

4 STORIES OF THE FRENCH ARTISTS

and occasionally in a vicious, direction, has stamped the eighteenth century in France as one of the great periods in the history of the world's art. One has but to contemplate the art of surrounding countries during this period to realise what an enormous influence was being exercised by France. Europe as a whole was following the lead the French were giving. Never were conditions so favourable for the full display of the powers of the Gallic temperament as during the eighteenth century. Luxury and refinement had almost reached their maximum development, and an exquisite spirit of gaiety had seized upon the upper classes. The simple life of the middle classes passed almost unnoticed when frivolity reigned supreme. Art was exclusively devoted to the rich; there was no other hope for it, no other outlet for its products. The great redeeming feature lay in the facts that the innate taste of the directors of fashion was of the highest order, and that the artists were endowed with a capacity for treating these excrescences of worldly folly and licentiousness in a manner which has excited the wonder and admiration of succeeding generations.

If we sometimes have reason to object to some want of modesty in the work of such men as