

MASSEY'S MAGAZINE

Vol. II.

DECEMBER, 1896.

No. 6.

LAURENCE ALMA-TADEMA.

BY BERNARD McEVoy.

LAURENCE ALMA-TADEMA (with the accent on the Tad), possesses the robust, physical strength, and nervous energy which seem to be indispensable, or nearly so, to great performances in art, or literature, or music. The Bohemian superstition that long hair and limpness are the invariable accompaniments of the artistic temperament, is passing away. The commonplace virtues of industry, self-restraint and regularity are appreciating—to use a currency term—in the best art circles. Accordingly, when you meet Alma-Tadema in a London street, or near Regent's Park, where his residence and studio are situated, his short, virile, broad-shouldered figure, his clear eye, and wholesome face suggest the idea of a pervading earnestness. As you look after him you find it easy to believe that he has painted 300 pictures, and that most of them are famous. He was one of the men who were thought of the other day as possible Presidents of the Royal Academy, and he must be counted as one of the few really great painters of Europe.

His ancestry is Dutch. He was born in Donryp, Friesland, in the north of Holland, sixty years ago. The first step in his artistic career was getting a broad and liberal education at the Leeuwarden Gymnasium. He became especially interested in classics. At this time of his life he was so passionately devoted to Greek and Latin literature that his contemporaries might easily have supposed that he would make his mark as a

scholar. Love of art was, however, in his blood. His classical education was to be used, but not in the ordinary way. The more he saw of the great triumphs of Dutch art, and drank into its traditions, the more he longed to be a painter. He left the Gymnasium with honors, and became a student in the Antwerp Academy—one of the most famous schools of art in Europe—in 1852. There was living at this time in Antwerp, Baron Henry Leys, a history and *genre* painter of considerable eminence. He had a somewhat stiff and formal style, but he was a solid artist, and to his studio as a disciple Alma-Tadema went when he was eighteen or nineteen. He had shown in the Academy much pertinacious Dutch industry, and he carried the same earnest endeavor to the studio of his new master. Here his genius was shown in utilizing just that portion of Baron Henry Leys' example that could be assimilated by his own idiosyncrasy without disturbing his characteristic aims. A weaker man would have produced results which might have been called Leys and water. As a matter of fact he painted pictures that were Baron Leys *plus* Alma-Tadema. When he was twenty-five he got his first work accepted for the exhibition of the Antwerp Academy. The following year he exhibited at Amsterdam, was awarded a gold medal, and began to be known as a rising young artist who was sure to do something.

Mr. Gambart of the French gallery, London, was the first to bring Alma-