

HOMER.

Homer, thy song men liken to the sea
With all the notes of music in its tone,
With tides that wash the dim dominion
Of Hades, and light waves that wash in glee
Around the isles enchanted; nay, to me
Thy verse seems as the river of source unknown,
That glances Egypt's temples overthrown
In his sky-nurtured stream, eternally.
No wiser we than men of heretofore
To find thy sacred fountains guarded fast;
Enough thy flood makes green our human shore,
As Nilus Egypt, rolling down his vast
His fertile flood, that murmurs evermore
Of gods dethroned, and empires in the past.

Mr. Goldwin Smith has said very happily in his excellent life of Cowper:—"The translation of Homer into verse is the Polar Expedition of literature, always failing, yet still desperately renewed. Homer defines modern reproduction. His primeval simplicity is a dew of the dawn which can never be re-distilled. His primeval savagery is almost unrepresentable. If Cowper failed in performing the impossible, it was not from not knowing his author. At school he used to read Homer in his leisure hours. His love for the old Greek received a graceful acknowledgment from a relative, who acted as editor to Cowper's works in 1815.

TO JOHN JOHNSON,

On his presenting me with an antique bust of Homer.

Kinsman below'd, and as a son, by me!
When I behold this fruit of thy regard,
The sculptur'd form of my old fav'rite bard,
I reverence feel for him, and love for thee.
Joy too, and grief. Much joy that there should be
Wise men and learn'd, who grudge not to reward
With some applause my bold attempt and hard,
Which others scorn: critics by courtesy,
The grief is this, that sunk in Homer's mine
I lose my precious years, now soon to fail,
Handling this gold, which, howsoever it shine,
Proves dross when balanced in the Christian scale.
Be wiser thou! like our forefather Donne,
Seek heavenly wealth, and work for God alone.

Cowper was descended on his mother's side from the founder of the metaphysical school of poetry, Dr. John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's. In a letter to his cousin, Mrs. Anne Bodham, Cowper wrote, "There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper."

There is little value in any personal sonnet beyond the interest arising from the personality of the author. In the present instance a few couplets would have served the purposes of acknowledgment and advice better than the sonnet form, which cannot properly lend itself to such use.

SAREPTA.

SOME PARIS ATELIERS.

FRENCH art has become so much the fashion and so widely influences other schools that it may be interesting to most people to know something of the students, and haunts of students, in the centre of the tide of influence.

Fashion in art, as in other things, is transitory, and it is lucky that it is so, else we should lose much freshness and movement in life. It is all very well to sneer at it, from a fancied vantage ground of a higher perception and critical faculty, as the food for the mob, but after all the mob is the majority, and it is astonishing how many respectable people belong to it. It certainly is not the fashion which makes the taste, but the taste the fashion; and it generally is the outcome of some leading necessity or reaction, interpreted, consciously or unconsciously, by those who respond to the stress, and hit the nail of current ideas on the head, driving it home. In spite of there always being in every age, a few seers, whose footing is on the foundation of the world, the greatest age is, without doubt, the age in which things and ideas of great and enduring proportions are the tests of being in the swim of the world. It was not Cimabue who made himself the fashion of his day—it was the tendency of education in forms and ideas of beauty which enabled the Florentines to appreciate him when he came in due season, and to welcome him as the satisfier of their artistic perceptions, making Cimabue's age a great age, not so much because of Cimabue, but because of the power of appreciating and producing him which was inherent in it. Through the condition of their culture they were able to do so, whereas a modern French picture of a common-place horror—being the product of a different culture—in spite of greater skill on the painter's craft, would not have appealed to them.

But in a nutshell, "fashion" as an index of current life is to be studied—and the one is no more to be separated from the other than the leaves and the trunk of a tree. The law that the demand creates the supply holds here as elsewhere. Thus to examine modern French art is to acknowledge that its methods and its results are distinctly typical of the present. I have no hesitation in saying that both may be sometimes intrinsically bad in their extremes; but to recognize that a bad thing is is to recognize that there is a taste or demand for it; therefore, a mode of thought and movement of life of which it is the outcome. The present will be properly judged in its future, not only by this result of its activity, but also by its appreciation of this result; but it is when the reasons for partizanship have passed away that an act is judged by its being "en rapport" with fundamental humanity and nature, and so establishing its claim to be monumental and for all time. French art is just now urging war against falseness or affectation. I do not deny that there is neither falseness or affectation in it, but it has a healthy ambition towards straightforward methods and frank expression of truth. This, of course, brings us to

the verge of the never-to-be-decided question of "naturalism versus idealism." Everyone can answer it according to his conception of the terms, but no one can deny that the French school of painting is doing good work in the direction most needed at present, opposing sentimental standards and bringing to bear upon artistic methods the fact that it is not the idea of a picture which is alone valuable, but also the power of expressing any idea with a mastery of the medium used, and delight in truth for truth's sake. Therefore, as the students of to-day are the artists of to-morrow, it is from the Paris ateliers that the widespread influence more directly comes.

Most of the men students enter, sooner or later, for a longer or shorter period, the "Ecole National des Beaux Arts." Members of all nationalities are admitted, if satisfactorily successful, in certain examinations and a full-length drawing from the nude. For two years the student is thus placed in the current of popular ideas in the thick of modernism, not with a counteracting influence in certain professors; it depends greatly upon his natural instincts what his final course will be, but at present the classicists have little chance. Among the "patrons" of the ateliers to which the students pass from the antique school, are Gerome, Cabanel, J. P. Laurens. Some professors being much more popular than others, the competition is stiffer; but the student can choose his "patron" and wait for the opportunity. If a medal or mention is taken during the first two years, the studentship is extended for two more. The last and highest ambition of the French student is the "Grand Prix de Rome," which means a sufficient income for four years to be spent in the French academy in Rome. This is not open to foreigners. A "Prix de Rome" is considered "of some importance," and although many "Prix de Rome" have sunk into the limbo which often swallows up successful mediocrity, it is always his first step to possible fame, and if the holder is afterwards successful it still adds a point to his crown of glory. The prize is awarded to the best picture painted on a given subject, in a given time, the picture to belong to the nation. Everything that can be needed to advance the student in painting, sculpture, or architecture, to a practical or theoretical knowledge of art, is gathered together in the building of the Ecole des Beaux Arts—good copies of the best examples of the foreign schools—casts and marbles, examples of architectural styles, including the portrait of the famous "Chateau Guilan," placed in one of the courts, and some fine examples of Luca della Robbia's faience—an amphitheatre, in which are held lectures for the students, and decorated by De la Roche's Hemicycle, and a good library open to outsiders; besides the various ateliers of the professors, and the ateliers in which the competitors for the "Prix de Rome" make their pictures.

But if the "Ecole des Beaux Arts" is the centre of the student life and draws the best of it to itself, there are in Paris dozens of ateliers which receive students of both sexes and of all nationalities. The only one which closes its doors to foreigners is J. P. Laurens'. It is a great loss, as he is considered one of the most successful professors. However, he dislikes all foreigners, and especially Americans, which is a curious want of liberality in such a cosmopolitan city as Paris.

One of the best known ateliers to Americans and Englishmen is Julien's. Julien is a power in Paris. He is the "patron"—everybody is the patron of somebody or something in some way—of four studios, and is, I believe, a fair sculptor himself, but, of course, his object is quite mercenary. The professors receive no remuneration, either in their studios or elsewhere, but give their time and attention in hopes of the honour and glory of being the instructor of successful artists and to gain reputations as professors. To the English mind this appears incredible, but there is no place in the world, I suppose, where so much gratuitous instruction is given in a spirit of wide liberality, as in Paris. It is not only in the graphic arts, but in all branches of education. Julien has separate studios for men and women, and about four hundred students on his roll. His professors are Boulanger, Lefebvre, J. Robert Fleury, and Bouguereau. In the Salon his students are generally well represented, and this makes him the power he is in the artistic world, for as each exhibitor has a vote the following year for the members of the jury, they naturally favour the men who are most likely to favour them in return. It is easily seen how much a clique can hold in its own hands. Julien's is always crowded, and is, perhaps, one of the best drawing schools in existence.

In most of the ateliers the men are admitted at a much lower rate than the women. It is from them that the reputation of a studio more generally comes, as men do not, as a rule, dabble in a French atelier. Comparatively few of the women are professionally serious, and those who are are not too well-off, and go to the less expensive studios. An "Atelier des Dames," which is filled by a certain class, principally rich Americans and others, is a profitable speculation, which I am sorry to say does not always tend to the advantage of the student.

There are several other ateliers of the same order as Julien's, but not so large. Collin, Courtois, Dagnan-Bouveret, Constant, Blanc, J. P. Laurens, Aimé Morot and others visit them, and very many private studios belonging to the professors themselves. The last is, to my mind, a very much more satisfactory arrangement, and has many advantages over the system which has a "middle-man" between the professor and student, especially when the studio is organized by the students. The students rent the studio, and manage it, subject to the wishes of

the professor who is asked to visit. An artist very seldom refuses to undertake the position, as to accept it is almost a point of honour. When the studio is rented, the students choose a "Massier," who receives the subscriptions, has most authority as to the choosing and poising of models, and attends to the general business of the atelier. Every student who enters agrees to help him to maintain a decent amount of order; and the professor, having accepted the post of "patron," is constituted the final court of appeal in any dispute. It is almost a necessity to believe, or to appear to believe, that the patron, like Caesar, "can do no wrong." By this system a professor is brought into much closer relationship with his pupils, and he consequently takes a greater interest in their progress and manner of work. The students rise at his entrances and exits, and remain politely silent during his corrections; but the door is hardly closed on his retreating figure, with a "Bon jour, Messieurs," when there is a general stampede to make up for lost time. Tongues wag as only French tongues can wag. The model rests. The students begin fencing, dumb-bells, any kind of exercise or amusement that comes first; songs of all shades of political feeling, notably the "Boulanger March," recently varied by "God Save the Queen" for the edification of Her subjects who happen to be present, jokes and horseplay, and I have seen a quadrille gravely danced to the wild hooting of a cross-eyed, bow-legged youngster. In such studios rank is obliterated; the aristocracy is one of skill, or perhaps physical force. All grades of society are to be found in them—from the member whose general impression is about on a level with the rag-picker, to scions of French and sometimes foreign nobility; not, however, that sometimes the "rag-picker" has not the best of it. I have seen a "De" something or other, possessing an ancestral chateau somewhere or other, whose appearance suggested a sandy desert where no water is, and the absence of the civilizing influence of clean linen; and sometimes the "rag-picker" has the manners and exhibits the tact which is supposed to be the exclusive property of quite a different section of society. Their minds and opinions range over an equally wide area; it depends greatly upon the studio you happen to be in what your general impression may be. All the studios are rough and noisy. Smoking is never prohibited. There are found all opinions, religious and politic, but the general tendency is to an active freethought and radicalism. Sometimes the *rara avis* among students of the devout Roman Catholic is found working among the common brown sparrows who hop about among the by-ways of speculation. In the studios where the professor is a secondary power to the proprietor, the students have unbounded license as long as they do not interfere with the material prosperity of the proprietor.

But perhaps the best way to give an idea of the general atmosphere of the studios is to describe a by no means out-of-the-way example. The proprietor, or patron, is an Italian—formerly a model, who began life as a goatherd near Naples. He is the one man for his position, and manages the conflicting elements with the readiest tact. He possesses four studios; two near the Arc de Triomphe, and two in the Quartier Latin. The latter are the most typical. They are built back from the street, and are entered through another house by a narrow passage. Steps lead up and down to them, as they are one above the other. The yard is hung with mildewed casts, and ornamented with terra-cotta busts. All day long picturesque models hang about waiting to be engaged, gossiping and lounging in the sun; principally Italians, for the patron favours his countrymen. The hours of work are from eight a.m. till twelve, from one p.m. till five, if the light lasts, and an evening class from seven till ten. All but the afternoon class downstairs and the evening water-colour class are nude. The study of the nude is the principal feature of the Parisian ateliers, being the best possible preparation for all drawing and painting. The student may join for any length of time, and for any or all the *seances*—a day. It is a representative studio, and draws students from all quarters. The human aspect is constantly changing; new faces come and disappear, old faces crop up at unexpected times, while there are a few who are always there. It is in the thick of the fray. Most studio news from all over Paris is sure to filter through it sooner or later. Students stroll in from the Beaux Arts at odd times. Students, in Paris for a short time, find it most convenient. There, old friends meet who have not met for years; but, in the long run, students who have once met are almost sure to at last again touch each other in the round of student life. This ebb and flow of life keeps the ideas fresh, and as students learn as much, if not more, from their fellow-students as from their professors, it is an advantage to see various styles of work, and sometimes of the best. It is a common disappointment to new-comers from other countries, who expect a very high standard of work, to find so much mediocre, and even downright bad, work done in almost all the ateliers.

It does not follow that because work is done in Paris that it is typically French, or even passable; but so much excellent work is annually seen on exhibition walls done either in French ateliers or under French influence, that it is hard to believe it is the exception after all, not the rule, in the average atelier. The best class in the studios I am speaking of is probably the evening drawing class. The model is generally good; the average of work high, augmented by clever outsiders and the American element is generally strong, which, as a rule, has a healthy influence. The model in this, as indeed in all the classes, is chosen by vote, and as it is no easy matter to satisfy the various demands of seventy or eighty students, the hub-