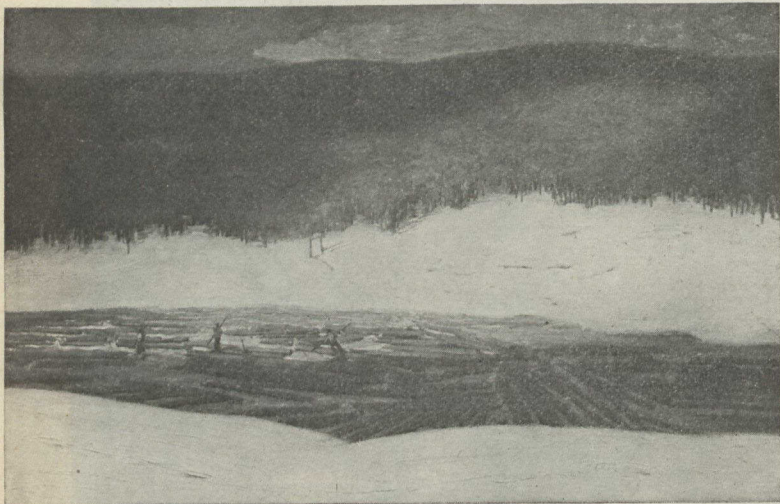




A Strong Delineation of the Prairie.
"The Valley," by C. W. Jefferys.



A Scene From the Land of Lumberjacks.
"The Drive," by Lawren S. Harris.

A Season of Pictures

Appreciated Somewhat at Random

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

SINCE winter began there has been an almost continuous exhibition of Canadian pictures at the gallery of the Art Museum in the main public library of Toronto. The first to open the season was an extensive loan collection mainly of foreign works owned by Canadians. This gave the public some opportunity of beholding the opulence of a few and the discerning taste of a good many other people.

The next was the annual expose of the Royal Canadian Academy, which is supposed to be to Canadian art what the French Academy is to learning in France. This was highly instructive as a perfectly dignified collection of canvases, possessing somewhat the same interest as might be excited by rummaging through a book of old prints—with here and there a modern photograph. But it was not modern Canada; at least not the Canada that builds railways at the rate of three thousand miles per annum. A visitor to that show would not be seized of the feeling that Canadian painters had got far beyond their tacit homage to the old masters who painted before Canada was discovered by the white man.

Again, and closing only a couple of weeks ago, came the annual showing of the Canadian Art Club, which was formed some five years ago by a spirited secession from the Ontario Society of Artists. This was again an all-Canadian collection; modern, progressive and of much interest to those who cared to see how some phases of Canadian and old-world life look through the optics of a comparatively few men.

Canadian art owes a good deal of stimulus and somewhat of example to this body of men whose President is Homer Watson, of Doon, Ont., and whose annual star exhibitor is the great Canadian painter, Horatio Walker, selling his canvases for thousands of dollars in New York, that he paints in summer at his studio on the Isle of Orleans, in the St. Lawrence.

But Walker seldom does anything in paint to surpass the best work of Curtis Williamson, two of whose canvases at this year's showing struck a strong, decisive note worthy of a place in any art

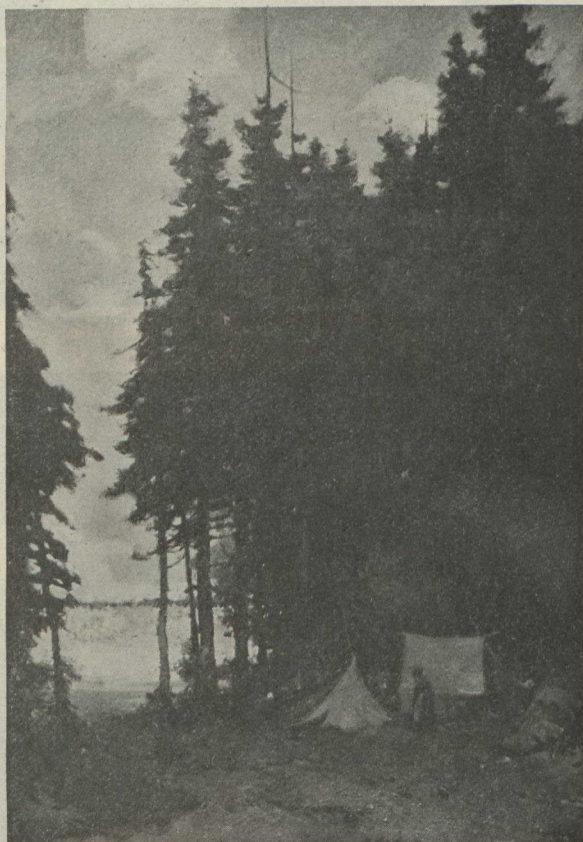
gallery. One of these was a remarkable portrait of a brother artist, William Cruikshank, one of the most original characters in Canadian life as well as in art. To have seen Williamson's picture of Cruikshank is to have got a better idea of what sort of figure the man is; as picturesque among the artists of Canada as was Dr. Sam Johnson among the writers of London. The black and white section of the Canadian Art Club show contained a couple of hundred masterly pen and ink drawings of this dean of art.

The other picture of Williamson's that rivalled the Cruikshank portrait in human interest was his winter vespers of a scene got from his studio window; the focal point being a group of dilapidated rear-yard shacks with a single dab of a window gleaming; in the background the gloomy walls of a huge office building housing millions of vested interests; off to the right and almost out of the canvas the outline of a cathedral spire: poverty, wealth and religion perhaps unconsciously embodied, but done by a man with a grim sense of humour in paint.

Homer Watson's offerings were quite up to the well-known Homeric standard; pictures with a depth of meaning, a richness of paint texture, and a finishment of style, less low in tone than usual: a distinct contrast to the numerous works of J. Archibald Browne, an array of *delicatessen* in landscape, dreamy moons and misty trees and a perpetual atmosphere of unreality in realism.

Space and the lapse of time make it impossible to pursue the contents of this show in detail. But the Canadian Art Club has already accomplished part of its purpose in evolving a cleaner, smarter and stronger show than used to characterize its parent contemporary, the O. S. A.

And when we come to survey the fortieth exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists, now on, and until the end of this month, it must be admitted, before any individual criticism is attempted, that the old Society has taken a stride, even since last year, that quite bewilders the chronic damners with faint praise or the casual newspaper critic, in many cases bored by the pictures. The man who could be bored by this show must be



Glimpse of an Indian Camp Ground.
"The North Land," by J. W. Beatty.

colour blind. I recall some shows of the O. S. A. to enter which was like going to a long sermon and leaving with an undefinable tired feeling.

Not so this one. There is an exhilaration, almost an abandon, about the contents of this collection that convinces any average beholder of the vitality of Canadian art in the body that a few years ago showed symptoms of senility. To begin with the show is well hung. The hangers had more respect for the walls than ever before. With even more canvases to choose from they hung less, and hung them with due regard to the value of the rooms as rooms and not as mere spaces on which to put a lot of frames with pictorial canvases inside.

Still even the worst of hanging could not spoil the abundant optimism and real art excellence of this show. Of course the artists themselves are certain that they have put 1912 as far ahead of 1911 as that was ahead of any other year. There has been a house-cleaning. Yet none of the old standbys have been missed. Every man and woman that used to add a touch of worth to the O. S. A. since the secession of the Art Club has pictures in that collection. And there are some new ones. It is not necessary to specify the paintings of Princess Patricia, which are all very well in their way and happily do not detract in the least from the show.

Here we have the first satisfying depiction of Canada not merely of farm landscapes and pastorals and snug interiors, and pretty women, and more or less smugly comfortable citizens; but a Canada of east and west, of north and south, of railways and traffic and city streets, of types of people—though all too few of these—and phases of development.

Oh, of course some artists allege that subject is of no importance; that technic and atmosphere and tone and high lights and juicy paint and superb texture and breezy handling and swish and go, and heaven knows what, are the things to look for in a show. But the same artists know right well that subject to the average appreciator means half the battle; that to a Canadian, scenes in this country are of vastly more interest than all the fishing smacks and brass-kettles and sea-weed sonatas of north Europe.

SO there are at least twenty of the exhibitors at the O. S. A. who have translated the joy and savagery and crudity and peaceful picturesqueness of Canadian life, leaving those who prefer the melancholia to depict the sorrows. Among these it scarcely matters where to begin. If you care for the far west you have it in one big canvas of C. W. Jefferys, somewhat posteresque in treatment, but a fine sweeping delineation by a master hand at composition and drawing; with the superbly candid colouring of the great plains at the edge of whose tremendous billows of wheat and grass stands a solitary, reminiscent horseman. This is modern and a note of great joy. Let us hope for more of the same.

Back to the city and you have the works of two more of the younger men who go trailing about in unlikely corners to drag out the epic meaning of what some people see as commonplaces if at all. Lawren Harris gives both the land of the lumberjack and the city street. His river-drive canvas is a big piece of work in which the background of gloomy pine-stripped hill and clean, strong sky is in comprehensive contrast to the logs and the lumberjacks below. His Deserted Barn in the Laurentians, got last fall, is of less interest, but consummately ugly and compelling. His town topics—here we have the other side of a most virile and passionately ecstatic young man who hoofs with the eye of an explorer into neglected streets to fetch out pictures of low shacks against great modern buildings, roughcasts bedecked with October chestnut trees whose fallen leaves you could kick out of the canvas, and whose lights and shadows are simply stunning; and the serried monotonous rows of louse walls—just brick and mortar, but an interpretation by Harris, who has the faculty of looking at the inside of a brick, and knows how to fling light where he needs it and colour that may be a bit over-blue betimes; but so let it be, for he is young and fairly sings in his paint.

J. E. H. Macdonald, too—look at his Tracks and Traffics for a strong splash of thick smoke and crawling trains and lumber-piles and fog-wrapped walls; his two moon pictures, one called the Snow-Cloud, the other Early Evening—mysterious but grippy and virile—if only somebody would break the glass over the canvases! And this early morning thing where the figures climb the hill over the keen blue winter shadows—it fairly reeks with the nip of a great healthy cold.

Look at another ecstatic painter, a woman, too, Mary Wrinch, who made her first hit some five