth canvas

commemorative of the Vendean insurrection, is almost daintily fastidious

about the naturalistic aspect of his abundant detail. M.

Benjamin-Constant's artificially conceived seraglio scenes are as

realistically rendered as is indicated by a recent caricature depicting

an astonished sneak-thief, foiled in an attempted rape of the jewels in

a sultana's diadem, painted with such deceptive illusoriness by M.

Benjamin-Constant's clever brush. The military painters, Detaille, De

Neuville, Berne-Bellecour, do not differ from Vernet more by painting

incidents instead of phases of warfare, by substituting the touch of

dramatic \_genre\_ for epic conceptions, than they do by the scrupulously

naturalistic rendering that in them supplants the old academic

symbolism. Their dragoons and \_fantassins\_ are not merely more real in

what they do, but in how they look. Vernet's look like tin soldiers by

comparison; certainly like soldiers \_de convenance\_. Aimé Morot

evidently used instantaneous photography, and his magnificent cavalry

charges suggest not only carnage, but Muybridge as well.

The great portrait-painters of the day--Carolus-Duran, Bonnat,

Ribot--are realists to the core. They are very far from being purely

portrait-painters of course, and their realism shows itself with

splendid distinction in other works. Few painters of the nude have

anything to their credit as fine as the figure M. Carolus-Duran

exhibited at the Paris Exposition in 1889. Ribot's "Saint Sebastian" is

one of the most powerful pictures of modern French art. Bonnat's

"Christ" became at once famous. Each picture is painted with a vigor and

point of realistic detail that are peculiar to our own time; painted

to-day, Bonnat's fine and sculptural "Fellah Woman and Child," of the

Metropolitan Museum, would be accented in a dozen ways in which now it

is not. But it is perhaps in portraiture that the eminence of these

painters is most explicit. They are at the head of contemporary

portraitists, at all events. And their portraits are almost defiantly

real, void often of arrangement, and as little artificial as the very

frequently prosaic atmosphere appertaining to their sometimes very stark

subjects suggests. A portrait by Bonnat blinks nothing in the subject;

its aim and accomplishment are the rendering of the character in a vivid

fashion--including the reproduction of cobalt cravats and creased

trousers even--which would have mightily embarrassed Van Dyck or

Velasquez. Ribot reproduces Ribera often, but he deals with fewer

externals, fewer effects, taken in the widest sense. Carolus-Duran, the

"swell" portrait-painter of the day, artificial as he may be in the

quality of his mind, nevertheless seeks and attains, first of all, the

sense of an even exaggerated life-likeness in his charming sitters.

They are, first of all, people; the pictorial element takes care of

itself; sometimes even--so overmastering is the realistic tendency--the

plush of the chair, the silk of the robe, the cut of the coat, seems, to

an observer who thinks of the old traditions of Titian, of Raphael, of

Moroni, unduly emphasized, even for realism.

V

One element of modernity is a certain order of eclecticism. It is not

the eclecticism of the Bolognese painters, for example, illustrating the

really hopeless attempt to combine the supposed and superficial

excellences, always dissociated from the essence, of different points of

view. It is a free choice of attitude, rather, due to the release of the

individual from the thraldom of conformity that ruled even during the

romantic epoch. Hence a great deal of admirable work, of which one

hardly thinks whether it is realistic or not, side by side with the more

emphatic expressions of the realistic spirit. And this work is of all

degrees of realism, never, however, getting very far away from the

naturalistic basis on which more and more everyone is coming to insist

as the necessary and only solid pedestal of any flight of fancy. Baudry

is perhaps the nearest of the really great men to the Bolognese order

of eclecticism. I suppose he must be classed among the really great men,

so many painters of intelligence place him there, though I must myself

plead the laic privilege of a slight scepticism as to whether time will

approve their enthusiasm. He is certainly very effective, and in

certainly his own way, idle as it is to say that his drafts on the great

Italians are no greater than those of Raphael on the antique frescos. He

had a great love of color and a native instinct for it; with perhaps

more appreciation than invention, his imagination has something very

personal in the zealous enthusiasm with which he exercised it, though I

think it must be admitted that his reflections of Tiepolo, Titian,

Tintoretto and his attenuated expansions of Michael Angelo's condensed

grandiosity, recall the eclecticism of the Carracci far more than that

of Raphael. But his manner is the modern manner, and it is altogether

more effective, more "fetching," to use a modern term, than anything

purely academic can be. Élie Delaunay, another master of decoration, is,

on the other hand, as real as the most rigorous literalist could ask of

a painter of decorative works. Chartran, who has an individual charm

that both Baudry and Delaunay lack, inferior as he is to them in sweep

and power, is perhaps in this respect midway between the two. Clairin

is, like Mazerolles, a pure \_fantaisiste\_. Dubufe \_fils\_, whose at

least equally famous father ranks in a somewhat similar category with

Couture, shows a distinct advance upon him in reality of rendering, as

the term would be understood at present.

In other departments of painting the note of realism is naturally still

more universally apparent; but as in the work of the painters of

decoration it is often most noticeable as an undertone, indicating a

point of departure rather than an aim. Bonvin is a realist only as

Chardin, as Van der Meer of Delft, as Nicholas Maes were, before the

jargon of realism had been thought of. He is, first of all, an exquisite

artist, in love with the beautiful in reality, finding in it the

humblest material, and expressing it with the gentlest, sweetest,

æsthetic severity and composure imaginable. The most fastidious critic

needs but a touch of human feeling to convert any characterization of

this most refined and elevated of painters into pure panegyric. Vollon's

touch is felicity itself, and it is evident that he takes more pleasure

in exercising and exploiting it than in its successful imitation,

striking as its imitative quality is. Gervex and Duez are very much more

than impressionists, both in theory and practice. There is nothing

polemic in either. Painters extol in the heartiest way the color, the

creative coloration of Gervex's "Rolla," quite aside from its dramatic

force or its truth of aspect. Personal feeling is clearly the

inspiration of every work of Duez, not the demonstration of a theory of

treating light and atmosphere. The same may be said of Roll at his best,

as in his superb rendering of what may be called the modern painter's

conception of the myth of Europa. Compared with Paul Veronese's

admirable classic, that violates all the unities (which Veronese,

nevertheless, may readily be pardoned by all but literalists and

theorists for neglecting), this splendid nude girl in \_plein air\_,

flecked with splotches of sunlight filtered through a sieve of leafage,

with her realistic taurine companion, and their environment of

veridically rendered out-of-doors, may stand for an illustrative

definition of modernity; but what you feel most of all is Roll. It is

ten chances to one that he has never even been to Venice or thought of

Veronese. He has not always been so successful; as when in his "Work" he

earned Degas's acute comment: "A crowd is made with five persons, not

with fifty." ("Il y a cinquante figures, mais je ne vois pas la foule;

on fait une foule avec cinq, et non pas avec cinquante.") But he has

always been someone. Compare with him L'Hermitte, a painter who

illustrates sometimes the possibility of being an artificial realist.

His "Vintage" at the Metropolitan Museum, his "Harvesters" at the

Luxembourg, are excellently real and true in detail, but in idea and

general expression they might compete for the prix de Rome. The same is

measurably true of Lerolle, whose pictures are more sympathetic--sometimes

they are \_very\_ sympathetic--but on the whole display less power. But

in each instance the advocate \_à outrance\_ of realism may justly, I

think, maintain that a painter with a natural predisposition toward the

insipidity of the academic has been saved from it by the inherent sanity

and robustness of the realistic method. Jean Béraud, even, owes something

to the way in which his verisimilitude of method has reinforced his

artistic powers. His delightful Parisiennes--modistes' messengers crossing

wet glistening pavements against a background of gray mist accented with

poster-bedizened kiosks and regularly recurring horse-chestnut trees;

\_élégantes\_ at prayer, in somewhat distracted mood, on \_prie-dieus\_

in the vacant and vapid Paris churches; seated at café tables on the busy,

leisurely boulevards, or posing \_tout bonnement\_ for the reproduction

of the most fascinating feminine \_ensemble\_ in the world--owe their

charm (I may say again their "fetchingness") to the faithfulness with which

their portraitist has studied, and the fidelity with which he has

reproduced, their differing types, more than to any personal expression

of his own view of them. Fancy Béraud's masterpiece, the Salle

Graffard--that admirable characterization of crankdom embodied in a

socialist reunion--painted by an academic painter. How absolutely it would

lose its pith, its force, its significance, even its true distinction. And

his "Magdalen at the Pharisee's House," which is almost equally

impressive--far more impressive of course in a literary and, I think,

legitimate, sense--owes even its literary effectiveness to its significant

realism.

What the illustrators of the present day owe to the naturalistic method,

it is almost superfluous to point out. "Illustrators" in France are, in

general, painters as well, some of them very eminent painters. Daumier,

who passed in general for a contributor to illustrated journals, even

such journals as \_Le Petit Journal pour Rire\_, was not only a genius of

the first rank, but a painter of the first class. Monvel and Monténard

at present are masterly painters. But in their illustration as well as

in their painting, they show a notable change from the illustration of

the days of Daumier and Doré. The difference between the elegant (or

perhaps rather the handsome) drawings of Bida, an artist of the utmost

distinction, and that of the illustrators of the present day who are

comparable with him--their name is not legion--is a special attestation

of the influence of the realistic ideal in a sphere wherein, if

anywhere, one may say, realism reigns legitimately, but wherein also the

conventional is especially to be expected. One cannot indeed be quite

sure that the temptations of the conventional are resisted by the

ultra-realistic illustrators of our own time, Rossi, Beaumont, Albert

Lynch, Myrbach. They have certainly a very handy way of expressing

themselves; one would be justified in suspecting the labor-saving, the

art-sparing kodak, behind many of their most unimpeachable successes.

But the attitude taken is quite other than it used to be, and the change

that has come over French æsthetic activity in general can be noted in

very sharp definition by comparing a book illustrated twenty years ago

by Albert Lynch, with, for example, Maupassant's "Pierre et Jean," the

distinguished realism of whose text is adequately paralleled--and the

implied eulogy is by no means trivial--by the pictorical commentary, so

to speak, which this first of modern illustrators has supplied. And an

even more striking illustration of the evolution of realistic thought

and feeling, as well as of rendering, is furnished by the succession of

Forain to Grévin, as an illustrator of the follies of the day, the

characteristic traits of the Parisian seamy side, morally speaking.

Grévin is as conventional as Murger, in philosophy, and--though

infinitely cleverer--as "Mars" in drawing. Forain, with the pencil of a

realism truly Japanese, illustrates with sympathetic incisiveness the

pitiless pessimism of Flaubert, Goncourt, and Maupassant as well.

VI

But to go back a little and consider the puissant individualities, the

great men who have really given its direction to and, as it were, set

the pace of, the realistic movement, and for whom, in order more

conveniently to consider impressionism pure and simple by itself, I have

ventured to disturb the chronological sequence of evolution in French

painting--a sequence that, even if one care more for ideas than for

chronology, it is more temerarious to vary from in things French than in

any others. To go back in a word to Manet; the painter of whom M. Henri

Houssaye has remarked: "Manet sowed, M. Bastien-Lepage has reaped."

Manet was certainly one of the most noteworthy painters that France or

any other country has produced. His is the great, the very rare, merit

of having conceived a new point of view. That he did not illustrate this

in its completeness, that he was a sign-post, as Albert Wolff very aptly

said, rather an exemplar, is nothing. He was totally unheralded, and he

was in his way superb. No one before him had essayed--no one before him

had ever thought of--the immense project of breaking, not relatively but

absolutely, with the conventional. Looking for the first time at one of

his pictures, one says that customary notions, ordinary brushes,

traditional processes of even the highest authenticity, have been thrown

to the winds. Hence, indeed, the scandal which he caused from the first

and which went on increasing, until, owing to the acceptance, with

modifications, of his point of view by the most virile and vigorous

painters of the day, he became, as he has become, in a sense the head of

the corner. Manet's great distinction is to have discovered that the

sense of reality is achieved with a thousand-fold greater intensity by

getting as near as possible to the \_actual\_, rather than resting content

with the \_relative\_, value of every detail. Everyone who has painted

since Manet has either followed him in this effort or has appeared

jejune.

Take as an illustration of the contrary practice such a masterpiece in

its way as Gérôme's "Éminence Grise." In this picture, skilfully and

satisfactorily composed, the relative values of all the colors are

admirably, even beautifully, observed. The correspondence of the gamut

of values to that of the light and dark scale of such an actual scene is

perfect. Before Manet, one could have said that this is all that is

required or can be secured, arguing that exact \_imitation\_ of local

tints and general tone is impossible, owing to the difference between

nature's highest light and lowest dark, and the potentialities of the

palette. In other words, one might have said, that inasmuch as you can

squeeze absolute white and absolute black out of no tubes, the thing to

do is first to determine the scale of your picture and then make every

note in it bear the same relation to every other that the corresponding

note in nature bears to its fellows in its own corresponding but

different scale. This is what Gérôme has done in the "Éminence Grise"--a

scene, it will be remembered, on a staircase in a palace interior. Manet

inquires what would happen to this house of cards shored up into

verisimilitude by mere \_correspondence\_, if Gérôme had been asked to cut

a window in his staircase and admit the light of out-of-doors into his

correspondent but artificial scene. The whole thing would have to be

done over again. The scale of the picture running from the highest

palette white to the lowest palette dark, and yet the key of an actual

interior scene being much nearer middle-tint than the tint of an actual

out-of-doors scene, it would be impossible to paint with any

verisimilitude the illumination of a window from the outside, the

resources of the palette having already been exhausted, every object

having been given a local value solely with relation, so far as truth of

representation is concerned, to the values of every other object, and no

effort being made to get the precise value of the object as it would

appear under analogous circumstances in nature.

It may be replied, and I confess I think with excellent reason, that

Gérôme's picture has no window in it, and therefore that to ask of him

to paint a picture as he would if he were painting a different picture,

is pedantry. The old masters are still admirable, though they only

observed a correspondence to the actual scale of natural values, and

were not concerned with imitation of it. But it is to be observed that,

successful as their practice is, it is successful in virtue of the

unconscious co-operation of the beholder's imagination. And nowadays not

only is the exercise of the imagination become for better or worse a

little old-fashioned, but the one thing that is insisted on as a

starting-point and basis, at the very least, is the sense of reality.

And it is impossible to exaggerate the way in which the sense of reality

has been intensified by Manet's insistence upon getting as near as

possible to the individual values of objects as they are seen in

nature--in spite of his abandonment of the practice of painting on a

parallel scale. Things now drop into their true place, look as they

really do, and count as they count in nature, because the painter is no

longer content with giving us change for nature, but tries his best to

give us nature itself. Perspective acquires its actual significance,

solids have substance and bulk as well as surfaces, distance is

perceived as it is in nature, by the actual interposition of atmosphere,

chiaro-oscuro is abolished--the ways in which reality is secured being

in fact legion the moment real instead of relative values are studied.

Something is lost, very likely--an artist cannot be so intensely

preoccupied with reality as, since Manet, it has been incumbent on

painters to be, without missing a whole range of qualities that are so

precious as rightly perhaps to be considered indispensable. Until

reality becomes in its turn an effect unconsciously attained, the

painter's imagination will be held more or less in abeyance. And perhaps

we are justified in thinking that nothing can quite atone for its

absence. Meantime, however, it must be acknowledged that Manet first

gave us this sense of reality in a measure comparable with that which

successively Balzac, Flaubert, Zola gave to the readers of their

books--a sense of actuality and vividness beside which the traditionary

practice seemed absolutely fanciful and mechanical.

Applying Manet's method, his invention, his discovery, to the painting

of out-of-doors, the \_plein air\_ school immediately began to produce

landscapes of astonishing reality by confining their effort to those

values which it is in the power of pigments to imitate. The possible

scale of mere correspondence being of course from one to one hundred,

they secured greater truth by painting between twenty and eighty, we may

say. Hence the grayness of the most successful French landscapes of the

present day--those of Bastien-Lepage's backgrounds, of Cazin's pictures.

Sunlight being unpaintable, they confined themselves to the

representation of what they could represent. In the interest of truth,

of reality, they narrowed the gamut of their modulations, they attempted

less, upheld by the certainty of accomplishing more. For a time French

landscape was pitched in a minor key. Suddenly Claude Monet appeared.

Impressionism, as it is now understood, and as Manet had not succeeded

in popularizing it, won instant recognition. Monet's discovery was that

light is the most important factor in the painting of out-of-doors. He

pushed up the key of landscape painting to the highest power. He

attacked the fascinating, but of course demonstrably insolvable, problem

of painting sunlight, not illusorily, as Fortuny had done by relying on

contrasts of light and dark correspondent in scale, but positively and

realistically. He realized as nearly as possible the effect of

sunlight--that is to say, he did as well and no better in this respect

than Fortuny had done--but he created a much greater illusion of a

sunlit landscape than anyone had ever done before him, by painting those

parts of his picture not in sunlight with the exact truth that in

painting objects in shadow the palette can compass.

Nothing is more simple. Take a landscape with a cloudy sky, which means

diffused light in the old sense of the term, and observe the effect upon

it of a sudden burst of sunlight. What is the effect where considerable

portions of the scene are suddenly thrown into marked shadow, as well as

others illuminated with intense light? Is the absolute value of the

parts in shadow lowered or raised? Raised, of course, by reflected

light. Formerly, to get the contrast between sunlight and shadow in

proper scale, the painter would have painted the shadows darker than

they were before the sun appeared. Relatively they are darker, since

their value, though heightened, is raised infinitely less than the value

of the parts in sunlight. Absolutely, their value is raised

considerably. If, therefore, they are painted lighter than they were

before the sun appeared, they in themselves seem truer. The part of

Monet's picture that is in shadow is measurably true, far truer than it

would have been if painted under the old theory of correspondence, and

had been unnaturally darkened to express the relation of contrast

between shadow and sunlight. Scale has been lost. What has been gained?

Simply truth of impressionistic effect. Why? Because we know and judge

and appreciate and feel the measure of truth with which objects in

shadow are represented; we are insensibly more familiar with them in

nature than with objects directly sun-illuminated, the value as well as

the definition of which are far vaguer to us on account of their

blending and infinite heightening by a luminosity absolutely

overpowering. In a word, in sunlit landscapes objects in shadow are what

customarily and unconsciously we see and note and know, and the illusion

is greater if the relation between them and the objects in sunlight,

whose value habitually we do not note, be neglected or falsified. Add to

this source of illusion the success of Monet in giving a juster value to

the sunlit half of his picture than had even been systematically

attempted before his time, and his astonishing \_trompe-l'oeil\_ is, I

think, explained. Each part is truer than ever before, and unless one

have a specially developed sense of \_ensemble\_ in this very special

matter of values in and affected by sunlight, one gets from Monet an

impression of actuality so much greater than he has ever got before,

that he may be pardoned for feeling, and even for enthusiastically

proclaiming, that in Monet realism finds its apogee. To sum up: The

first realists painted \_relative\_ values; Manet and his derivatives

painted \_absolute\_ values, but in a wisely limited gamut; Monet paints

\_absolute values in a very wide range, plus sunlight, as nearly as he

can get it\_--as nearly as pigment can be got to represent it. Perforce

he loses scale, and therefore artistic completeness, but he secures an

incomparably vivid effect of reality, of nature--and of nature in her

gayest, most inspiring manifestation, illuminated directly and

indirectly, and everywhere vibrant and palpitating with the light of all

our physical seeing.

Monet is so subtle in his own way, so superbly successful within his own

limits, that it is time wasted to quarrel with the convention-steeped

philistine who refuses to comprehend even his point of view, who judges

the pictures he sees by the pictures he has seen. He has not only

discovered a new way of looking at nature, but he has justified it in a

thousand particulars. Concentrated as his attention has been upon the

effects of light and atmosphere, he has reproduced an infinity of

nature's moods that are charming in proportion to their transitoriness,

and whose fleeting beauties he has caught and permanently fixed.

Rousseau made the most careful studies, and then combined them in his

studio. Courbet made his sketch, more or less perfect, face to face with

his subject, and elaborated it afterward away from it. Corot painted his

picture from nature, but put the Corot into it in his studio. Monet's

practice is in comparison drastically thorough. After thirty minutes, he

says--why thirty instead of forty or twenty, I do not know; these

mysteries are Eleusinian to the mere amateur--the light changes; he

must stop and return the next day at the same hour. The result is

immensely real, and in Monet's hands immensely varied. One may say as

much, having regard to their differing degrees of success, of Pissaro,

who influenced him, and of Caillebotte, Renoir, Sisley, and the rest of

the impressionists who followed him.

He is himself the prominent representative of the school, however, and

the fact that one representative of it is enough to consider, is

eloquent of profound criticism of it. For decorative purposes a hole in

one's wall, an additional window through which one may only look

satisfactorily during a period of thirty minutes, has its drawbacks. A

walk in the country or in a city park is after all preferable to anyone

who can really appreciate a Monet--that is, anyone who can feel the

illusion of nature which it is his sole aim to produce. After all, what

one asks of art is something different from imitative illusion. Its

essence is illusion, I think, but illusion taken in a different sense

from optical illusion--\_trompe-l'oeil\_. Its function is to make dreams

seem real, not to recall reality. Monet is enduringly admirable mainly

to the painter who envies and endeavors to imitate his wonderful power

of technical expression--the thing that occupies most the conscious

attention of the true painter. To others he must remain a little

unsatisfactory, because he is not only not a dreamer, but because he

does nothing with his material except to show it as it is--a great

service surely, but largely excluding the exercise of that architectonic

faculty, personally directed, which is the very life of every truly

æsthetic production.

VII

In fine, the impressionist has his own conventions; no school can escape

them, from the very nature of the case and the definition of the term.

The conventions of the impressionists, indeed, are particularly salient.

Can anyone doubt it who sees an exhibition of their works? In the same

number of classic, or romantic, or merely realistic pictures, is there

anything quite equalling the monotony that strikes one in a display of

canvasses by Claude Monet and his fellows and followers? But the defect

of impressionism is not mainly its technical conventionality. It is, as

I think everyone except its thick-and-thin advocates must feel, that

pursued \_à outrance\_ it lacks a seriousness commensurate with its

claims--that it exhibits indeed a kind of undertone of frivolity that is

all the nearer to the absolutely comic for the earnestness, so to speak,

of its unconsciousness. The reason is, partly no doubt, to be ascribed

to its \_débonnaire\_ self-satisfaction, its disposition to "lightly run

amuck at an august thing," the traditions of centuries namely, to its

bumptiousness, in a word. But chiefly, I think, the reason is to be

found in its lack of anything properly to be called a philosophy. This

is surely a fatal flaw in any system, because it involves a

contradiction in terms; and to say that to have no philosophy is the

philosophy of the impressionists, is merely a word-juggling bit of

question-begging. A theory of technic is not a philosophy, however

systematic it may be. It is a mechanical, not an intellectual, point of

view. It is not a way of looking at things, but of rendering them. It

expresses no idea and sees no relations; its claims on one's interest

are exhausted when once its right to its method is admitted. The remark

once made of a typically literal person--that he cared so much for facts

that he disliked to think they had any relations--is intimately

applicable to the whole impressionist school. Technically, of course,

the impressionist's relations are extremely just--not exquisite, but

exquisitely just. But merely to get just values is not to occupy one's

self with values ideally, emotionally, personally. It is merely to

record facts. Certainly any impressionist rendering of the light and

shade and color relations of objects seems eloquent beside any

traditional and conventional rendering of them; but it is because each

object is so carefully observed, so truly painted, that its relation to

every other is spontaneously satisfactory; and this is a very different

thing from the result of truly pictorial rendering with its constructive

appeal, its sense of \_ensemble\_, its presentation of an idea by means of

the convergence and interdependence of objects focussed to a common and

central effect. To this impressionism is absolutely insensitive. It is

the acme of detachment, of indifference.

Turgénieff, according to Mr. George Moore, complained of Zola's Gervaise

Coupeau, that Zola explained how she felt, never what she thought.

"Qu'est que ça me fait si elle suait sous les bras, ou au milieu du

dos?" he asked, with most pertinent penetration. He is quite right.

Really we only care for facts when they explain truths. The desultory

agglomeration of never so definitely rendered details necessarily leaves

the civilized appreciation cold. What distinguishes the civilized from

the savage appreciation is the passion for order. The tendency to order,

said Sénancour, should form "an essential part of our inclinations, of

our instinct, like the tendencies to self-preservation and to

reproduction." The two latter tendencies the savage possesses as

completely as the civilized man, but he does not share the civilized

man's instinct for correlation. And in this sense, I think, a certain

savagery is justly to be ascribed to the impressionist. His productions

have many attractions and many merits--merits and attractions that the

traditional painting has not. But they are really only by a kind of

automatic inadvertence, pictures. They are not truly pictorial.

And a picture should be something more than even pictorial. To be

permanently attaching it should give at least a hint of the painter's

philosophy--his point of view, his attitude toward his material. In the

great pictures you can not only discover this attitude, but the attitude

of the painter toward life and the world in general. Everyone has as

distinct an idea of the philosophy of Raphael as of the qualities of his

designs. The impressionist not only does not show you what he thinks, he

does not even show you how he feels, except by betraying a fondness for

violets and diffused light, and by exhibiting the temper of the radical

and the rioter. The order of a blithe, idyllic landscape by Corot, of

one of Delacroix's pieces of concentric coloration, of an example of

Ingres's purity of outline, shows not only temperament, but the position

of the painter in regard to the whole intellectual world so far as he

touches it at all. What does a canvas of Claude Monet show in this

respect? It is more truthful but not less impersonal than a photograph.

Degas is the only other painter usually classed with the

impressionists, of whom this may not be said. But Degas is hardly an

impressionist at all. He is one of the most personal painters, if not

the most personal painter, of the day. He is as original as Puvis de

Chavannes. What allies him with the impressionists is his fondness for

fleeting aspects, his caring for nothing beyond aspect--for the look of

things and their transitory look. He is an enthusiastic admirer of

Ingres--who, one would say, is the antithesis of impressionism. He never

paints from nature. His studies are made with the utmost care, but they

are arranged, composed, combined by his own sense of what is

pictorial--by, at any rate, his own idea of the effects he wishes to

create. He cares absolutely nothing for what ordinarily we understand by

the real, the actual, so far as its reality is concerned; he sees

nothing else, to be sure, and is probably very sceptical about anything

but colors and shapes and their decorative arrangement; but he sees what

he likes in reality and follows this out with an inerrancy so

scrupulous, and even affectionate, as to convey the idea that in his

result he himself counts for almost nothing. This at least may be said

of him, that he shows what, given genius, can be got out of the

impressionist method artistically and practically employed to the end of

illustrating a personal point of view. A mere amateur can hardly

distinguish between a Caillebotte and a Sisley, for example, but

everyone identifies a Degas as immediately and as certainly as he does a

Whistler. His work is perfectly sincere and admirably intelligent. It

has neither the pose nor the irresponsibility of the impressionists. His

artistic apotheosis of the ballet-girl is merely the result of his happy

discovery of something delightfully, and in a very true sense naturally,

decorative in material that is in the highest degree artificial. His

impulse is as genuine and spontaneous as if the substance upon which it

is exercised were not the acme of the exotic, and already arranged with

the most elaborate conventionality. Nothing indeed could be more opposed

to the elementary crudity of impressionism than his distinction and

refinement, which may be said to be carried to a really \_fin de siècle\_

degree.

VIII

Whatever the painting of the future is to be, it is certain not to be

the painting of Monet. For the present, no doubt, Monet is the last word

in painting. To belittle him is not only whimsical, but ridiculous. He

has plainly worked a revolution in his art. He has taken it out of the

vicious circle of conformity to, departure from, and return to

abstractions and the so-called ideal. No one hereafter who attempts the

representation of nature--and for as far ahead as we can see with any

confidence, the representation of nature, the pantheistic ideal if one

chooses, will increasingly intrench itself as the painter's true aim--no

one who seriously attempts to realize this aim of now universal appeal

will be able to dispense with Monet's aid. He must perforce follow the

lines laid down for him by this astonishing naturalist. Any other course

must result in solecism, and if anything future is certain, it is

certain that the future will be not only inhospitable to, but absolutely

intolerant of, solecism. Henceforth the basis of things is bound to be

solid and not superficial, real and not fantastic. But--whether the

future is to commit itself wholly to prose, or is to preserve in new

conditions the essence of the poetry that, in one form or another, has

persisted since plastic art began--for the superstructure to be erected

on the sound basis of just values and true impressions it is justifiably

easy to predict a greater interest and a more real dignity than any such

preoccupation with the basis of technic as Monet's can possibly have.

And though, even as one says it, one has the feeling that the future is

pregnant with some genius who will out-Monet Monet, and that painting

will in some now inconceivable way have to submit hereafter to a still

more rigorous standard than it does at present--I have heard the claims

of binocular vision urged--at the same time the true "child of nature"

may console himself with the reflection that accuracy and competence are

but the accidents, at most the necessary phenomena, of what really and

essentially constitutes fine art of any kind--namely, the expression of

a personal conception of what is not only true but beautiful as well. In

France less than anywhere else is it likely that even such a powerful

force as modern realism will long dominate the constructive, the

architectonic faculty, which is part of the very fibre of the French

genius. The exposition and illustration of a theory believed in with a

fervency to be found only among a people with whom the intelligence is

the chief element and object of experiment and exercise, are a natural

concomitant of mental energy and activity. But no theory holds them long

in bondage. At the least, it speedily gives place to another formulation

of the mutinous freedom its very acceptance creates. And the conformity

that each of them in succession imposes on mediocrity is always varied

and relieved by the frequent incarnations in masterful personalities of

the natural national traits--of which, I think, the architectonic spirit

is one of the most conspicuous. Painting will again become creative,

constructive, personally expressive. Its basis having been established

as scientifically impeccable, its superstructure will exhibit the

taste, the elegance, the imaginative freedom, exhibited within the

limits of a cultivated sense of propriety, that are an integral part of

the French painter's patrimony.

IV

CLASSIC SCULPTURE

I

French sculpture naturally follows very much the same course as

French painting. Its beginnings, however, are Gothic, and the

Renaissance emancipated rather than created it. Italy, over which the

Gothic wave passed with less disturbing effect than anywhere else, and

where the Pisans were doing pure sculpture when everywhere farther north

sculpture was mainly decorative and rigidly architectural, had a potent

influence. But the modern phases of French sculpture have a closer

relationship with the Chartres Cathedral than modern French painting has

with its earliest practice; and Claux Sluters, the Burgundian Fleming

who modelled the wonderful Moses Well and the tombs of Jean Sans Peur

and Phillippe le Hardi at Dijon, among his other anachronistic

masterpieces, exerted considerably greater influence upon his successors

than the Touraine school of painting and the Clouets did upon theirs.

These works are a curious compromise between the Gothic and the modern

spirits. Sluters was plainly a modern temperament working with Gothic

material and amid Gothic ideas. In itself his sculpture is hardly

decorative, as we apply the epithet to modern work. It is just off the

line of rigidity, of insistence in every detail of its right and title

to individuality apart from every other sculptured detail. The prophets

in the niches of the beautiful Dijon Well, the monks under the arcades

of the beautiful Burgundian tombs, have little relation with each other

as elements of a decorative sculptural composition. They are in the same

style, that is all. Each of them is in interest quite independent of the

other. Compared with one of the Pisans' pulpits they form a congeries

rather than a composition. Compared with Goujon's "Fountain of the

Innocents" their motive is not decorative at all. Isaiah, Ezekiel,

Jeremiah asserts his individuality in a way the more sociable prophets

of the Sistine Chapel would hesitate to do. They have a little the air

of hermits--of artistic anchorites, one may say.

They are Gothic, too, not only in being thus sculpturally undecorative

and uncomposed, but in being beautifully subordinate to the architecture

which it is their unmistakable ancillary function to decorate in the

most delightful way imaginable--in being in a word architecturally

decorative. The marriage of the two arts is, Gothically, not on equal

terms. It never occurred, of course, to the Gothic architect that it

should be. His \_ensemble\_ was always one of which the chief, the

overwhelming, one may almost say the sole, interest is structural. He

even imposed the condition that the sculpture which decorated his

structure should be itself architecturally structural. One figure of the

portals of Chartres is almost as like another as one pillar of the

interior is like its fellows; for the reason--eminently satisfactory to

the architect--that it discharges an identical function.

Emancipation from this thraldom of the architect is Sluters's great

distinction, however. He is modern in this sense, without going so

far--without going anything like so far--as the modern sculptor who

divorces his work from that of the architect with whom he is called upon

to combine to the end of an \_ensemble\_ that shall be equally agreeable

to the sense satisfied by form and that satisfied by structure. His

figures, subordinate as they are to the general architectural purpose

and function of what they decorate, are not only not purely structural

in their expression, stiff as they still are from the point of view of

absolutely free sculpture; they are, moreover, not merely unrelated to

each other in any essential sense, such as that in which the figures of

the Pisans and of Goujon are related; they are on the contrary each and

all wonderfully accentuated and individualized. Every ecclesiastic on

the Dijon tombs is a character study. Every figure on the Well has a

psychologic as well as a sculptural interest. Poised between Gothic

tradition and modern feeling, between a reverend and august æsthetic

conventionality and the dawn of free activity, Sluters is one of the

most interesting and stimulating figures in the whole history of

sculpture. And the force of his characterizations, the vividness of his

conceptions, and the combined power and delicacy of his modelling give

him the added importance of one of the heroes of his art in any time or

country. There is something extremely Flemish in his sense of

personality. A similar interest in humanity as such, in the individual

apart from the type, is noticeable in the pictures of the Van Eycks, of

Memling, of Quentin Matsys, and Roger Van der Weyden, wherein all idea

of beauty, of composition, of universal appeal is subordinated as it is

in no other art--in that of Holland no more than in that of Italy--to

the representation in the most definite, precise, and powerful way of

some intensely human personality. There is the same extraordinary

concreteness in one of Matsys's apostles and one of Sluters's prophets.

Michel Colombe, the pupil of Claux and Anthoniet and the sculptor of the

monument of François II., Duke of Brittany, at Nantes, the relief of

"St. George and the Dragon" for the Château of Gaillon, now in the

Louvre, and the Fontaine de Beaune, at Tours, and Jean Juste, whose

noble masterpiece, the Tomb of Louis XII. and Anne of Brittany, is the

finest ornament of the Cathedral of St. Denis, bridge the distance and

mark the transition to Goujon, Cousin, and Germain Pilon far more

suavely than the school of Fontainebleau did the change from that of

Tours to Poussin. Cousin, though the monument of Admiral Chabot is a

truly marvellous work, witnessing a practical sculptor's hand, is really

to be classed among painters. And Germain Pilon's compromise with

Italian decorativeness, graceful and fertile sculptor as his many works

show him to have been, resulted in a lack of personal force that has

caused him to be thought on the one hand "seriously injured by the

bastard sentiment proper to the school of Fontainebleau," as Mrs.

Pattison somewhat sternly remarks, and on the other to be reprehended by

Germain Brice in 1718, for evincing \_quelque reste du goût

gothique\_--some reminiscence of Gothic taste. Jean Goujon is really the

first modern French sculptor.

II

He remains, too, one of the very finest, even in a competition

constantly growing more exacting since his day. He had a very particular

talent, and it was exhibited in manifold ways. He is as fine in relief

as in the round. His decorative quality is as eminent as his purely

sculptural side. Compared with his Italian contemporaries he is at once

full of feeling and severe. He has nothing of Pilon's chameleon-like

imitativeness. He does not, on the other hand, break with the traditions

of the best models known to him--and, undoubtedly he knew the best. His

works cover and line the Louvre, and anyone who visits Paris may get a

perfect conception of his genius--certainly anyone who in addition

visits Rouen and beholds the lovely tracery of his earliest sculpture on

the portal of St. Maclou. He was eminently the sculptor of an educated

class, and appealed to a cultivated appreciation. Coming as he did at

the acme of the French Renaissance, when France was borrowing with

intelligent selection whatever it considered valuable from Italy, he

pleased the dilettanti. There is something distinctly "swell" in his

work. He does not perhaps express any overmastering personal feeling,

nor does he stamp the impress of French national character on his work

with any particular emphasis. He is too well-bred and too cultivated, he

has too much \_aplomb\_. But his works show both more personal feeling and

more national character than the works of his contemporaries elsewhere.

For line he has a very intimate instinct, and of mass, in the sculptor's

as well as the painter's sense, he has a native comprehension. Compare

his "Diana" of the Louvre with Cellini's in the adjoining room from the

point of view of pure sculpture. Goujon's group is superb in every way.

Cellini's figure is tormented and distorted by an impulse of decadent

though decorative æstheticism. Goujon's caryatides and figures of the

Innocents Fountain are equally sculptural in their way--by no means

arabesques, as is so much of Renaissance relief, and the modern relief

that imitates it. Everything in fine that Goujon did is unified with the

rest of his work and identifiable by the mark of style.

III

What do we mean by style? Something, at all events, very different from

manner, in spite of Mr. Hamerton's insistence upon the contrary. Is the

quality in virtue of which--as Mr. Dobson paraphrases Gautier--

"The bust outlives the throne,

The coin Tiberius"

the specific personality of the artist who carved the bust or chiselled

the coin that have thus outlived all personality connected with them?

Not that personality is not of the essence of enduring art. It is, on

the contrary, the condition of any vital art whatever. But what gives

the object, once personally conceived and expressed, its currency, its

universality, its eternal interest--speaking to strangers with familiar

vividness, and to posterity as to contemporaries--is something aside

from its personal feeling. And it is this something and not specific

personality that style is. Style is the invisible wind through whose

influence "the lion on the flag" of the Persian poet "moves and

marches." The lion of personality may be painted never so deftly, with

never so much expression, individual feeling, picturesqueness, energy,

charm; it will not move and march save through the rhythmic, waving

influence of style.

Nor is style necessarily the grand style, as Arnold seems to imply, in

calling it "a peculiar recasting and heightening, under a certain

condition of spiritual excitement, of what a man has to say in such a

manner as to add dignity and distinction to it." Perhaps the most

explicit examples of pure style owe their production to spiritual

coolness; and, in any event, the word "peculiar" in a definition begs

the question. Buffon is at once juster and more definite in saying:

"Style is nothing other than the order and movement which we put into

our thoughts." It is singular that this simple and lucid utterance of

Buffon should have been so little noticed by those who have written in

English on style. In general English writers have apparently

misconceived, in very curious fashion, Buffon's other remark, "le style

c'est l'homme;" by which aphorism Buffon merely meant that a man's

individual manner depends on his temperament, his character, and which

he, of course, was very far from suspecting would ever be taken for a

definition.

Following Buffon's idea of "order and movement," we may say, perhaps,

that style results from the preservation in every part of some sense of

the form of the whole. It implies a sense of relations as well as of

statement. It is not mere expression of a thought in a manner peculiar

to the artist (in words, color, marble, what not), but it is such

expression penetrated with both reminiscence and anticipation. It is,

indeed, on the contrary, very nearly the reverse of what we mean by

expression, which is mainly a matter of personal energy. Style means

correctness, precision, that feeling for the \_ensemble\_ on which an

inharmonious detail jars. Expression results from a sense of the value

of the detail. If Walt Whitman, for example, were what his admirers'

defective sense of style fancies him, he would be expressive. If French

academic art had as little expression as its censors assert, it would

still illustrate style--the quality which modifies the native and

apposite form of the concrete individual thing with reference to what

has preceded and what is to follow it; the quality, in a word, whose

effort is to harmonize the object with its environment. When this

environment is heightened, and universal instead of logical and

particular, we have the "grand style;" but we have the grand style

generally in poetry, and to be sure of style at all prose--such prose as

Goujon's, which in no wise emulates Michael Angelo's poetry--may

justifiably neglect in some degree the specific personality that tends

to make it poetic and individual.

IV

After Goujon, Clodion is the great name in French sculpture, until we

come to Houdon, who may almost be assigned to the nineteenth century.

There were throughout the eighteenth century honorable artists,

sculptors of distinction beyond contest. But sculpture is such an

abstract art itself that the sculpture which partook of the

artificiality of the eighteenth century has less interest for us, less

that is concrete and appealing than even the painting of the epoch. It

derived its canons and its practice from Puget--the French Bernini, who

with less grace and less dilettante extravagance than his Italian

exemplar had more force and solidity. With less cleverness, less

charm--for Bernini, spite of the disesteem in which his juxtaposition to

Michael Angelo and his apparent unconsciousness of the attitude such

juxtaposition should have imposed upon him, cause him to be held, has a

great deal of charm and is extraordinarily clever--he is more sincere,

more thorough-going, more respectable. Coysevox is chiefly Puget

exaggerated, and his pupil, Coustou, who comes down to nearly the middle

of the eighteenth century, contributed nothing to French sculptural

tradition.

But Clodion is a distinct break. He is as different from Coysevox and

Coustou as Watteau is from Lebrun. He is the essence of what we mean by

Louis Quinze. His work is clever beyond characterization. It has in

perfection what sculptors mean by color--that is to say a certain warmth

of feeling, a certain \_insouciance\_, a brave carelessness for

sculpturesque traditions, a free play of fancy, both in the conception

and execution of his subjects. Like the Louis Quinze painters, he has

his thoughtless, irresponsible, involuntary side, and like them--like

the best of them, that is to say, like Watteau--he is never quite as

good as he could be. He seems not so much concerned at expressing his

ideal as at pleasing, and pleasing people of too frivolous an

appreciation to call forth what is best in him. He devoted himself

almost altogether to terra-cotta, which is equivalent to saying that the

exquisite and not the impressive was his aim. Thoroughly classic, so far

as the avoidance of everything naturalistic is concerned, he is yet as

little severe and correct as the painters of his day. He spent nine

years in Rome, but though enamoured in the most sympathetic degree of

the antique, it was the statuettes and figurines, the gay and social,

the elegant and decorative side of antique sculpture that exclusively he

delighted in. His work is Tanagra Gallicized. It is not the group of

"The Deluge," or the "Entry of the French into Munich," or "Hercules in

Repose," for which he was esteemed by contemporaries or is prized by

posterity. He is admirable where he is inimitable--that is to say, in

the delightful decoration of which he was so prodigal. It is not in his

compositions essaying what is usually meant by sculptural effect, but in

his vases, clocks, pendants, volutes, little reliefs of nymphs riding

dolphins over favoring breakers and amid hospitable foam, his toilettes

of Venus, his façade ornamentations, his applied sculpture, in a word,

that his true talent lies. After him it is natural that we should have a

reversion to quasi-severity and imitation of the antique--just as David

succeeded to the Louis Quinze pictorial riot--and that the French

contemporaries of Canova and Thorwaldsen, those literal, though

enthusiastic illustrators of Winckelmann's theories, should be Pradier

and Etex and the so-called Greek school. Pradier's Greek inspiration has

something Swiss about it, one may say--he was a Genevan--though his

figures were simple and largely treated. He had a keen sense for the

feminine element--the \_ewig Weibliche\_--and expressed it plastically

with a zest approaching gusto. Yet his statues are women rather than

statues, and, more than that, are handsome rather than beautiful. Etex,

it is to be feared, will be chiefly remembered as the unfortunately

successful rival of Rude in the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile decoration.

V

Having in each case more or less relation with, but really wholly

outside of and superior to all "schools" whatever--except the school of

nature, which permits as much freedom as it exacts fidelity--is the

succession of the greatest of French sculptors since the Renaissance and

down to the present day: Houdon, David d'Angers, Rude, Carpeaux, and

Barye. Houdon is one of the finest examples of the union of vigor with

grace. He will be known chiefly as a portraitist, but such a masterpiece

as his "Diana" shows how admirable he was in the sphere of purely

imaginative theme and treatment. Classic, and even conventionally

classic as it is, both in subject and in the way the subject is

handled--compared for example with M. Falguière's "Nymph Hunting," which

is simply a realistic Diana--it is designed and modelled with as much

personal freedom and feeling as if Houdon had been stimulated by the

ambition of novel accomplishment, instead of that of rendering with

truth and grace a time-honored and traditional sculptural motive. Its

treatment is beautifully educated and its effect refined, chaste, and

elevated in an extraordinary degree. No master ever steered so near the

reef of "clock-tops," one may say, and avoided it so surely and

triumphantly. The figure is light as air and wholly effortless at the

same time. There has rarely been such a distinguished success in

circumventing the great difficulty of sculpture--which is to rob marble

or metal of its specific gravity and make it appear light and buoyant,

just as the difficulty of the painter is to give weight and substance to

his fictions. But Houdon's admirable busts of Molière, Diderot,

Washington, Franklin, and Mirabeau, his unequalled statue of Voltaire in

the \_foyer\_ of the Français and his San Bruno in Santa Maria degli

Angeli at Rome are the works on which his fame will chiefly rest, and,

owing to their masterly combination of strength with style, rest

securely.

To see the work of David d'Angers, one must go to Angers itself and to

Père-Lachaise. The Louvre is lamentably lacking in anything truly

representative of this most eminent of all portraitists in sculpture, I

think, not excepting even Houdon, if one may reckon the mass as well as

the excellence of his remarkable production and the way in which it

witnesses that portraiture is just what he was born to do. The

"Philopoemen" of the Louvre is a fine work, even impressively large and

simple. But it is the competent work of a member of a school and leaves

one a little cold. Its academic quality quite overshadows whatever

personal feeling one may by searching find in the severity of its

treatment and the way in which a classic motive has been followed out

naturally and genuinely instead of perfunctorily. It gives no intimation

of the faculty that produced the splendid gallery of medallions

accentuated by an occasional bust and statue, of David's celebrated

contemporaries and quasi-contemporaries in every field of distinction.

It is impossible to overestimate the interest and value, the truth and

the art of these. Whether the subject be intractable or not seems to

have made no difference to David. He invariably produced a work of art

at the same time that he expressed the character of its motive with

uncompromising fidelity. His portraits, moreover, are pure sculpture.

There is nothing of the cameo-cutter's art about them. They are modelled

not carved. The outline is no more important than it is in nature, so

far as it is employed to the end of identification. It is used

decoratively. There are surprising effects of fore-shortening,

exhibiting superb, and as it were unconscious ease in handling

relief--that most difficult of illusions in respect of having no law (at

least no law that it is worth the sculptor's while to try to discover)

of correspondence to reality. Forms and masses have a definition and a

firmness wholly remarkable in their independence of the usual low

relief's reliance on pictorial and purely linear design. They do not

blend picturesquely with the background, and do not depend on their

suggestiveness for their character. They are always realized,

executed--sculpture in a word whose suggestiveness, quite as potent as

that of feebler executants, begins only when actual representation has

been triumphantly achieved instead of impotently and skilfully avoided.

Of Rude's genius one's first thought is of its robustness, its

originality. Everything he did is stamped with the impress of his

personality. At the same time it is equally evident that Rude's own

temperament took its color from the transitional epoch in which he

lived, and of which he was \_par excellence\_ the sculptor. He was the

true inheritor of his Burgundian traditions. His strongest side was that

which allies him with his artistic ancestor, Claux Sluters. But he

lived in an era of general culture and æstheticism, and all his

naturalistic tendencies were complicated with theory. He accepted the

antique not merely as a stimulus, but as a model. He was not only a

sculptor but a teacher, and the formulation of his didacticism

complicated considerably the free exercise of his expression. At the

last, as is perhaps natural, he reverted to precedent and formulary, and

in his "Hebe and the Eagle of Jupiter" and his "L'Amour Dominateur du

Monde," is more at variance than anywhere else with his native instinct,

which was, to cite the admirable phrase of M. de Fourcaud, \_extérioriser

nos idées et nos âmes\_. But throughout his life he halted a little

between two opinions--the current admiration of the classic, and his own

instinctive feeling for nature unsystematized and unsophisticated. His

"Jeanne d'Arc" is an instance. In spite of the violation of tradition,

which at the time it was thought to be, it seems to-day to our eyes to

err on the side of the conventional. It is surely intellectual, classic,

even factitious in conception as well as in execution. In some of its

accessories it is even modish. It illustrates not merely the abstract

turn of conceiving a subject which Rude always shared with the great

classicists of his art, but also the arbitrariness of treatment against

which he always protested. Without at all knowing it, he was in a very

intimate sense an eclectic in many of his works. He believed in forming

a complete mental conception of every composition before even posing a

model, as he used to tell his students, but in complicated compositions

this was impossible, and he had small talent for artificial composition.

Furthermore, he often distrusted--quite without reason, but after the

fatal manner of the rustic--his own intuitions. But one mentions these

qualifications of his genius and accomplishment only because both his

genius and accomplishment are so distinguished as to make one wish they

were more nearly perfect than they are. It is really idle to wish that

Rude had neglected the philosophy of his art, with which he was so much

occupied, and had devoted himself exclusively to treating sculptural

subjects in the manner of a nineteenth century successor of Sluters and

Anthoniet. He might have been a greater sculptor than he was, but he is

sufficiently great as he is. If his "Mercury" is an essay in

conventional sculpture, his "Petit Pêcheur" is frank and free sculptural

handling of natural material. His work at Lille and in Belgium, his

reclining figure of Cavaignac in the cemetery of Montmartre, his noble

figures of Gaspard Monge at Beaune, of Marshal Bertrand, and of Ney, are

all cast in the heroic mould, full of character, and in no wise

dependent on speculative theory. Few sculptors have displayed anything

like his variety and range, which extends, for example, from the

"Baptism of Christ" to a statue of "Louis XIII. enfant," and includes

portraits, groups, compositions in relief, and heroic statues. In all

his successful work one cannot fail to note the force and fire of the

man's personality, and perhaps what one thinks of chiefly in connection

with him is the misfortune which we owe to the vacillation of M. Thiers

of having but one instead of four groups by him on the piers of the Arc

de Triomphe de l'Étoile. Carpeaux used to say that he never passed the

"Chant du Départ" without taking off his hat. One can understand his

feeling. No one can have any appreciation of what sculpture is without

perceiving that this magnificent group easily and serenely takes its

rank among the masterpieces of sculpture of all time. It is, in the

first place, the incarnation of an abstraction, the spirit of patriotism

roused to the highest pitch of warlike intensity and self-sacrifice, and

in the second this abstract motive is expressed in the most elaborate

and comprehensive completeness--with a combined intricacy of detail and

singleness of effect which must be the despair of any but a master in

sculpture.

VI

Carpeaux perhaps never did anything that quite equals the masterpiece of

his master Rude. But the essential quality of the "Chant du Départ" he

assimilated so absolutely and so naturally that he made it in a way his

own. He carried it farther, indeed. If he never rose to the grandeur of

this superb group, and he certainly did not, he nevertheless showed in

every one of his works that he was possessed by its inspiration even

more completely than was Rude himself. His passion was the

representation of life, the vital and vivifying force in its utmost

exuberance, and in its every variety, so far as his experience could

enable him to render it. He was infatuated with movement, with the

attestation in form of nervous energy, of the quick translation of

thought and emotion into interpreting attitude. His figures are, beyond

all others, so thoroughly alive as to seem conscious of the fact and joy

of pure existence. They are animated, one may almost say inspired, with

the delight of muscular activity, the sensation of exercising the

functions with which nature endows them. And accompanying this supreme

motive and effect is a delightful grace and winningness of which few

sculptors have the secret, and which suggest more than any one else

Clodion's decorative loveliness. An even greater charm of sprite-like,

fairy attractiveness, of caressing and bewitching fascination, a more

penetrating and seductive engagingness plays about Carpeaux's "Flora," I

think, than is characteristic even of Clodion's figures and reliefs.

Carpeaux is at all events nearer to us, and if he has not the classic

detachment of Clodion he substitutes for it a quality of closer

attachment and more intimate appeal. He is at his best perhaps in the

"Danse" of the Nouvel Opéra façade, wherein his elfin-like grace and

exuberant vitality animate a group carefully, and even classically

composed, exhibiting skill and restraint as well as movement and fancy.

Possibly his temperament gives itself too free a rein in the group of

the Luxembourg Gardens, in which he has been accused by his own admirers

of sacrificing taste to turbulence and securing expressiveness at the

expense of saner and more truly sculptural aims. But fancy the

Luxembourg Gardens without "The Four Quarters of the World supporting

the Earth." Parisian censure of his exuberance is very apt to display a

conventional standard of criticism in the critic rather than to

substantiate its charge.

Barye's place in the history of art is more nearly unique, perhaps, than

that of any of the great artists. He was certainly one of the greatest

of sculptors, and he had either the good luck or the mischance to do

his work in a field almost wholly unexploited before him. He has in his

way no rivals, and in his way he is so admirable that the scope of his

work does not even hint at his exclusion from rivalry with the very

greatest of his predecessors. A perception of the truth of this apparent

paradox is the nearest one may come, I think, to the secret of his

excellence. No matter what you do, if you do it well enough, that is,

with enough elevation, enough spiritual distinction, enough

transmutation of the elementary necessity of technical perfection into

true significance--you succeed. And this is not the sense in which

motive in art is currently belittled. It is rather the suggestion of

Mrs. Browning's lines:

"Better far

Pursue a frivolous trade by serious means

Than a sublime art frivolously."

Nothing could be more misleading than to fancy Barye a kind of modern

Cellini. Less than any sculptor of modern times is he a decorative

artist. The small scale of his works is in great part due to his lack of

opportunity to produce larger ones. Nowadays one does what one can, even

the greatest artists; and Barye had no Lorenzo de'Medici for a patron,

but, instead, a frowning Institute, which confined him to such work as,

in the main, he did. He did it \_con amore\_ it need not be added, and

thus lifted it at once out of the customary category of such work. His

bronzes were never \_articles de Paris\_, and their excellence transcends

the function of teaching our sculptors and amateurs the lesson that

"household" is as dignified a province as monumental, art. His groups

are not essentially "clock-tops," and the work of perhaps the greatest

artist, in the line from Jean Goujon to Carpeaux can hardly be used to

point the moral that "clock-tops" ought to be good. Cellini's "Perseus"

is really more of a "parlor ornament" than Barye's smallest figure.

Why is he so obviously great as well as so obviously extraordinary? one

constantly asks himself in the presence of his bronzes. Perhaps because

he expresses with such concreteness, such definiteness and vigor a

motive so purely an abstraction. The illustration in intimate

elaboration of elemental force, strength, passion, seems to have been

his aim, and in everyone of his wonderfully varied groups he attains it

superbly--not giving the beholder a symbol of it merely; in no degree

depending upon association or convention, but exhibiting its very

essence with a combined scientific explicitness and poetic energy to

which antique art alone, one may almost say, has furnished a parallel.

For this, fauna served him as well as the human figure, though, could

he have studied man with the facility which the Jardin des Plantes

afforded him of observing the lower animals, he might have used the

medium of the human figure more frequently than he did. When he did, he

was hardly less successful; and the four splendid groups that decorate

the Pavillons Denon and Richelieu of the Louvre are in the very front

rank of the heroic sculpture of the modern world.

V

ACADEMIC SCULPTURE

I

From Barye to the Institute is a long way. Nothing could be more

interhostile than his sculpture and that of the professors at the École

des Beaux-Arts. And in considering the French sculpture of the present

day we may say that, aside from the great names already

mentioned--Houdon, David d'Angers, Rude, Carpeaux, and Barye--and apart

from the new movement represented by Rodin and Dalou, it is represented

by the Institute, and that the Institute has reverted to the Italian

inspiration. The influence of Canova and the example of Pradier and Etex

were not lasting. Indeed, Greek sculpture has perished so completely

that it sometimes seems to live only in its legend. With the modern

French school, the academic school, it is quite supplanted by the

sculpture of the Renaissance. And this is not unreasonable. The

Renaissance sculpture is modern; its masters did finely and perfectly

what since their time has been done imperfectly, but essentially its

artistic spirit is the modern artistic spirit, full of personality,

full of expression, careless of the type. Nowadays we patronize a little

the ideal. You may hear very intelligent critics in Paris--who in Paris

is not an intelligent critic?--speak disparagingly of the Greek want of

expression; of the lack of passion, of vivid interest, of significance

in a word, in Greek sculpture of the Periclean epoch. The conception of

absolute beauty having been discovered to be an abstraction, the

tradition of the purely ideal has gone with it. The caryatids of the

Erechtheum, the horsemen of the Parthenon frieze, the reliefs of the

Nike Apteros balustrade are admired certainly; but they are hardly

sympathetically admired; there is a tendency to relegate them to the

limbo of subjects for æsthetic lectures. And yet no one can have

carefully examined the brilliant productions of modern French sculpture

without being struck by this apparent paradox: that, whereas all its

canons are drawn from a study of the Renaissance, its chief

characteristic is, at bottom, a lack of expression, a carefulness for

the type. The explanation is this: in the course of time, which "at last

makes all things even," the individuality, the romanticism of the

Renaissance has itself become the type, is now itself become

"classical," and the modern attitude toward it, however sympathetic

compared with the modern attitude toward the antique, is to a noteworthy

degree factitious and artificial. And in art everything depends upon

the attitude of mind. It is this which prevents Ingres from being truly

Raphaelesque, and Pradier from being really classical. If, therefore, it

can justly be said of modern French sculpture that its sympathy for the

Renaissance sculpture obscures its vision of the ideal, it is clearly to

be charged with the same absence of individual significance with which

its thick-and-thin partisans reproach the antique. The circumstance

that, like the Renaissance sculpture, it deals far more largely in

pictorial expression than the antique does, is, if it deals in them

after the Renaissance fashion and not after a fashion of its own, quite

beside the essential fact. There is really nothing in common between an

academic French sculptor of the present day and an Italian sculptor of

the fifteenth century, except the possession of what is called the

modern spirit. But the modern spirit manifests itself in an enormous

gamut, and the differences of its manifestations are as great in their

way, and so far as our interest in them is concerned, as the difference

between their inspiration and the mediæval or the antique inspiration.

II

Chapu, who died a year or two ago, is perhaps the only eminent sculptor

of the time whose inspiration is clearly the antique, and when I add

that his work appears to me for this reason none the less original, it

will be immediately perceived that I share imperfectly the French

objection to the antique. Indeed, nowadays to have the antique

inspiration is to be original \_ex vi termini\_; nothing is farther

removed from contemporary conventions. But this is true in a much more

integral sense. The pre-eminent fact of Greek sculpture, for example,

is, from one point of view, the directness with which it concerns itself

with the ideal--the slight temporary or personal element with which it

is alloyed. When one calls an artist or a work Greek, this is what is

really meant; it is the sense in which Raphael is Greek. Chapu is Greek

in this way, and thus individualized among his contemporaries, not only

by having a different inspiration from them, but by depending for his

interest on no convention fixed or fleeting and on no indirect support

of accentuated personal characteristics. Perhaps the antiquary of a

thousand years from now, to whom the traits which to us distinguish so

clearly the work of certain sculptors who seem to have nothing in

common will betray only their common inspiration, will be even less at a

loss than ourselves to find traces of a common origin in such apparently

different works as Chapu's "Mercury" and his "Jeunesse" of the Regnault

monument. He will by no means confound these with the classical

productions of M. Millet or M. Cavelier, we may be sure. And this, I

repeat, because their purely Greek spirit, the subordination in their

conception and execution of the personal element, the direct way in

which the sculptor looks at the ideal, the type, not only distinguish

them among contemporary works, which are so largely personal

expressions, but give them an eminent individuality as well. Like the

Greek sculpture, they are plainly the production of culture, which in

restraining wilfulness, however happily inspired, and imposing measure

and poise, nevertheless acutely stimulates and develops the faculties

themselves. The skeptic who may very plausibly inquire the distinction

between that vague entity, "the ideal," and the personal idea of the

artist concerned with it, can be shown this distinction better than it

can be expressed in words. He will appreciate it very readily, to return

to Chapu, by contrasting the "Jeanne d'Arc" at the Luxembourg Gallery

with such different treatment of the same theme as M. Bastien-Lepage's

picture, now in the New York Metropolitan Museum, illustrates. Contrary

to his almost invariable practice of neglecting even design in favor of

impersonal natural representation, Bastien-Lepage's "Jeanne d'Arc" is

the creature of wilful originality, a sort of embodied protest against

conventionalism in historical painting; she is the illustration of a

theory, she is this and that systematically and not spontaneously; the

predominance of the painter's personality is plain in every detail of

his creation. Chapu's "Maid" is the ideal, more or less perfectly

expressed; she is everybody's "Maid," more or less adequately embodied.

The statue is the antipodes of the conventional much more so, even, to

our modern sense, than that of Rude; it suggests no competition with

that at Versailles or the many other characterless conceptions that

abound. It is full of expression--arrested just before it ceases to be

suggestive; of individuality restrained on the hither side of

peculiarity. The "Maid" is hearing her "voices" as distinctly as

Bastien-Lepage's figure is, but the fact is not forced upon the sense,

but is rather disclosed to the mind with great delicacy and the dignity

becoming sculpture. No one could, of course, mistake this work for an

antique--an error that might possibly be made, supposing the conditions

favorable, in the case of Chapu's "Mercury;" but it presents,

nevertheless, an excellent illustration of a modern working naturally

and freely in the antique spirit. It is as affecting, as full of direct

appeal, as a modern work essays to be; but its appeal is to the sense of

beauty, to the imagination, and its effect is wrought in virtue of its

art and not of its reality. No, individuality is no more inconsistent

with the antique spirit than it is with eccentricity, with the

extravagances of personal expression. Is there more individuality in a

thirteenth-century grotesque than in the "Faun" of the Capitol? For

sculpture especially, art is eminently, as it has been termed, "the

discipline of genius," and it is only after the sculptor's genius has

submitted to the discipline of culture that it evinces an individuality

which really counts, which is really thrown out in relief on the

background of crude personality. And if there be no question of

perfection, but only of the artist's attitude, one has but to ask

himself the real meaning of the epithet Shakespearian to be assured of

the harmony between individuality and the most impersonal practice.

Nevertheless, this attitude and this perfection, characteristic as they

are of Chapu's work, have their peril. When the quickening impulse, of

whose expression they are after all but conditions, fails, they suddenly

appear so misplaced as to render insignificant what would otherwise have

seemed "respectable" enough work. Everywhere else of great

distinction--even in the execution of so perfunctory a task as a

commission for a figure of "Mechanical Art" in the Tribunal de

Commerce--at the great Triennial Exposition of 1883 Chapu was simply

insignificant. There was never a more striking illustration of the

necessity of constant renewal of inspiration, of the constant danger of

lapse into the perfunctory and the hackneyed, which threatens an artist

of precisely Chapu's qualities. Another of equal eminence escapes this

peril; there is not the same interdependence of form and "content" to be

disturbed by failure in the latter; or, better still, the merits of form

are not so distinguished as to require imperatively a corresponding

excellence of intention. In fact, it is because of the exceptional

position that he occupies in deriving from the antique, instead of

showing the academic devotion to Renaissance romanticism which

characterizes the general movement of academic French sculpture, that in

any consideration of this sculpture Chapu's work makes a more vivid

impression than that of his contemporaries, and thus naturally takes a

foremost place.

III

M. Paul Dubois, for example, in the characteristics just alluded to,

presents the greatest possible contrast to Chapu; but he will never, we

may be sure, give us a work that could be called insignificant. His

work will always express himself, and his is a personality of very

positive idiosyncrasy. M. Dubois, indeed, is probably the strongest of

the Academic group of French sculptors of the day. The tomb of General

Lamoricière at Nantes has remained until recently one of the very finest

achievements of sculpture in modern times. There is in effect nothing

markedly superior in the Cathedral of St. Denis, which is a great deal

to say--much more, indeed, than the glories of the Italian Renaissance,

which lead us out of mere momentum to forget the French, permit one to

appreciate. Indeed, the sculpture of M. Dubois seems positively to have

but one defect, a defect which from one point of view is certainly a

quality, the defect of impeccability. It is at any rate impeccable; to

seek in it a blemish, or, within its own limitations, a distinct

shortcoming, is to lose one's pains. As workmanship, and workmanship of

the subtler kind, in which every detail of surface and structure is

perceived to have been intelligently felt (though rarely

enthusiastically rendered), it is not merely satisfactory, but visibly

and beautifully perfect. But in the category in which M. Dubois is to be

placed that is very little; it is always delightful, but it is not

especially complimentary to M. Dubois, to occupy one's self with it. On

the other hand, by impeccability is certainly not here meant the mere

success of expressing what one has to express--the impeccability of

Canova and his successors, for example. The difficulty is with M.

Dubois's ideal, with what he so perfectly expresses. In the last

analysis this is not his ideal more than ours. And this, indeed, is what

makes his work so flawless in our eyes, so impeccable. It seems as if of

what he attempts he attains the type itself; everyone must recognize its

justness.

The reader will say at once here that I am cavilling at M. Dubois for

what I praised in Chapu. But let us distinguish. The two artists belong

to wholly different categories. Chapu's inspiration is the antique

spirit. M. Dubois, is, like all academic French sculptors, except Chapu

indeed, absolutely and integrally a romanticist, completely enamoured of

the Renaissance. The two are so distinct as to be contradictory. The

moment M. Dubois gives us the \_type\_ in a "Florentine Minstrel," to the

exclusion of the personal and the particular, he fails in

imaginativeness and falls back on the conventional. The \_type\_ of a

"Florentine Minstrel" is infallibly a convention. M. Dubois, not being

occupied directly with the ideal, is bound to carry his subject and its

idiosyncrasies much farther than the observer could have foreseen. To

rest content with expressing gracefully and powerfully the notion common

to all connoisseurs is to fall short of what one justly exacts of the

romantic artist. Indeed, in exchange for this one would accept very

faulty work in this category with resignation. Whatever we may say or

think, however we may admire or approve, in romantic art the quality

that charms, that fascinates, is not adequacy but unexpectedness. In

addition to the understanding, the instinct demands satisfaction. The

virtues of "Charity" and "Faith" and the ideas of "Military Courage" and

"Meditation" could not be more adequately illustrated than by the

figures which guard the solemn dignity of General Lamoricière's sleep.

There is a certain force, a breadth of view in the general conception,

something in the way in which the sculptor has taken his task, closely

allied to real grandeur. The confident and even careless dependence upon

the unaided value of its motive, making hardly any appeal to the fancy

on the one hand, and seeking no poignant effect on the other, endues the

work with the poise and purity of effortless strength. It conveys to the

mind a clear impression of manliness, of qualities morally refreshing.

But such work educates us so inexorably, teaches us to be so exacting!

After enjoying it to its and our utmost, we demand still something else,

something more moving, more stirring, something more directly appealing

to our impulse and instinct. Even in his free and charming little "St.

John Baptist" of the Luxembourg, and his admirable bust of Baudry one

feels like asking for more freedom still, for more "swing." Dubois

certainly is the last artist who needs to be on his guard against

"letting himself go." Why is it that in varying so agreeably Renaissance

themes--compare the "Military Courage" and Michael Angelo's "Pensiero,"

or the "Charity" and the same group in Della Quercia's fountain at

Sienna--it is restraint, rather than audacity, that governs him? Is it

caution or perversity? In a word, imaginativeness is what permanently

interests and attaches, the imaginativeness to which in sculpture the

ordinary conventions of form are mere conditions, and the ordinary

conventions of idea mere material. One can hardly apply generalities of

the kind to M. Dubois without saying too much, but it is nevertheless

true that one may illustrate the grand style and yet fail of being

intimately and acutely sympathetic; and M. Dubois, to whose largeness of

treatment and nobility of conception no one will deny something truly

suggestive of the grand style, does thus fail. It is not that he does

not possess charm, and charm in no mean proportion to his largeness and

nobility, but for the elevation of these into the realm of magic, into

the upper air of spontaneous spiritual activity, his imagination has,

for the romantic imagination which it is, a trifle too much

self-possession--too much sanity, if one chooses. He has the ambitions,

the faculties, of a lyric poet, and he gives us too frequently

recitative.

IV

It is agreeable in many ways to turn from the rounded and complete

impeccability of M. Dubois to the fancy of M. Saint-Marceaux. More than

any of his rivals, M. Saint-Marceaux possesses the charm of

unexpectedness. He is not perhaps to be called an original genius, and

his work will probably leave French sculpture very nearly where it found

it. Indeed, one readily perceives that he is not free from the trammels

of contemporary convention. But how easily he wears them, and if no

"severe pains and birth-throes" accompany the evolution of his

conceptions, how graceful these conceptions are! They are perhaps of the

Canova family; the "Harlequin," for instance, which has had such a

prodigious success, is essentially Milanese sculpture; essentially even

the "Genius Guarding the Secret of the Tomb" is a fantastic rather than

an original work. But how the manner, the treatment, triumphs over the

Canova insipidity! It is not only Milanese sculpture better done, the

execution beautifully sapient and truthful instead of cheaply imitative,

the idea broadly enforced by the details instead of frittered away among

them; it is Milanese sculpture essentially elevated and dignified.

Loosely speaking, the mere \_article de vertu\_ becomes a true work of

art. And this transformation, or rather this development of a germ of

not too great intrinsic importance, is brought about in the work of

Saint-Marceaux by the presence of an element utterly foreign to the

Canova sculpture and its succession--the element of character. If to the

clever workmanship of the Italians he merely opposed workmanship of a

superior kind as well as quality--thoroughly artistic workmanship, that

is to say--his sculpture would be far less interesting than it is. He

does, indeed, noticeably do this; there is a felicity entirely

delightful, almost magical, in every detail of his work. But when one

compares it with the sculpture of M. Dubois, it is not of this that one

thinks so much as of a certain individual character with which M.

Saint-Marceaux always contrives to endue it. This is not always in its

nature sculptural, it must be admitted, and it approaches perhaps too

near the character of \_genre\_ to have the enduring interest that purely

sculptural qualities possess. But it is always individual, piquant, and

charming, and in it consists M. Saint-Marceaux's claim upon us as an

artist. No one else, even given his powers of workmanship, that is to

say as perfectly equipped as he, could have treated so thoroughly

conventional a \_genre\_ subject as the "Harlequin" as he has treated it.

The mask is certainly one of the stock properties of the subject, but

notice how it is used to confer upon the whole work a character of

mysterious witchery. It is as a whole, if you choose, an \_article de

Paris\_, with the distinction of being seriously treated; the modelling

and the movement admirable as far as they go, but well within the bounds

of that anatomically artistic expression which is the \_raison d'être\_ of

sculpture and its choice of the human form as its material. But the

character saves it from this category; what one may almost call its

psychological interest redeems its superficial triviality.

M. Saint-Marceaux is always successful in this way. One has only to look

at the eyes of his figures to be convinced how subtle is his art of

expressing character. Here he swings quite clear of all convention and

manifests his genius positively and directly. The unfathomable secret of

the tomb is in the spiritual expression of the guarding genius, and the

elaborately complex movement concentrated upon the urn and directly

inspired by the ephebes of the Sistine ceiling is a mere blind. The same

is true of the portrait heads which within his range M. Saint Marceaux

does better than almost anyone. M. Renan's "Confessions" hardly convey

as distinct a notion of character as his bust exhibited at the Triennial

of 1883. Many of the sculptors' anonymous heads, so to speak, are

hardly less remarkable. Long after the sharp edge of one's interest in

the striking pose of his "Harlequin" and the fine movement and bizarre

features of his "Genius" has worn away, their curious spiritual

interest, the individual \_cachet\_ of their character, will sustain them.

And so integrally true is this of all the productions of M.

Saint-Marceaux's talent, that it is quite as perceptible in works where

it is not accentuated and emphasized as it is in those of which I have

been speaking; it is a quality that will bear refining, that is even

better indeed in its more subtle manifestations. The figure of the

Luxembourg Gallery, the young Dante reading Virgil, is an example; a

girl's head, the forehead swathed in a turban, first exhibited some

years ago, is another. The charm of these is more penetrating, though

they are by no means either as popular or as "important" works as the

"Genius of the Tomb" or the "Harlequin." In the time to come M.

Saint-Marceaux will probably rely more and more on their quality of

grave and yet alert distinction, and less on striking and eccentric

variations of themes from Michael Angelo like the "Genius," and

illustrations like the "Harlequin" of the artistic potentialities of the

Canova sculpture.

With considerably less force than M. Dubois and decidedly less piquancy

than M. Saint-Marceaux, M. Antonin Mercié has perhaps greater

refinement than either. His outline is a trifle softer, his sentiment

more gracious, more suave. His work is difficult to characterize

satisfactorily, and the fact may of course proceed from its lack of

force, as well as from the well-understood difficulty of translating

into epithets anything so essentially elusive as suavity and grace of

form. At one epoch in any examination of academic French sculpture that

of M. Mercié seems the most interesting; it is so free from exaggeration

of any kind on the one hand, it realizes its idea so satisfactorily on

the other, and this idea is so agreeable, so refined, and at the same

time so dignified. The "David" is an early work now in the Luxembourg

gallery, reproductions of which are very popular, and the reader may

judge how well it justifies these remarks. Being an early work, one

cannot perhaps insist on its originality; in France, a young sculptor

must be original at his peril; his education is so complete, he must

have known and studied the beauties of classic sculpture so thoroughly,

that not to be impressed by them so profoundly as to display his

appreciativeness in his first work is apt to argue a certain

insensitiveness. And every one cannot have creative genius. What a

number of admirable works we should be compelled to forego if creative

genius were demanded of an artist of the present day when the best

minds of the time are occupied with other things than art! One is apt to

forget that in our day the minds that correspond with the artistic

miracles of the Renaissance are absorbed in quite different departments

of effort. M. Mercié's "David" would perhaps never have existed but for

Donatello's. As far as plastic motive is concerned, it may without

injustice be called a variant of that admirable creation, and from every

point of view except that of dramatic grace it is markedly inferior to

its inspiration; as an embodiment of triumphant youth, of the divine

ease with which mere force is overcome, it has only a superficial

resemblance to the original.

But if with M. Mercié "David" was simply a classic theme to be treated,

which is exactly what it of course was not with Donatello, it is

undeniable that he has expressed himself very distinctly in his

treatment. A less sensitive artist would have vulgarized instead of

merely varying the conception, whereas one can easily see in M. Mercié's

handling of it the ease, science, and felicitous movement that have

since expressed themselves more markedly, more positively, but hardly

more unmistakably, in the sculptor's maturer works. Of these the chief

is perhaps the "Gloria Victis," which now decorates the Square

Montholon; and its identity of authorship with the "David" is apparent

in spite of its structural complexity and its far greater importance

both in subject and execution. Its subject is the most inspiring that a

French sculptor since the events of 1870-71 (so lightly considered by

those who only see the theatric side of French character) could treat.

Its general interest, too, is hardly inferior; there is something

generally ennobling in the celebration of the virtues of the brave

defeated that surpasses the commonplace of pæans. M. Mercié was, in this

sense, more fortunate than the sculptor to whom the Berlinese owe the

bronze commemoration of their victory. Perhaps to call his treatment

entirely worthy of the theme, is to forget the import of such works as

the tombs of the Medici Chapel at Florence. There is a region into whose

precincts the dramatic quality penetrates only to play an insufficient

part. But in modern art to do more than merely to keep such truths in

mind, to insist on satisfactory plastic illustrations of them, is not

only to prepare disappointment for one's self, but to risk misjudging

admirable and elevated effort; and to regret the fact that France had

only M. Mercié and not Michael Angelo to celebrate her "Gloria Victis"

is to commit both of these errors. After all, the subjects are

different, and the events of 1870-71 had compensations for France which

the downfall of Florentine liberty was without; so that, indeed, a note

of unmixed melancholy, however lofty its strain, would have been a

discord which M. Mercié has certainly avoided. He has avoided it in

rather a marked way, it is true. His monument is dramatic and stirring

rather than inwardly moving. It is rhetorical rather than truly poetic;

and the admirable quality of its rhetoric, its complete freedom from

vulgar or sentimental alloy--its immense superiority to Anglo-Saxon

rhetoric, in fine--does not conceal the truth that it is rhetoric, that

it is prose and not poetry after all. Mercié's "Gloria Victis" is very

fine; I know nothing so fine in modern sculpture outside of France. But

then there is not very much that is fine at all in modern sculpture

outside of France; and modern French sculpture, and M. Mercié along with

it as one of its most eminent ornaments, have made it impossible to

speak of them in a relative way. The antique and the Renaissance

sculpture alone furnish their fit association, and like the Renaissance

and the antique sculpture they demand a positive and absolute, and not a

comparative criticism.

V

Well, then, speaking thus absolutely and positively, the cardinal defect

of the Institute sculpture--and the refined and distinguished work of M.

Mercié better perhaps than almost any other assists us to see this--is

its over-carefulness for style. This is indeed the explanation of what I

mentioned at the outset as the chief characteristic of this sculpture,

the academic inelasticity, namely, with which it essays to reproduce the

Renaissance romanticism. But for the fondness for style integral in the

French mind and character, it would perceive the contradiction between

this romanticism and any canons except such as are purely intuitive and

indefinable. In comparison with the Renaissance sculptors, the French

academic sculptors of the present day are certainly too exclusive

devotees of Buffon's "order and movement," and too little occupied with

the thought itself--too little individual. In comparison with the

antique, this is less apparent, but I fancy not less real. We are so

accustomed to think of the antique as the pure and simple embodiment of

style, as a sublimation, so to speak of the individual into style

itself, that in this respect we are scarcely fair judges of the antique.

In any case we know very little of it; we can hardly speak of it except

by periods. But it is plain that the Greek is so superior to any

subsequent sculpture in this one respect of style that we rarely think

of its other qualities. Our judgment is inevitably a comparative one,

and inevitably a comparative judgment fixes our attention on the Greek

supremacy of style. Indeed, in looking at the antique the thought

itself is often alien to us, and the order and movement, being more

nearly universal perhaps, are all that occupy us. A family tombstone

lying in the cemetery at Athens, and half buried in the dust which blows

from the Piræus roadway, has more style than M. Mercié's "Quand-Même"

group for Belfort, which has been the subject of innumerable encomiums,

and which has only style and no individuality whatever to commend it.

And the Athenian tombstone was probably furnished to order by the

marble-cutting artist of the period, corresponding to those whose signs

one sees at the entrances of our own large cemeteries. Still we may be

sure that the ordinary Athenian citizen who adjudged prizes between

Æschylus and Sophocles, and to whom Pericles addressed the oration which

only exceptional culture nowadays thoroughly appreciates, found plenty

of individuality in the decoration of the Parthenon, and was perfectly

conscious of the difference between Phidias and his pupils. Even now, if

one takes the pains to think of it, the difference between such works as

the so-called "Genius" of the Vatican and the Athenian marbles, or

between the Niobe group at Florence and the Venus torso at Naples, for

example, seems markedly individual enough, though the element of style

is still to our eyes the most prominent quality in each. Indeed, if one

really reflects upon the subject, it will not seem exaggeration to say

that to anyone who has studied both with any thoroughness it would be

more difficult to individualize the mass of modern French sculpture than

even that of the best Greek epoch--the epoch when style was most

perfect, when its reign was, as it sometimes appears to us, most

absolute. And if we consider the Renaissance sculpture, its complexity

is so great, its individuality is so pronounced, that one is apt to lose

sight of the important part which style really plays in it. In a work by

Donatello we see first of all his thought; in a Madonna of Mino's it is

the idea that charms us; the Delia Robbia frieze at Pistoja is pure

\_genre\_.

But modern academic French sculpture feels the weight of De Musset's

handicap--it is born too late into a world too old. French art in

general feels this, I think, and painting suffers from it equally with

sculpture. Culture, the Institute, oppress individuality. But whereas

Corot and Millet have triumphed over the Institute there are--there

were, at least, till yesterday--hardly any Millets and Corots of

sculpture whose triumph is as yet assured. The tendency, the weight of

authority, the verdict of criticism, always conservative in France, are

all the other way. At the École des Beaux-Arts one learns, negatively,

not to be ridiculous. This is a great deal; it is more than can be

learned anywhere else nowadays--witness German, Italian, above all

English exhibitions. Positively one learns the importance of style; and

if it were not for academic French sculpture, one would say that this

was something the importance of which could not be exaggerated. But in

academic French sculpture it is exaggerated, and, what is fatal, one

learns to exaggerate it in the schools. The traditions of Houdon are

noticeably forgotten. Not that Houdon's art is not eminently

characterized by style; the "San Bruno" at Rome is in point of style an

antique. But compare his "Voltaire" in the foyer of the Comédie

Française with Chapu's "Berryer" of the Palais de Justice, to take one

of the very finest portrait-statues of the present day. Chapu's statue

is more than irreproachable, it is elevated and noble, it is in the

grand style; but it is plain that its impressiveness is due to the fact

that the subject is conceived as the Orator in general and handled with

almost a single eye to style. The personal interest that accentuates

every detail of the "Voltaire"--the physiognomy, the pose, the right

hand, are marvellously characteristic--simply is not sought for in

Chapu's work. Of this quality there is more in Houdon's bust of Molière,

whom of course Houdon never saw, than in almost any production of the

modern school. Chapu's works, and such exceptions as the heads of Baudry

and Renan already mentioned, apart, one perceives that the modern

school has made too many statues of the République, too many "Ledas" and

"Susannahs" and "Quand-Mêmes" and "Gloria Victis." And its penchant for

Renaissance canons only emphasizes the absolute commonplace of many of

these.

On the other hand, if Houdon's felicitous harmony of style and

individual force are forgotten, there is hardly any recognized

succession to the imaginative freedom, the \_verve\_, the triumphant

personal fertility of Rude and Carpeaux. At least, such as there is has

not preserved the dignity and in many instances scarcely the decorum of

those splendid artists. Much of the sculpture which figures at the

yearly Salons is, to be sure, the absolute negation of style; its main

characteristic is indeed eccentricity; its main virtues, sincerity

(which in art, of course, is only a very elementary virtue) and good

modelling (which in sculpture is equally elementary). Occasionally in

the midst of this display of fantasticality there is a work of promise

or even of positive interest. The observer who has not a weak side for

the graceful conceits, invariably daintily presented and beautifully

modelled, of M. Moreau-Vauthier for example, must be hard to please;

they are of the very essence of the \_article de Paris\_, and only

abnormal primness can refuse to recognize the truth that the \_article

de Paris\_ has its art side. M. Moreau-Vauthier is not perhaps a modern

Cellini; he has certainly never produced anything that could be classed

with the "Perseus" of the Loggia de' Lanzi, or even with the

Fontainebleau "Diana;" but he does more than anyone else to keep alive

the tradition of Florentine preciosity, and about everything he does

there is something delightful.

Still the fantastic has not made much headway in the Institute, and it

is so foreign to the French genius, which never tolerates it after it

has ceased to be novel, that it probably never will. It is a great

tribute to French "catholicity of mind and largeness of temper" that

Carpeaux's "La Danse" remains in its position on the façade of the Grand

Opéra. French sentiment regarding it was doubtless accurately expressed

by the fanatic who tried to ink it indelibly after it was first exposed.

This vandal was right from his point of view--the point of view of

style. Almost the one work of absolute spontaneity among the hundreds

which without and within decorate M. Garnier's edifice, it is thus a

distinct jar in the general harmony; it distinctly mars the "order and

movement" of M. Garnier's thought, which is fundamentally opposed to

spontaneity. But imagine the devotion to style of a \_milieu\_ in which a

person who would throw ink on a confessedly fine work of art is

actuated by an impersonal dislike of incongruity! Dislike of the

incongruous is almost a French passion, and, like all qualities, it has

its defect, the defect of tolerating the conventional. It is through

this tolerance, for example, that one of the freest of French critics of

art, a true Voltairian, Stendhal, was led actually to find Guido's ideal

of beauty higher than Raphael's, and to miss entirely the grandeur of

Tintoretto. Critical opinion in France has not changed radically since

Stendhal's day.

VI

The French sculptor may draw his inspiration from the sources of

originality itself, his audience will measure the result by conventions.

It is this fact undoubtedly that is largely responsible for the

over-carefulness for style already remarked. Hence the work of M.

Aimé-Millet and of Professors Guillaume and Cavelier, and the fact that

they are professors. Hence also the election of M. Falguière to succeed

to the chair of the Beaux-Arts left vacant by the death of Jouffroy some

years ago. All of these have done admirable work. Professor Guillaume's

Gracchi group at the Luxembourg is alone enough to atone for a mass of

productions of which the "Castalian Fount" of a recent Salon is the

cold and correct representative. Cavalier's "Gluck," destined for the

Opéra, is spirited, even if a trifle galvanic. Millet's "Apollo," which

crowns the main gable of the Opéra, stands out among its author's other

works as a miracle of grace and rhythmic movement. M. Falguière's

admirers, and they are numerous, will object to the association here

made. Falguière's range has always been a wide one, and everything he

has done has undoubtedly merited a generous portion of the prodigious

encomiums it has invariably obtained. Yet, estimating it in any other

way than by energy, variety, and mass, it is impossible to praise it

highly with precision. It is too plainly the work of an artist who can

do one thing as well as another, and of which cleverness is, after all,

the spiritual standard. Bartholdi, who also should not be forgotten in

any sketch of French sculpture, would, I am sure, have acquitted himself

more satisfactorily than Falguière did in the colossal groups of the

Trocadéro and the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile. To acquit himself

satisfactorily is Bartholdi's specialty. These two groups are the

largest and most important that a sculptor can have to do. The crowning

of the Arc de Triomphe at least was a splendid opportunity. Neither of

them had any distinction of outline, of mass, of relation, or of idea.

Both were conventional to the last degree. That on the Arc had even its

ludicrous details, such as occur only from artistic absent-mindedness in

a work conceived and executed in a fatigued and hackneyed spirit. The

"Saint Vincent de Paul" of the Panthéon, which justly passes for the

sculptor's \_chef-d'oeuvre\_ is in idea a work of large humanity. M.

Falguière is behind no one in ability to conceive a subject of this kind

with propriety, and his subject here is inspiring if ever a subject was.

The "Petit Martyr" of the Luxembourg has a real charm, but it too is

content with too little, as one finds out in seeing it often; and it is

in no sense a large work, scarcely larger than the tiresomely popular

"Running Boy" of the same museum, which nevertheless in its day marked

an epoch in modelling. Indeed, so slight is the spiritual hold that M.

Falguière has on one, that it really seems as if he were at his best in

such a frankly carnal production as his since variously modified "Nymph

Hunting" of the Triennial Exposition of 1883. The idea is nothing or

next to nothing, but the surface \_faire\_ is superb.

M. Barrias, M. Delaplanche, and M. Le Feuvre have each of them quite as

much spontaneity as M. Falguière, though the work of neither is as

important in mass and variety. M. Delaplanche is always satisfactory,

and beyond this there is something large about what he does that confers

dignity even in the absence of quick interest. His proportions are

simple, his outline flowing, and the agreeable ease of his compositions

makes up to a degree for any lack of sympathetic sentiment or impressive

significance: witness his excellent "Maternal Instruction," of the

little park in front of Sainte Clothilde. M. Le Feuvre's qualities are

very nearly the reverse of these: he has a fondness for integrity quite

hostile in his case to simplicity. In his very frank appeal to one's

susceptibility he is a little careless of sculptural considerations,

which he is prone to sacrifice to pictorial ends. The result is a

mannerism that in the end ceases to impress, and even becomes

disagreeable. As nearly as may be in a French sculptor it borders on

sentimentality, and finally the swaying attitudes of his figures become

limp, and the startled-fawn eyes of his maidens and youths appear less

touching than lackadaisical. But his being himself too conscious of it

should not obscure the fact that he has a way of his own. M. Barrias is

an artist of considerably greater powers than either M. Le Feuvre or M.

Delaplanche; but one has a vague perception that his powers are limited,

and that to desire in his case what one so sincerely wishes in the case

of M. Dubois, namely, that he would "let himself go," would be unwise.

Happily, when he is at his best there is no temptation to form such a

wish. The "Premières Funérailles" is a superb work--"the chef-d'oeuvre

of our modern sculpture," a French critic enthusiastically terms it. It

is hardly that; it has hardly enough spiritual distinction--not quite

enough of either elegance or elevation--to merit such sweeping praise.

But it may be justly termed, I think, the most completely representative

of the masterpieces of that sculpture. Its triumph over the prodigious

difficulties of elaborate composition "in the round"--difficulties to

which M. Barrias succumbed in the "Spartacus" of the Tuileries

Gardens--and its success in subordinating the details of a group to the

end of enforcing a single motive, preserving the while their individual

interest, are complete. Nothing superior in this respect has been done

since John of Bologna's "Rape of the Sabines."

VII

M. Emmanuel Frémiet occupies a place by himself. There have been but two

modern sculptors who have shown an equally pronounced genius for

representing animals--namely, Barye, of course, and Barye's clever but

not great pupil, Cain. The tigress in the Central Park, perhaps the best

bronze there (the competition is not exacting), and the best also of the

several variations of the theme of which, at one time, the sculptor

apparently could not tire, familiarizes Americans with the talent of

Cain. In this association Rouillard, whose horse in the Trocadéro

Gardens is an animated and elegant work, ought to be mentioned, but it

is hardly as good as the neighboring elephant of Frémiet as mere animal

representation (the \_genre\_ exists and has excellences and defects of

its own), while in more purely artistic worth it is quite eclipsed by

its rival. Still if \_fauna\_ is interesting in and of itself, which no

one who knows Barye's work would controvert, it is still more

interesting when, to put it brutally, something is done with it. In his

ambitious and colossal work at the Trocadéro, M. Frémiet does in fact

use his \_fauna\_ freely as artistic material, though at first sight it is

its zoölogical interest that appears paramount. The same is true of the

elephant near by, in which it seems as if he had designedly attacked the

difficult problem of rendering embodied awkwardness decorative. Still

more conspicuous, of course, is the artistic interest, the fancy, the

humor, the sportive grace of his Luxembourg group of a young satyr

feeding honey to a brace of bear's cubs, because he here concerns

himself more directly with his idea and gives his genius freer play. And

everyone will remember the sensation caused by his impressively

repulsive "Gorilla Carrying off a Woman." But it is when he leaves this

kind of thing entirely, and, wholly forgetful of his studies at the

Jardin des Plantes, devotes himself to purely monumental work, that he

is at his best. And in saying this I do not at all mean to insist on the

superiority of monumental sculpture to the sculpture of \_fauna\_; it is

superior, and Barye himself cannot make one content with the exclusive

consecration of admirable talent to picturesque anatomy illustrating

distinctly unintellectual passions. M. Frémiet, in ecstasy over his

picturesque anatomy at the Jardin des Plantes, would scout this; but it

is nevertheless true that in such works as the "Âge de la pierre,"

which, if it may be called a monumental clock-top, is nevertheless

certainly monumental; his "Louis d'Orléans," in the quadrangle of the

restored Château de Pierrefonds; his "Jeanne d'Arc" (the later statue is

not, I think, essentially different from the earlier one); and his

"Torch-bearer" of the Middle Ages, in the new Hôtel de Ville of Paris,

not only is his subject a subject of loftier and more enduring interest

than his elephants and deer and bears, but his own genius finds a more

congenial medium of expression. In other words, any one who has seen his

"Torch-bearer" or his "Louis d'Orléans" must conclude that M. Frémiet is

losing his time at the Jardin des Plantes. In monumental works of the

sort he displays a commanding dignity that borders closely upon the

grand style itself. The "Jeanne d'Arc" is indeed criticised for lack of

style. The horse is fine, as always with M. Frémiet; the action of both

horse and rider is noble, and the homogeneity of the two, so to speak,

is admirably achieved. But the character of the Maid is not perfectly

satisfactory to \_à priori\_ critics, to critics who have more or less

hard and fast notions about the immiscibility of the heroic and the

familiar. The "Jeanne d'Arc" is of course a heroic statue, illustrating

one of the most puissant of profane legends; and it is unquestionably

familiar and, if one chooses, defiantly unpretentious. Perhaps the Maid

as M. Frémiet represents her could never have accomplished

legend-producing deeds. Certainly she is the Maid neither of Chapu, nor

of Bastien-Lepage, nor of the current convention. She is, rather,

pretty, sympathetically childlike, \_mignonne\_; but M. Frémiet's

conception is an original and a gracious one, and even the critic

addicted to formulæ has only to forget its title to become thoroughly in

love with it; beside this merit \_à priori\_ shortcomings count very

little. But the other two works just mentioned are open to no objection

of this kind or of any other, and in the category to which they belong

they are splendid works. Since Donatello and Verrocchio nothing of the

kind has been done which surpasses them; and it is only M. Frémiet's

penchant for animal sculpture, and his fondness for exercising his

lighter fancy in comparatively trivial \_objets de vertu\_, that obscure

in any degree his fine talent for illustrating the grand style with

natural ease and large simplicity.

VIII

I have already mentioned the most representative among those who have

"arrived" of the school of academic French sculpture as it exists

to-day, though it would be easy to extend the list with Antonin Carlès,

whose "Jeunesse" of the World's Fair of 1889 is a very graceful

embodiment of adolescence; Suchetet, whose "Byblis" of the same

exhibition caused his early death to be deplored; Adrien Gaudez,

Etcheto, Idrac, and, of course, many others of distinction. There is no

looseness in characterizing this as a "school;" it has its own qualities

and its corresponding defects. It stands by itself--apart from the Greek

sculpture and from its inspiration, the Renaissance, and from the more

recent traditions of Houdon, or of Rude and Carpeaux. It is a thoroughly

legitimate and unaffected expression of national thought and feeling at

the present time, at once splendid and simple. The moment of triumph in

any intellectual movement is, however, always a dangerous one. A

slack-water period of intellectual slothfulness nearly always ensues.

Ideas which have previously been struggling to get a hearing have

become accepted ideas that have almost the force of axioms; no one

thinks of their justification, of their basis in real truth and fact;

they take their place in the great category of conventions. The mind

feels no longer the exhilaration of discovery, the stimulus of fresh

perception; the sense becomes jaded, enthusiasm impossible. Dealing with

the same material and guided by the same principles, its production

becomes inevitably hackneyed, artificial, lifeless; the \_Zeit-Geist\_,

the Time-Spirit, is really a kind of Sisyphus, and the essence of life

is movement. This law of perpetual renewal, of the periodical quickening

of the human spirit, explains the barrenness of the inheritance of the

greatest men; shows why originality is a necessary element of

perfection; why Phidias, Praxiteles, Donatello, Michael Angelo (not to

go outside of our subject), had no successors. Once a thing is done it

is done for all time, and the study of perfection itself avails only as

a stimulus to perfection in other combinations. In fact, the more nearly

perfect the model the greater the necessity for an absolute break with

it in order to secure anything like an equivalent in living force; in

\_its\_ direction at least everything vital has been done. So its lack of

original force, its over-carefulness for style, its inevitable

sensitiveness to the criticism that is based on convention, make the

weak side of the French academic sculpture of the present day, fine and

triumphant as it is. That the national thought and feeling are not a

little conventional, and have the academic rather than a spontaneous

inspiration, has, however, lately been distinctly felt as a misfortune

and a limitation by a few sculptors whose work may be called the

beginning of a new movement out of which, whatever may be its own

limitations, nothing but good can come to French sculpture and of which

the protagonists are Auguste Rodin and Jules Dalou.

VI

THE NEW MOVEMENT IN SCULPTURE

I

Side by side with the academic current in French art has moved of recent

years a naturalist and romantic impulse whose manifestations have been

always vigorous though occasionally exaggerated. In any of the great

departments of activity nationally pursued--as art has been pursued in

France since Francis I.--there are always these rival currents, of which

now one and now the other constantly affects the ebb and flow of the

tide of thought and feeling. The classic and romantic duel of 1830, the

rise of the naturalist opposition to Hugo and romanticism in our own

day, are familiar instances of this phenomenon in literature. The revolt

of Géricault and Delacroix against David and Ingres are equally well

known in the field of painting. Of recent years the foundation of the

periodical \_L'Art\_ and its rivalry with the conservative \_Gazette des

Beaux Arts\_ mark with the same definiteness, and an articulate

precision, the same conflict between truth, as new eyes see it, and

tradition. Never, perhaps, since the early Renaissance, however, has

nature asserted her supremacy over convention in such unmistakable, such

insistent, and, one may say, I think, such intolerant fashion as she is

doing at the present moment. Sculpture, in virtue of the defiant

palpability of its material, is the most impalpable of the plastic arts,

and therefore it feels less quickly than the rest, perhaps, the impress

of the influences of the epoch and their classifying canons. Natural

imitation shows first in sculpture, and subsists in it longest. But

convention once its conqueror, the return to nature is here most tardy,

because, owing to the impalpable, the elusive quality of sculpture,

though natural standards may everywhere else be in vogue, no one thinks

of applying them to so specialized an expression. Its variation depends

therefore more completely on the individual artist himself. Niccolò

Pisano, for example, died when Giotto was two years old, but, at the

other end of the historic line of modern art, it has taken years since

Delacroix to furnish recognition for Auguste Rodin. The stronghold of

the Institute had been mined many times by revolutionary painters before

Dalou took the grand medal of the Salon.

Owing to the relative and in fact polemic position which these two

artists occupy, the movement which they represent, and of which as yet

they themselves form a chief part, a little obscures their respective

personalities, which are nevertheless, in sculpture, by far the most

positive and puissant of the present epoch. M. Rodin's work, especially,

is so novel that one's first impression in its presence is of its

implied criticism of the Institute. One thinks first of its attitude,

its point of view, its end, aim, and means, and of the utter contrast of

these with those of the accepted contemporary masters in his art--of

Dubois and Chapu, Mercié and Saint-Marceaux. One judges generally, and

instinctively avoids personal and direct impressions. The first thought

is not, Are the "Saint Jean" and the "Bourgeois de Calais" successful

works of art? But, \_Can\_ they be successful if the accepted masterpieces

of modern sculpture are not to be set down as insipid? One is a little

bewildered. It is easy to see and to estimate the admirable traits and

the shortcomings of M. Dubois's delightful and impressive reminiscences

of the Renaissance, of M. Mercié's refined and graceful compositions.

They are of their time and place. They embody, in distinguished manner

and in an accentuated degree, the general inspiration. Their spiritual

characteristics are traditional and universal, and technically, without

perhaps often passing beyond it, they exhaust cleverness. You may enjoy

or resent their classic and exemplary excellences, as you feel your

taste to have suffered from the lack or the superabundance of academic

influences; I cannot fancy an American insensitive to their charm. But

it is plain that their perfection is a very different thing from the

characteristics of a strenuous artistic personality seeking expression.

If these latter when encountered are seen to be evidently of an

extremely high order, contemporary criticism, at all events, should feel

at once the wisdom of beginning with the endeavor to appreciate, instead

of making the degree of its own familiarity with them the test of their

merit.

French æsthetic authority, which did this in the instances of Barye, of

Delacroix, of Millet, of Manet, of Puvis de Chavannes, did it also for

many years in the instance of M. Rodin. It owes its defeat in the

contest with him--for like the recalcitrants in the other contests, M.

Rodin has definitively triumphed--to the unwise attempt to define him in

terms heretofore applicable enough to sculptors, but wholly inapplicable

to him. It failed to see that the thing to define in his work was the

man himself, his temperament, his genius. Taken by themselves and

considered as characteristics of the Institute sculptors, the obvious

traits of this work might, that is to say, be adjudged eccentric and

empty. Fancy Professor Guillaume suddenly subordinating academic

disposition of line and mass to true structural expression! One would

simply feel the loss of his accustomed style and harmony. With M. Rodin,

who deals with nature directly, through the immediate force of his own

powerful temperament, to feel the absence of the Institute training and

traditions is absurd. The question in his case is simply whether or no

he is a great artistic personality, an extraordinary and powerful

temperament, or whether he is merely a turbulent and capricious

protestant against the measure and taste of the Institute. But this is

really no longer a question, however it may have been a few years ago;

and when his Dante portal for the new Palais des Arts Décoratifs shall

have been finished, and the public had an opportunity to see what the

sculptor's friend and only serious rival, M. Dalou, calls "one of the

most, if not the most original and astonishing pieces of sculpture of

the nineteenth century," it will be recognized that M. Rodin, so far

from being amenable to the current canon, has brought the canon itself

to judgment.

How and why, people will perceive in proportion to their receptivity.

Candor and intelligence will suffice to appreciate that the secret of M.

Rodin's art is structural expression, and that it is this and not any

superficial eccentricity of execution that definitely distinguishes him

from the Institute. Just as his imagination, his temperament, his

spiritual energy and ardor individualize the positive originality of his

motive, so the expressiveness of his treatment sets him aside from all

as well as from each of the Institute sculptors in what may be broadly

called technical attitude. No sculptor has ever carried expression

further. The sculpture of the present day has certainly not occupied

itself much with it. The Institute is perhaps a little afraid of it. It

abhors the \_baroque\_ rightly enough, but very likely it fails to see

that the expression of such sculpture as M. Rodin's no more resembles

the contortions of the Dresden Museum giants than it does the composure

of M. Delaplanche. The \_baroque\_ is only violent instead of placid

commonplace, and is as conventional as any professor of sculpture could

desire. Expression means individual character completely exhibited

rather than conventionally suggested. It is certainly not too much to

say that in the sculpture of the present day the sense of individual

character is conveyed mainly by convention. The physiognomy has usurped

the place of the physique, the gesture of the form, the pose of the

substance. And face, gesture, form are, when they are not brutally

naturalistic and so not art at all, not individual and native, but

typical and classic. Very much of the best modern sculpture might really

have been treated like those antique figurines of which the bodies were

made by wholesale, being supplied with individual heads when the time

came for using them.

This has been measurably true since the disappearance of the classic

dress and the concealment of the body by modern costume. The nudes of

the early Renaissance, in painting still more than in sculpture, are

differentiated by the faces. The rest of the figure is generally

conventionalized as thoroughly as the face itself is in Byzantine and

the hands in Giottesque painting. Giotto could draw admirably, it need

not be said. He did draw as well as the contemporary feeling for the

human figure demanded. When the Renaissance reached its climax and the

study of the antique led artists to look beneath drapery and interest

themselves in the form, expression made an immense step forward. Color

was indeed almost lost sight of in the new interest, not to reappear

till the Venetians. But owing to the lack of visible nudity, to the lack

of the classic gymnasia, to the concealments of modern attire, the

knowledge of and interest in the form remained, within certain limits,

an esoteric affair. The general feeling, even where, as in the Italy of

the \_quattro\_ and \_cinque centi\_, everyone was a connoisseur, did not

hold the artist to expression in his anatomy as the general Greek

feeling did. Everyone was a connoisseur of art alone, not of nature as

well. Consequently, in spite of such an enthusiastic genius as

Donatello, who probably more than any other modern has most nearly

approached the Greeks--not in spiritual attitude, for he was eminently

of his time, but in his attitude toward nature--the human form in art

has for the most part remained, not conventionalized as in the Byzantine

and Gothic times, but thoroughly conventional. Michael Angelo himself

certainly may be charged with lending the immense weight of his majestic

genius to perpetuate the conventional. It is not his distortion of

nature, as pre-Raphaelite limitedness glibly asserts, but his

carelessness of her prodigious potentialities, that marks one side of

his colossal accomplishment. Just as the lover of architecture as

architecture will protest that Michael Angelo's was meretricious,

however inspiring, so M. Rodin declares his sculpture unsatisfactory,

however poetically impressive. "He used to do a little anatomy

evenings," he said to me, "and used his chisel next day without a model.

He repeats endlessly his one type--the youth of the Sistine ceiling. Any

particular felicity of expression you are apt to find him borrowing from

Donatello--such as, for instance, the movement of the arm of the

'David,' which is borrowed from Donatello's 'St. John Baptist.'" Most

people to whom Michael Angelo's creations appear celestial in their

majesty at once and in their winningness would deny this. But it is

worth citing both because M. Rodin strikes so many crude apprehensions

as a French Michael Angelo, whereas he is so radically removed from him

in point of view and in practice that the unquestionable spiritual

analogy between them is rather like that between kindred spirits working

in different arts, and because, also, it shows not only what M. Rodin is

not, but what he is. The grandiose does not run away with him. His

imagination is occupied largely in following out nature's suggestions.

His sentiment does not so drench and saturate his work as to float it

bodily out of the realm of natural into that of supernal beauty, there

to crystallize in decorative and puissant visions appearing out of the

void and only superficially related to their corresponding natural

forms. Standing before the Medicean tombs the modern susceptibility

receives perhaps the most poignant, one may almost say the most

intolerable, impression to be obtained from any plastic work by the hand

of man; but it is a totally different impression from that left by the

sculptures of the Parthenon pediments, not only because the sentiment is

wholly different, but because in the great Florentine's work it is so

overwhelming as wholly to dominate purely natural expression, natural

character, natural beauty. In the Medici Chapel the soul is exalted; in

the British Museum the mind is enraptured. The object itself seems to

disappear in the one case, and to reveal itself in the other.

I do not mean to compare M. Rodin with the Greeks--from whom in

sentiment and imagination he is, of course, as totally removed as what

is intensely modern must be from the antique--any more than I mean to

contrast him with Michael Angelo, except for the purposes of clearer

understanding of his general æsthetic attitude. Association of anything

contemporary with what is classic, and especially with what is greatest

in the classic, is always a perilous proceeding. Very little time is apt

to play havoc with such classification. I mean only to indicate that the

resemblance to Michael Angelo, found by so many persons in such works as

the Dante doors, is only of the loosest kind--as one might, through

their common lusciousness, compare peaches with pomegranates--and that

to the discerning eye, or the eye at all experienced in observing

sculpture, M. Rodin's sculpture is far more closely related to that of

Donatello and the Greeks. It, too, reveals rather than constructs

beauty, and by the expression of character rather than by the suggestion

of sentiment.

An illustration of M. Rodin's affinity with the antique is an incident

which he related to me of his work upon his superb "Âge d'Airain." He

was in Naples; he saw nature in freer inadvertence than she allows

elsewhere; he had the best of models. Under these favoring circumstances

he spent three months on a leg of his statue; "which is equivalent to

saying that I had at last absolutely mastered it," said he. One day in

the Museo Nazionale he noticed in an antique the result of all his study

and research. Nature, in other words, is M. Rodin's \_material\_ in the

same special sense in which it was the antique material, and in which,

since Michael Angelo and the high Renaissance, it has been for the most

part only the sculptor's \_means\_. It need not be said that the

personality of the artist may be as strenuous in the one case as in the

other; unless, indeed, we maintain, as perhaps we may, that

individuality is more apt to atrophy in the latter instance; for as one

gets farther and farther away from nature he is in more danger from

conventionality than from caprice. And this is in fact what has happened

since the high Renaissance, the long line of conventionalities being

continued, sometimes punctuated here and there as by Clodion or Houdon,

David, Rude, or Barye, sometimes rising into great dignity and

refinement of style and intelligence, as in the contemporary sculpture

of the Institute, but in general almost purely decorative or

sentimental, and, so far as natural expression is concerned, confining

itself to psychological rather than physical character.

What is it, for instance, that distinguishes a group like M. Dubois's

"Charity" from the \_genre\_ sentiment or incident of some German or

Italian "professor?" Qualities of style, of refined taste, of elegance,

of true intelligence. Its artistic interest is purely decorative and

sentimental. Really what its average admirer sees in it is the same

moral appeal that delights the simple admirers of German or Italian

treatment of a similar theme. It is simply infinitely higher bred. Its

character is developed no further. Its significance as form is not

insisted on. The parts are not impressively differentiated, and their

mysterious mutual relations and correspondences are not dwelt on. The

physical character, with its beauties, its salient traits of every kind,

appealing so strongly to the sculptor to whom nature appears plastic as

well as suggestive, is wholly neglected in favor of the psychological

suggestion. And the individual character, the \_cachet\_ of the whole, the

artistic essence and \_ensemble\_, that is to say, M. Dubois has, after

the manner of most modern sculpture, conveyed in a language of

convention, which since the time of the Siennese fountain, at all

events, has been classical.

The literary artist does not proceed in this way. He does not content

himself with telling us, for example, that one of his characters is a

good man or a bad man, an able, a selfish, a tall, a blonde, or a stupid

man, as the case may be. He takes every means to express his character,

and to do it, according to M. Taine's definition of a work of art, more

completely than it appears in nature. He recognizes its complexity and

enforces the sense of reality by a thousand expedients of what one may

almost call contrasting masses, derivative movements, and balancing

planes. He distinguishes every possible detail that plays any structural

part, and, in short, instead of giving us the mere symbol of the

Sunday-school books, shows us a concrete organism at once characteristic

and complex. Judged with this strictness, which in literary art is

elementary, how much of the best modern sculpture is abstract, symbolic,

purely typical. What insipid fragments most of the really eminent

Institute statues would make were their heads knocked off by some band

of modern barbarian invaders. In the event of such an irruption, would

there be any torsos left from which future Poussins could learn all they

should know of the human form? Would there be any \_disjecta membra\_ from

which skilled anatomists could reconstruct the lost \_ensemble\_, or at

any rate make a shrewd guess at it? Would anything survive mutilation

with the serene confidence in its fragmentary but everywhere penetrating

interest which seems to pervade the most fractured fraction of a Greek

relief on the Athenian acropolis? Yes, there would be the débris of

Auguste Rodin's sculpture.

In our day the human figure has never been so well understood. Back of

such expressive modelling as we note in the "Saint Jean," in the "Adam"

and "Eve," in the "Calaisiens," in a dozen figures of the Dante doors,

is a knowledge of anatomy such as even in the purely scientific

profession of surgery can proceed only from an immense fondness for

nature, an insatiable curiosity as to her secrets, an inexhaustible

delight in her manifestations. From the point of view of such knowledge

and such handling of it, it is no wonder that the representations of

nature which issue from the Institute seem superficial. One can

understand that from this point of view very delightful sculpture, very

refined, very graceful, very perfectly understood within its limits, may

appear like \_baudruche\_--inflated gold-beater's skin, that is to say, of

which toy animals are made in France, and which has thus passed into

studio \_argot\_ as the figure for whatever lacks structure and substance.

Ask M. Rodin the explanation of a movement, an attitude, in one of his

works which strikes your convention-steeped sense as strange, and he

will account for it just as an anatomical demonstrator would--pointing

out its necessary derivation from some disposition of another part of

the figure, and not at all dwelling on its grace or its other purely

decorative felicity. Its artistic function in his eyes is to aid in

expressing fully and completely the whole of which it forms a part, not

to constitute a harmonious detail merely agreeable to the easily

satisfied eye. But then the whole will look anatomical rather than

artistic. There is the point exactly. Will it? I remember speculating

about this in conversation with M. Rodin himself. "Isn't there danger,"

I said, "of getting too fond of nature, of dissecting with so much

enthusiasm that the pleasure of discovery may obscure one's feeling for

pure beauty, of losing the artistic in the purely scientific interest,

of becoming pedantic, of imitating rather than constructing, of missing

art in avoiding the artificial?" I had some difficulty in making myself

understood; this perpetual see-saw of nature and art which enshrouds

æsthetic dialectics as in a Scotch mist seems curiously factitious to

the truly imaginative mind. But I shall always remember his reply, when

he finally made me out, as one of the finest severings conceivable of a

Gordian knot of this kind. "Oh, yes," said he; "there is, no doubt, such

a danger for a mediocre artist."

M. Rodin is, whatever one may think of him, certainly not a mediocre

artist. The instinct of self-preservation may incline the Institute to

assert that he obtrudes his anatomy. But prejudice itself can blind no

one of intelligence to his immense imaginative power, to his poetic

"possession." His work precisely illustrates what I take to have been,

at the best epochs, the relations of nature to such art as is loosely

to be called imitative art--what assuredly were those relations in the

mind of the Greek artist. Nature supplies the parts and suggests their

cardinal relations. Insufficient study of her leaves these superficial

and insipid. Inartistic absorption in her leaves them lifeless. The

imagination which has itself conceived the whole, the idea, fuses them

in its own heat into a new creation which is "imitative" only in the

sense that its elements are not inventions. The art of sculpture has

retraced its steps far enough to make pure invention, as of Gothic

griffins and Romanesque symbology, unsatisfactory to everyone. But, save

in M. Rodin's sculpture, it has not fully renewed the old alliance with

nature on the old terms--Donatello's terms; the terms which exact the

most tribute from nature, which insist on her according her completest

significance, her closest secrets, her faculty of expressing character

as well as of suggesting sentiment. Very beautiful works are produced

without her aid to this extent. We may be sure of this without asking M.

Rodin to admit it. He would not do his own work so well were he prepared

to; as Millet pointed out when asked to write a criticism of some other

painter's canvas, in estimating the production of his fellows an artist

is inevitably handicapped by the feeling that he would have done it very

differently himself. It is easy not to share M. Rodin's gloomy

vaticinations as to French sculpture based on the continued triumph of

the Institute style and suavity. The Institute sculpture is too good for

anyone not himself engaged in the struggle to avoid being impressed

chiefly by its qualities to the neglect of its defects. At the same time

it is clear that no art can long survive in undiminished vigor that does

not from time to time renew its vitality by resteeping itself in the

influences of nature. And so M. Rodin's service to French sculpture

becomes, at the present moment, especially signal and salutary because

French sculpture, however refined and delightful, shows, just now, very

plainly the tendency toward the conventional which has always proved so

dangerous, and because M. Rodin's work is a conspicuous, a shining

example of the return to nature on the part not of a mere realist,

naturalist, or other variety of "mediocre artist," but of a profoundly

poetic and imaginative temperament.

This is why, one immediately perceives in studying his works, Rodin's

treatment, while exhausting every contributary detail to the end of

complete expression, is never permitted to fritter away its energy

either in the mystifications of optical illusion, or in the infantine

idealization of what is essentially subordinate and ancillary. This is

why he devotes three months to the study of a leg, for example--not to

copy, but to "possess" it. Indeed, no sculptor of our time has made such

a sincere and, in general, successful, effort to sink the sense of the

material in the conception, the actual object in the artistic idea. One

loses all sense of bronze or marble, as the case may be, not only

because the artistic significance is so overmastering that one is

exclusively occupied in apprehending it, but because there are none of

those superficial graces, those felicities of surface modelling, which,

however they may delight, infallibly distract as well. Such excellences

have assuredly their place. When the motive is conventional or otherwise

insipid, or even when its character is distinctly light without being

trivial, they are legitimately enough agreeable. And because, in our

day, sculptural motives have generally been of this order we have become

accustomed to look for such excellences, and, very justly, to miss them

when they are absent. Grace of pose, suavity of outline, pleasing

disposition of mass, smooth, round deltoids and osseous articulations,

and perpetually changing planes of flesh and free play of muscular

movement, are excellences which, in the best of academic French

sculpture, are sensuously delightful in a high degree. But they

invariably rivet our attention on the successful way in which the

sculptor has used his bronze or marble to decorative ends, and when they

are accentuated so as to dominate the idea they invariably enfeeble its

expression. With M. Rodin one does not think of his material at all; one

does not reflect whether he used it well or ill, caused it to lose

weight and immobility to the eye or not, because all his superficial

modelling appears as an inevitable deduction from the way in which he

has conceived his larger subject, and not as "handling" at all. In

reality, of course, it is the acme of sensitive handling. The point is a

nice one. His practice is a dangerous one. It would be fatal to a less

strenuous temperament. To leave, in a manner and so far as obvious

insistence on it goes, "handling" to take care of itself, is to incur

the peril of careless, clumsy, and even brutal, modelling, which, so far

from dissembling its existence behind the prominence of the idea, really

emphasizes itself unduly because of its imperfect and undeveloped

character. Detail that is neglected really acquires a greater prominence

than detail that is carried too far, because it is sensuously

disagreeable. But when an artist like M. Rodin conceives his spiritual

subject so largely and with so much intensity that mere sensuous

agreeableness seems too insignificant to him even to be treated with

contempt, he treats his detail solely with reference to its centripetal

and organic value, which immediately becomes immensely enhanced, and the

detail itself, dropping thus into its proper place, takes on a beauty

wholly transcending the ordinary agreeable aspect of sculptural detail.

And the \_ensemble\_, of course, is in this way enforced as it can be in

no other, and we get an idea of Victor Hugo or St. John Baptist so

powerfully and yet so subtly suggested, that the abstraction seems

actually all that we see in looking at the concrete bust or statue.

Objections to M. Rodin's "handling" as eccentric or capricious, appear

to the sympathetic beholder of one of his majestic works the very acme

of misappreciation, and their real excuse--which is, as I have said, the

fact that such "handling" is as unfamiliar as the motives it

accompanies--singularly poor and feeble.

As for the common nature of these motives, the character of the

personality which appears in their varied presentments, it is almost

idle to speak in the absence of the work itself, so eloquent is this at

once and so untranslatable. But it may be said approximately that M.

Rodin's temperament is in the first place deeply romantic. Everything

the Institute likes repels him. He has the poetic conception of art and

its mission, and in poetry any authoritative and codifying consensus

seems to him paradoxical. Style, in his view, unless it is something

wholly uncharacterizable, is a vague and impalpable spirit breathing

through the work of some strongly marked individuality, or else it is

formalism. He delights in the fantasticality of the Gothic. The west

façade of Rouen inspires him more than all the formulæ of Palladian

proportions. He detests systematization. He reads Shakespeare, Schiller,

Dante almost exclusively. He sees visions and dreams dreams. The awful

in the natural forces, moral and material, seems his element. He

believes in freedom, in the absolute emancipation of every faculty. As

for study, study nature. If then you fail in restraint and measure you

are a "mediocre artist," whom no artificial system devised to secure

measure and restraint could have rescued from essential insignificance.

No poet or landscape painter ever delighted more in the infinitely

varied suggestiveness and exuberance of nature, or ever felt the

formality of much that passes for art as more chill and drear. Hence in

all his works we have the sense, first of all, of an overmastering

sincerity; then of a prodigious wealth of fancy; then of a marvellous

acquaintance with his material. His imagination has all the vivacity and

tumultuousness of Rubens's, but its images, if not better understood,

which would perhaps be impossible, are more compact and their evolution

more orderly. And they are furthermore one and all vivified by a wholly

remarkable feeling for beauty. In spite of all his knowledge of the

external world, no artist of our time is more completely mastered by

sentiment. In the very circumstance of being free from such conventions

as the cameo relief, the picturesque costume details, the goldsmith's

work characteristic of the Renaissance, now so much in vogue, M. Rodin's

things acquire a certain largeness and loftiness as well as simplicity

and sincerity of sentiment. The same model posed for the "Saint Jean"

that posed for a dozen things turned out of the academic studios, but

compared with the result in the latter cases, that in the former is even

more remarkable for sentiment than for its structural sapience and

general physical interest. How perfectly insignificant beside its moral

impressiveness are the graceful works whose sentiment does not result

from the expression of the form, but is conveyed in some convention of

pose, of gesture, of physiognomy! It is like the contrast between a

great and a graceful actor. The one interests you by his intelligent

mastery of convention, by the tact and taste with which he employs in

voice, carriage, facial expression, gesture, diction, the several

conventions according to which ideas and emotions are habitually

conveyed to your comprehension. Salvini, Coquelin, Got, pass immediately

outside the realm of conventions. Their language, their medium of

communication, is as new as what it expresses. They are inventive as

well as intelligent. Their effect is prodigiously heightened because in

this way, the warp as well as the woof of their art being expressive and

original, the artistic result is greatly fortified. Given the same

model, M. Rodin's result is in like manner expressly and originally

enforced far beyond the result toward which the academic French school

employs the labels of the Renaissance as conventionally as its

predecessor at the beginning of the century employed those of the

antique. "Formerly we used to do Greek," says M. Rodin, with no small

justice; "now we do Italian. That is all the difference there is." And I

cannot better conclude this imperfect notice of the work of a great

master, in characterizing which such epithets as majestic, Miltonic,

grandiose suggest themselves first of all, than by calling attention to

the range which it covers, and to the fact that, even into the domain

which one would have called consecrate to the imitators of the antique

and the Renaissance, M. Rodin's informing sentiment and sense of beauty

penetrate with their habitual distinction; and that the little child's

head entitled "Alsace," that considerable portion of his work

represented by "The Wave and the Shore," for example, and a small ideal

female figure, which the manufacturer might covet for reproduction, but

which, as Bastien-Lepage said to me, is "a definition of the essence of

art," are really as noble as his more majestic works are beautiful.

II

Aubé is another sculptor of acknowledged eminence who ranges himself

with M. Rodin in his opposition to the Institute. His figures of

"Bailly" and "Dante" are very fine, full of a most impressive dignity in

the \_ensemble\_, and marked by the most vigorous kind of modelling. One

may easily like his "Gambetta" less. But for years Rodin's only eminent

fellow sculptor was Dalou. Perhaps his protestantism has been less

pronounced than M. Rodin's. It was certainly long more successful in

winning both the connoisseur and the public. The state itself, which is

now and then even more conservative than the Institute, has charged him

with important works, and the Salon has given him its highest medal. And

he was thus recognized long before M. Rodin's works had risen out of the

turmoil of critical contention to their present envied if not cordially

approved eminence. But for being less energetic, less absorbed, less

intense than M. Rodin's, M. Dalou's enthusiasm for nature involves a

scarcely less uncompromising dislike of convention. He had no success at

the École des Beaux Arts. Unlike Rodin, he entered those precincts and

worked long within them, but never sympathetically or felicitously. The

rigor of academic precept was from the first excessively distasteful to

his essentially and eminently romantic nature. He chafed incessantly.

The training doubtless stood him in good stead when he found himself

driven by hard necessity into commercial sculpture, into that class of

work which is on a very high plane for its kind in Paris, but for which

the manufacturer rather than the designer receives the credit. But he

probably felt no gratitude to it for this, persuaded that but for its

despotic prevalence there would have been a clearer field for his

spontaneous and agreeable effort to win distinction in. He greatly

preferred at this time the artistic anarchy of England, whither he

betook himself after the Commune--not altogether upon compulsion, but by

prudence perhaps; for like Rodin, his birth, his training, his

disposition, his ideas, have always been as liberal and popular in

politics as in art, and in France a man of any sincerity and dignity of

character has profound political convictions, even though his profession

be purely æsthetic. In England he was very successful both at the

Academy and with the amateurs of the aristocracy, of many of whom he

made portraits, besides finding ready purchasers among them for his

imaginative works. The list of these latter begins, if we except some

delightful decoration for one of the Champs-Élysées palaces, with a

statue called "La Brodeuse," which won for him a medal at the Salon of

1870. Since then his production has been prodigious in view of its

originality, of its lack of the powerful momentum extraneously supplied

to the productive force that follows convention and keeps in the beaten

track.

His numerous peasant subjects at one time led to comparison of him with

Millet, but the likeness is of the most superficial kind. There is no

spiritual kinship whatever between him and Millet. Dalou models the

Marquis de Dreux-Brézé with as much zest as he does his "Boulonnaise

allaitant son enfant;" his touch is as sympathetic in his Rubens-like

"Silenus" as in his naturalistic "Berceuse." Furthermore, there is

absolutely no note of melancholy in his realism--which, at the present

time, is a point well worth noting. His vivacity excludes the pathetic.

Traces of Carpeaux's influence are plain in his way of conceiving such

subjects as Carpeaux would have handled. No one could have come so

closely into contact with that vigorous individuality without in some

degree undergoing its impress, without learning to look for the alert

and elegant aspects of his model, whatever it might be. But with

Carpeaux's distinction Dalou has more poise. He is considerably farther

away from the rococo. His ideal is equally to be summarized in the word

Life, but he cares more for its essence, so to speak, than for its

phenomena, or at all events manages to make it felt rather than seen.

One perceives that humanity interests him on the moral side, that he is

interested in its significance as well as its form. Accordingly with him

the movement illustrates the form, which is in its turn truly

expressive, whereas occasionally, so bitter was his disgust with the

pedantry of the schools, with Carpeaux the form is used to exhibit

movement. Then, too, M. Dalou has a certain nobility which Carpeaux's

vivacity is a shade too animated to reach. Motive and treatment blend in

a larger sweep. The graver substance follows the planes and lines of a

statelier if less brilliant style. It \_has\_, in a word, more style.

I can find no exacter epithet, on the whole, for Dalou's large

distinction, and conscious yet sober freedom, than the word Venetian.

There is some subtle phrenotype that associates him with the great

colorists. His work is, in fact, full of color, if one may trench on the

jargon of the studios. It has the sumptuousness of Titian and Paul

Veronese. Its motives are cast in the same ample mould. Many of his

figures breathe the same air of high-born ease and well-being, of serene

and not too intellectual composure. There is an aristocratic tincture

even in his peasants--a kind of native distinction inseparable from his

touch. And in his women there is a certain gracious sweetness, a certain

exquisite and elusive refinement elsewhere caught only by Tintoretto,

but illustrated by Tintoretto with such penetrating intensity as to

leave perhaps the most nearly indelible impression that the sensitive

amateur carries away with him from Venice. The female figures in the

colossal group which should have been placed in the Place de la

République, but was relegated by official stupidity to the Place des

Nations, are examples of this patrician charm in carriage, in form, in

feature, in expression. They have not the witchery, the touch of

Bohemian sprightliness that make such figures as Carpeaux's "Flora" so

enchanting, but they are at once sweeter and more distinguished. The

sense for the exquisite which this betrays excludes all dross from M.

Dalou's rich magnificence. Even the "Silenus" group illustrates

exuberance without excess: I spoke of it just now as Rubens-like, but it

is only because it recalls Rubens's superb strength and riotous fancy;

it is in reality a Rubens-like motive purged in the execution of all

Flemish grossness. There is even in Dalou's fantasticality of this sort

a measure and distinction which temper animation into resemblance to

such delicate blitheness as is illustrated by the Bargello "Bacchus" of

Jacopo Sansovino. Sansovino afterward, by the way, amid the

artificiality of Venice, whither he went, wholly lost his individual

force, as M. Dalou, owing to his love of nature, is less likely to do.

But his sketch for a monument to Victor Hugo, and perhaps still more his

memorial of Delacroix in the Luxembourg Gardens, point warningly in this

direction, and it would perhaps be easier than he supposes to permit his

extraordinary decorative facility to lead him on to execute works

unpenetrated by personal feeling, and recalling less the acme of the

Renaissance than the period just afterward, when original effort had

exhausted itself and the movement of art was due mainly to

momentum--when, as in France at the present moment, the enormous mass of

artistic production really forced pedantry upon culture, and prevented

any but the most strenuous personalities from being genuine, because of

the immensely increased authoritativeness of what had become classic.

Certainly M. Dalou is far more nearly in the current of contemporary art

than his friend Rodin, who stands with his master Barye rather defiantly

apart from the regular evolution of French sculpture, whereas one can

easily trace the derivation of M. Dalou and his relations to the present

and the immediate past of his art in his country. His work certainly has

its Fragonard, its Clodion, its Carpeaux side. Like every temperament

that is strongly attracted by the decorative as well as the significant

and the expressive, pure style in and for itself has its fascinations,

its temptations for him. Of course it does not succeed in getting the

complete possession of him that it has of the Institute. And there is,

as I have suggested, an important difference, disclosed in the fact that

M. Dalou uses his faculty for style in a personal rather than in the

conventional way. His decoration is distinctly Dalou, and not

arrangements after classic formulæ. It is full of zest, of ardor, of

audacity. So that if his work has what one may call its national side,

it is because the author's temperament is thoroughly national at bottom,

and not because this temperament is feeble or has been academically

repressed. But the manifest fitness with which it takes its place in the

category of French sculpture shows the moral difference between it and

the work of M. Rodin. Morally speaking, it is mainly--not altogether,

but mainly--rhetorical, whereas M. Rodin's is distinctly poetic. It is

delightful rhetoric and it has many poetic strains--such as the charm of

penetrating distinction I have mentioned. But with the passions in their

simplest and last analysis he hardly occupies himself at all. Such a

work as "La République," the magnificent bas-relief of the Hôtel de

Ville in Paris, is a triumph of allegorical rhetoric, very noble, not a

little moving, prodigious in its wealth of imaginative material,

composed from the centre and not arranged with artificial felicity, full

of suggestiveness, full of power, abounding in definite sculptural

qualities, both moral and technical; it again is Rubens-like in its

exuberance, but of firmer texture, more closely condensed. But anything

approaching the \_kind\_ of impressiveness of the Dante portal it

certainly does not essay. It is in quite a different sphere. Its

exaltation is, if not deliberate, admirably self-possessed. To find it

theatrical would be simply a mark of our absurd Anglo-Saxon preference

for reserve and repression in circumstances naturally suggesting

expansion and elation--a preference surely born of timorousness and

essentially very subtly theatrical itself. It is simply not deeply,

intensely poetic, but, rather, a splendid piece of rhetoric, as I say.

So, too, is the famous Mirabeau relief, which is perhaps M. Dalou's

masterpiece, and which represents his national side as completely as the

group for the Place des Nations does those of his qualities I have

endeavored to indicate by calling them Venetian. Observe the rare

fidelity which has contributed its weight of sincerity to this admirable

relief. Every prominent head of the many members of the Assembly, who

nevertheless rally behind Mirabeau with a fine pell-mell freedom of

artistic effect, is a portrait. The effect is like that of similar works

designed and executed with the large leisure of an age very different

from the competition and struggling hurry of our own. In every respect

this work is as French as it is individual. It is penetrated with a

sense of the dignity of French history. It is as far as possible removed

from the cheap \_genre\_ effect such a scheme in less skilful hands might

easily have had. Mirabeau's gesture, in fact his entire presence, is

superb, but the marquis is as fine in his way as the tribune in his. The

beholder assists at the climax of a great crisis, unfolded to him in the

impartial spirit of true art, quite without partisanship, and though

manifestly stimulated by sympathy with the nobler cause, even more

acutely conscious of the grandeur of the struggle and the distinction of

those on all sides engaged in it, and acquiring from these a kind of

elation, of exaltation such as the Frenchman experiences only when he

may give expression to his artistic and his patriotic instincts at the

same moment.

The distinctly national qualities of this masterpiece, and their

harmonious association with the individual characteristics of M. Dalou,

his love of nature, his native distinction, his charm, and his power, in

themselves bear eminent witness to the vitality of modern French

sculpture, in spite of all the influences which tend to petrify it with

system and convention. M. Rodin stands so wholly apart that it would be

unsafe perhaps to argue confidently from his impressive works the

potentiality of periodical renewal in an art over which the Institute

presides with still so little challenge of its title. But it is

different with M. Dalou. Extraordinary as his talent is, its

unquestioned and universal recognition is probably in great measure due

to the preparedness of the environment to appreciate extraordinary work

of the kind, to the high degree which French popular æsthetic education,

in a word, has reached. And one's last word about contemporary French

sculpture--even in closing a consideration of the works of such

protestants as Rodin and Dalou--must be a recognition of the immense

service of the Institute in education of this kind. Let some country

without an institute, around which what æsthetic feeling the age permits

may crystallize, however sharply, give us a Rodin and a Dalou!

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