

THE CHICAGO FAIR.

A Day Among the Pictures in the Art Palace.

I saw the mists blown in from the lake, this morning. The wind pushed them over the housetops from whence they tumbled into the streets, filling all places with dampness and all hearts with sadness. I was praying for a breeze to blow them away. I wanted to spend a bright day among the pictures in the Art Palace. The sun came to the rescue and his golden fingers gathered up the liquid atmosphere to cool its fevered face. I promised to write of the pictures in the Art Gallery. The bright day gave me the advantage of seeing these canvases at their best.

If you ask which nation has the finest display in oil painting, I must repeat the judgment of the public at large: France leads. Her artists are exquisite in technique. Their coloring is nature's hue. If they paint a face it looks like flesh; if a flower it wears the tint proper to its kind. Their excellence in this especial line becomes more marked by contrast. If you pass from the French Gallery into that of the United States, you are at once aware of the change. This was made very noticeable to me last week. I have already spent several days in the Art Palace, and have been wondering if eyes used to pictures would catch the difference that is noticeable when drifting from one room to another. A little incident satisfied my curiosity on this point. I was in one of the rooms of the United States section which immediately joins one of the French apartments. The walls are hung with a class of pictures wherein the artists have tried to paint strong sunshine. Bright yellow is the predominant tint. If you take a general view of the room your verdict will be, poor chromos. A gentleman came from the French section and entered the room. He took one glance, not a hasty glance either, and said: "Why, you need not be an artist to tell which of these rooms is the better. These pictures look cheap." And so they do. The American artists have a very large display. I do not think our painters have succeeded as well as our sculptors. In conception they are undoubtedly grand but in execution they are below their themes. The artists who do not reside at home have much the best of the display. Their subjects as a class are most remarkably un-American. They have tried to imitate foreign artists even in the selection of subjects. As though our nation's story, our dear land's history, the marvels of our woods and dales, in our hills and lakes, were barren of theme for a painter's brush. Come, my countrymen, come home and study America. Many of the themes are purely religious. As a rule these are among those that hold the crowds best. One of this class in the American Gallery is particularly noteworthy. It is called "Prayer." In a corner of a dim room three nuns kneel before a shrine which is not seen. One on the floor faces you. She has that sweet, calm look so common to the cloister. Her two companions are kneeling on low chairs, using the backs thereof for head rests. Of these you have a side view. They are wrapt in devotion, a holy and happy smile keeping your gaze from wandering away. You look and look and wonder if any of life's gall has ever mingled in their cups of pure delight. You may gaze on every canvas in that vast display, see women of all nations, pictures in every shade of joy and every hue of pleasure, peasants and queens, the slave of the household trudging at some daily task, and the slave of the morphia injecting the sense lulling potion into her arm, but you will not find that look of peace that sleeps on the face of a Catholic

nun save when the artist paints the religious habit.

"As though the wind could give the happiness,
The guileless nun within her convent knows."

In opposition to this sweet joy depicted in "Prayer" hangs in the same room a picture of horror. An old man sits by a fire-place and huddling close to him is a child of about eight. On the other side of the chimney a girl of twelve rests on a bench. In the centre of the room on a faded and rudely decorated catafalque a white coffin reposes and over it floats a white tulle veil. Beside the coffin, one arm thrown over it, half kneeling, half hanging, a wreath of white flowers by her knees, is the mother. The one in the coffin gives the picture its title, "My First Born." The picture appeals to your sympathies. It makes you feel. The utter helplessness of the mother's grief strikes deep. There is a human interest in the canvas that will not fail to move the coldest heart. You turn from this to seek relief. You find it in Edward H. Bashfield's "Christmas Bells," a picture that has been copied over and over again. Two huge bells of bronze are swinging back and forth in an old belfry and three angels, one sitting on the beam that sustains the lower bell, the other two floating near the upper one, putting its tongue a wagging, these fill in quite a large canvas. Aside from a certain stiffness in arm and leg of the lower angel the picture is very good. One other in that room must be noticed. It is a silent sermon. It is an incident of the Franco-Prussian war. History will record the deeds of sacrifice the religious men and women of France did for their bleeding country. The battlefield sprinkled with the blood of many sturdy hearts, strewn with the dead and the dying, became the legacy of religious. They cared for the wounded and even in battle passed along the lines taking the injured away. Look! A poor fellow has fallen from sheer loss of blood. Two sisters, wearing those well known white bonnets, chance along accompanied by an army surgeon. The surgeon has removed a ball from the man's wrist and the gentle sister is binding the bandages about the wound. Suddenly she groans and falls faceward over the wounded man. Her companion hastens to lift her head, which, as she sits, she allows to rest on her arm. Hurriedly the surgeon bends over the fallen. Excitedly the wounded soldier raises himself up, resting his half dressed limb upon the sod. But the fallen one stirs not, breathes not. Limp and dead her hands extended lay. A pallor is on her face and livid are her lips, her eyes are closed—forever. She is an "Innocent Victim."

But I have not time to speak of the many of the canvases in this section and so must hasten on. There are several "Annunciations" to be seen and these are unusually odd in conception. In one of these our Lady sits and the angel is genuflecting. He raises a long index finger in a warning manner. In another our Lady stands and the angel floats slightly above her, the conventional lily well to the front.

There is one canvas that I think must have come from the brush of a Chicagoan, who, having heard that joke about St. Peter's not knowing that a place named Chicago was in existence, determined to get even. And he did. In "Christ and the Fishermen" he has had his revenge. I think the Committee on Art could have omitted without remorse this and several other pictures. St. Peter will get even with that man yet. The "Light of the Incarnation" is a canvas of angels in cloud land who look far, far down upon the earth. Then from one little spot hiddden by forested forests light streams as from a center. The clouds and the

angels glow in glory. In this as in the generality of the work of the American artists, the conception is better than the execution.

The largest canvas in the United States exhibit, and the one that holds the largest crowds before it, is from the brush of Carl Marr, of Milwaukee. In the 18th century numbers of persons collected together for the purpose of religious reparation. They bared their shoulders, and forming in processions went through the streets of towns and villages thrashing their backs until the whips were reddened with the blood that leaped from the flesh in answer to each blow. At the beginning their motive was just. They soon run into error, however, and held that the baptism of water was of no avail. Flagellation, they thought, was necessary to salvation. They spread through Italy, Germany and France. Two councils, Lyons and Constance, condemned their errors and excesses. I am told a number of deluded Mexicans calling themselves "Flagellants" after the olden sect, imitate these public whippings once a year. This occurs on Good Friday. The remaining 364 days of the year they spend regardless. One of these old time processions is the subject on the very large canvas called "Flagellants." The frame is about 22ft x 16ft. In the centre of the picture stands a Dominican, who, with uplifted hands, seems to be clearing the way for the penitents. Following him is an acolyte bearing the processional cross. Then came the Flagellants. Half stripped, their backs are scared and bloody. Some bend over, a little child about 14, who, representing our Lord, is being carried on a litter by four of the penitents. An immense throng has gathered on the cathedral steps, lines the march or fills in the procession's wake. This picture is one of the most powerful in the gallery. No other canvas holds the crowds as well.

In the French exhibit are many beautiful and some odd productions. The life size portrait of Pope Leo XIII. by Theobald Chartran is magnificent. The sweetest smile I ever saw is fixed forever on that canvas. Leon Joseph Bonnet has a most lifelike picture of Cardinal Lavigerie. A very queer canvas is a "Descent from the Cross." Those who crowd around the body as it is being taken down are all clothed in modern costumes. Our Lady looks like a woman of about 50 years, in a common black dress and shawl of to-day. From the hill top Jerusalem may be seen—Jerusalem filled with modern buildings, factories, ten and twelve stories high. Removed from the crowd about our Lord is a French peasant, who, standing on the brow of hill, shakes his fist at the city below. If the picture is not allegorical it is meaningless.

French humor crops out in the "Return of the Missionary." In a convent hall sits a rotund, jolly and rosy old superior. He is busy over a chess board with a companion not quite so sleek, but apparently enjoying "right good health." The superior has turned from the board and leans back in his chair, his elbows on the arm rests, his hands extended in surprise, his face illumined with a pleased smile and other things. The cause of this joy is a lean, lank and cadaverous missionary, who, pilgrim's staff in hand, advances to greet the superior. Following him comes a negro from the wilds of Sonegambia, his sole burden a much amused ape. A monk, also in right good health, in fact, all look excellently well save the missionary—is having a little bye-play with the chattering stranger. One hand offers him an apple, the other conceals a second behind his back. A third inmate of the monastery stands at the door and beckons to the rest of the community. The humor of this picture is in the contrast between the newly arrived worker and the folk

that stayed at home. I cannot say it in words. One smiles and is much amused at the sly insinuation. In the German gallery are to be found many fine specimens. A peculiar bluish tint seems to pervade the atmosphere of the generality of the pictures here. You wonder if all of these artists lived by the sea.

The most powerful in this section is the fancy sketch to which I have referred before. It is "Polyphomus Fishing." The Germans are superior when it comes to portraying the robust. The figure of the one eyed cyclops whom Ulysses blinded is grand. It stands out from the wall, every muscle swelling, brown and hardy looking, painted type of passive power. I can not pass on without at least mentioning the beautiful "Apotheosis" by Prof. Ford Koller. He seems to have caught the happy of festiveness of the coloring that predominates in the French gallery. The theme is William I. after the Franco-Prussian war. Drawn in a magnificent chariot sits the old Emperor gloriously wrapped in kingly ermine. Over him floats the angel of victory bearing the Emperor's laurel wreath. Following on mounts are Von Moltke, Bismark and the late Frederick. It is a beautiful conception grandly executed. The Italian Gallery is of a different style entirely. They seem to succeed best on small canvases containing scenes of merriment. Their pictures of home life are true and beautiful in every detail—as a school they make perfect what has gained for Jean Millet his fame; that is, attitudes. The expression of attitudes is the key note to the success of their statuary and to the interest their pictures excite.

The Russian gallery, though not very large, is undoubtedly grand. I saw one picture, the remembrance of which I shall bear forever. It was a gleam of sunshine that breaks through a storm and darts across a dripping vessel on the waves. So real is this, that a gentleman who stood beside me advanced to the frame to see if the light were real or painted. There are many frames of power that in a letter brief as this must necessarily be, I cannot even mention. A little attention to the character of a piece of work will readily enable one to recognize some particular artist's brush, even as you get to know a man's hand writing. Gari Melcher's work will give the novice a splendid chance to try this. Let him note the similarity of the subjects chosen by these artists and the peculiar treatment he gives each one. With little trouble he will be able to recognize other products from the same brush.

In every painting there should be some central idea. Purely fancy themes will scarcely catch the mind. Religion, history, humanity and nature will give the artists subjects innumerable. Those who struggle merely for outline, who paint graceful figures and warm, fleshy hues are no more than mockers of art. Their art will die with them. It has not the impress of immortality. There are some of this stamp in the Art Exhibit, especially from the modern school of realism.

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