

# FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTS

## And Others

SEEN AT THE CANADIAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION

By ESTELLE M. KERR

ARTISTS who revelled in the brilliant display of modern French art at last year's C. N. E. are disappointed at the conventional collection which, though excellently representing the art which flourished in Paris many years ago, affords no new inspiration for the student. The places these pictures once occupied on the walls of the Luxembourg gallery have been usurped by more recent acquisitions of the government, and their fate is uncertain. After the hand that painted them has been dead ten years, they may be accorded a permanent home in the Louvre, but if they are not deemed worthy, they will continue to circulate amongst provincial galleries or relapse into still further obscurity.

The casual attendant at an art show prefers this year's display to the more startling canvasses on view last year. There is much nodding of heads and gratified murmurs of, "There's a lot of good work in that!" They are pleased to see the satin on the lady's gown shining like real satin, and every pearl rendered with admirable precision. The Canadian public breathes a sigh of relief and goes home confirmed in its opinion that art has degenerated sadly during the last fifty years. Those who were familiar with the Luxembourg Gallery, in Paris, ten or fifteen years ago, will recognize some old favourites: Henner's charming portrait of a girl in black against a background of turquoise blue, and others which, if not the identical pictures, are so similar in character as to be easily recognized as coming from the hand of the same artist. Jules Breton, whose favourite theme is of peasants working in the fields, Harpignies, who was considered a fine landscape painter before the modern artists had grappled with the problem of painting sunlight, and Carlos-Duran, the popular portrait painter of the "bustle" period of costume. Canadians who have visited Paris will be pleasantly reminded of the wonderful decorations by Puvis de Chavannes, in the Pantheon, but without this recollection it is difficult to admire his work in the small framed sketches, for he more than any mural decorator that ever lived, has subdued his own art in both line and colour to make it entirely harmonious with the surrounding architecture, and it is impossible to judge his work when separated from its proper surroundings. People who were aghast at the extraordinary oriental subjects shown by Besnard, last year, are quite willing to admit his colossal genius as shown in the portrait of the etcher, Alphonse Legros, which is one of his earlier water-colours. Two paintings of especial interest that formerly hung in the Impressionist room in the Luxembourg are Manet's "The Balcony," and "Raffaelli's "Guests Waiting for the Wedding Party."

When you say that these pictures belong to the "Impressionist" school, people look puzzled, for compared to more recent paintings, they are extremely conservative. Yet Manet was called the Father of the Impressionists, a group of young French painters who, about 1860, broke away from the prevailing traditions of the French Academy, with its classical subjects, black paint and studio arrangements. The works of Manet and his friends were rejected for three years by the jury of the Paris Salon, so in 1863 they exhibited at a Salon des Refuses and the public crowded there to have a good laugh. One of the pictures which caused most derision was a sunset by Claude Monet, entitled "Impressions," and from that the word Impressionist became attached to the



Portrait of Alphonse Legros.

By A. Besnard.



The Balcony.

By Manet.

whole group, which included Whistler, Fantin-Latour, Renoir, Legros and many others who have since become known to fame. The memory of this ridicule has made it possible for the futurists, cubists and post-impressionists of modern times to be respectfully received. We are afraid to laugh for fear history may prove that we did wrong.

CLAUDE MONET was perhaps the first to make use of prismatic colour juxtaposed in such a manner that at a certain distance it produces the

effect of the actual colouring, with a freshness and delicacy that cannot be obtained by colours mixed on a palette. This introduces the principle of the study of optics and is scientific rather than impressionistic. The search after a new technique and the expression of a modern reality were the chief aim of the impressionists. They protested against the dirty, dark colouring used to represent nature and also against every literary, psychologic or symbolical element in painting. This caused the young painters to draw inspiration from their own epoch instead of imitating the style of the past. They began also to substitute character for beauty and to apply their art in depicting rough peasants and scenes from everyday life, rather than virgins and nymphs. They no longer regulated their compositions according to the ideas contained in their pictures. For example, if the orthodox painters composed a picture representing the death of Agamemnon, they would subordinate the whole composition to the figure of Agamemnon, then to Clytemnestra, then to the witness of the murder, graduating the moral and literary interest according to the different persons, and sacrificing everything to this interest. The Impressionist picked out first the strongest note in the picture, say a red dress, and distributed the other values according to a harmonious arrangement of colour.

"The principal person in a picture is the light," said Manet.

THEY substituted, when possible, the natural model, seen in the exercise of his occupation, for the professional model, the light from out of doors for the top light of a studio, and held that the study of light and shadow on a landscape or a human face was of far greater importance than the delineations of the grass or the curve of an eyebrow. With the Impressionists came a new interest in painting out of doors. Monet and his followers showed new possibilities in rendering atmospheric conditions and effects of light, and the period of painting which followed the acceptance of the Impressionist school in France is more interesting to Canadian artists who are more largely devoted to landscape.

Most of the paintings shown in the Canadian Section have been previously shown in large exhibitions held during the year in Toronto and Montreal. "The Strollers," which won for Arthur Crisp a medal at the Spring Academy in New York, is shown for the first time in this country. Frederick Challenger's "Vacation Time" is both brilliant and charming, a joyous rendering of wind and sunshine. Laura Muntz Lyall shows a charming portrait of a small boy, worthy of Romney, and Mabel H. May has a landscape, very beautiful in colour. Carton Moorepark is a recent acquisition to Canada and through his work is well known both in London and New York. He exhibits both in the Fine and in the Applied Arts Sections, and his work has a decorative quality that makes it popular for magazine covers. Considerable interest is attached to a group of pictures by Tom Thomson, one of our very best landscape painters, whose work gave promise of even better things to come, who was recently crowned. Two very charming paintings by Florence Carlyle were sold for Red Cross purposes, the sum going to the work she is engaged upon in England.

The standard of Canadian illustrations shown is

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