

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRENCH SCHOOL UPON RECENT ART.

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THE student in the Art Palace of the Columbia Exhibition must have been struck by the constant presence in the art of every nation of the influence of the French school. In the United States collection, of 1154 oil paintings, there are scarcely more than one hundred pictures that might not, upon the gold-framed canvas, have borne the inscription of some French master.

So far as an individual characteristic is concerned, it has not been sought for—in fact it seems as though it were a quality rather to be deprecated than desired.

Previous to the exhibition of 1876 at Philadelphia, the German and English art held a certain control, modified by local conditions, over the American painter, but which they seem to have lost in less than two decades.

At the Centennial Exhibition, France undoubtedly held an important place in the art department, but not such as would warrant even the most credulous in anticipating for her anything more than perhaps a liberal patronage on this side of the Atlantic.

The French Art of 1876 had nothing in common with the French Art, of 1893. The loan collection in the United States galleries affords an opportunity of comparing the art of the two periods. Corot, Daubigny, Millet, Rosseau and Troyon painted with a spiritual humility even in their most common-place subject. The touch of the painter of that date reflected the downfall of the imperial throne, and the humiliation suffered by the conquests of the German army. The French painter of 1893 has put aside the urn, with its sacrificial ashes; has folded the mourning clothes and laid them away. Only seventeen years

have passed, and conscious of his republican freedom, he dares every phase of subject and succeeds in all. Strength, dash, materialism, modernism—these are the ascendant elements of to-day's French art.

I can easily understand why the French art of to-day appeals to the American citizen. The spirit of republicanism is alike the world over. The artist's love of freedom—freedom from the exacting considerations of court etiquette—his love of nature, unfeigned and simple, declare themselves upon canvas. A bond of union from purely political considerations might even have tended to unite the artistic spirit of France to the genius of America. But it is not the art of '93 that has captured the artistic fort of America, it was that of '76—the very antithesis of the modern dashing school.

The art of a nation should reflect the genius of the race—in short, it should be a mirror in which is reflected the varying phases of domestic and national life. If it be that, feeble though the reflection may be, it will awake a sympathy, arouse an interest, or, more, command the unqualified admiration of all. And more, it matters not whether it be the product of another race and nation; so long as it reflects our condition, it will at least for the time, appeal to our inmost feelings. To this I trace the cause of the French art influence of 1876.

In the United States the dew was still fresh upon the widow weeds of many a heart-broken mother, and from the door of many a lonely cottage on the banks of the Potomac, a sweet pale face, as was her custom for many years, looked out at sunset through