THE GROWTH OF ARTISTIC APPRECIATION IN AMERICA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By GEORGE H. RYDEN

In recent years there has been a decided tendency among historical writers not to treat American history as "past politics" merely, but to picture the life of a people in all its different phases in order that as comprehensive a view of a period might be given as is humanly possible. Consequently, we find the more modern historical works dealing with such varied problems as the economic, social, religious, educational and even recreational movements of a people. One field has, however, to a considerable extent been neglected, namely, a comprehensive study of the growth of artistic production and appreciation in America. My purpose in writing this paper is to indicate in outline three or four of the more important aspects of this development during the nineteenth century.

The widespread interest in art that we see today throughout the United States is of comparatively recent origin. Whereas we now have scores of private art collections containing priceless canvasses and other works, seventy-five or even fifty years ago such collections were extremely rare. The founding of public art galleries or museums in almost every metropolitan center and in many smaller cities as well is a further indication of a popular interest in art, which in the middle of the nineteenth century was only making a faint beginning. Loan exhibitions, now held annually in many places, were so uncommon even as late as the seventies as to attract marked attention in such large centers as New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Moreover, in architecture America has achieved a notable advance, while landscape gardening, sculpture, music, pageantry, aesthetic dancing,
artistic bookbinding, ceramics, and interior decorating show a variety of interests to which the people of the fifties paid little or no attention.

The reason for the tardiness of the growth of art and its appreciation is not far to seek. In the colonial period of American history but slight importance was attached to the so-called amenities of civilization except, perhaps, among the leisured class of planters in the South, who, to a greater degree than the people elsewhere, had social connections with the English aristocracy and were to some extent influenced by the customs of that class. The strict religious code of the New Englanders inhibited whatever innate love of the beautiful there may have existed among them and consequently no early growth of art developed in that quarter. Itinerant painters found some encouragement among the wealthy folk of Philadelphia, but confining themselves mostly to the painting of mediocre portraits their work stimulated no decided appreciation of genuine art.

For seventy-five years or so after the establishment of the independence of the United States conditions remained pretty much the same as during the colonial period. The interests of the inhabitants were primarily practical and material. How to make a living on the inhospitable frontier was the constant question facing most of the ancestors of present day Americans, for America continued to be a land of pioneers from the days the first colonists set foot on American soil until the westward moving population, supplemented by the later immigrants of the nineteenth century, had filled up the vast areas of the Great West and reached the Pacific. All the energy of a virile people was needed for the greatest and most rapid expansion of peoples in history, and left little for cultural advancement until this object had been attained, and then it was literature which first asserted itself rather than pictorial or musical art. Moreover, the elections of presidents and local officers, the set-
tlement of the slavery question, debates on tariff issues and states rights, the emancipation of women, sectarian squabbles, temperance agitations, and scores of other interests foreign and hostile to aesthetic forces occupied the minds of our people during their leisure moments to the exclusion of everything else.

PAINTING

But despite the prevalent apathy towards art among the great mass of the people there stood out a few solitary men at the end of the eighteenth century who were imbued with the art spirit. Often self-taught, these artists produced canvasses and pieces of sculpture, which, though they showed scant originality, yet prepared the way for a steadily increasing number of American artists. These men, during the first twenty-five years of the nineteenth century, gave an important impetus to the growth of American art. Among such leaders John Singleton Copley and Benjamin West were pre-eminent. Living abroad, they attracted a number of students from their homeland, notably, Stuart, well known for his portraits, and Trumbull, equally famous for his historical paintings. Trumbull became particularly active in art circles as president of the American Academy of Fine Arts, founded in 1802, which flourished during a quarter of a century until the National Academy of Design, founded by Samuel Morse and other progressive spirits, gradually superseded it.

While the English school of painting was still dominant in such works as Allston's and Peale's, a school of self-taught men sprang up during the second quarter of the century which confined itself largely to landscape and marine painting. Doughty, Cole and Durand, known as close literalists, were the leaders of this school and though their canvasses to our generation appear too panoramic they showed originality in their methods and can
be said to have been the first to bring forth a truly American art, free from dependence upon European models. In point of fact these men were the forerunners of the famous Hudson River School of landscape painters represented by such artists as George Inness, Wyant, Martin and Bierstadt. "It is in the work of some of the marine and landscape painters," wrote a critic, "that the foreigner would be least likely to detect the influence of Europe. These painters like most other true students of nature have found, each for himself, their own necessary language of expression."

Yet Europe continued to exert an increasing influence upon American painting and sculpture in general. After London, Rome became the Mecca for our students. Later, Düsseldorf and Munich attracted a considerable number, only to be superseded in the fifties by Paris, which continued during the remainder of the century to be the main source of influence for American painting as well as for that of other countries. (Later Paris also became the center for students in sculpture, architecture and landscape gardening.)

The work of these artists tended powerfully to stimulate a popular taste for the arts. From 1850 onward we see a beginning "not only of the modernization of the American painter's aims and methods," as a writer puts it, "but also of a national consciousness of painting as an art." Among the pioneers in this new departure, William Morris Hunt and John La Farge were pre-eminent. Hunt, among the first Americans to study under Couture and Millet, introduced the Barbizon school to the American public. First in Newport and later in Boston, he became very influential in improving the artistic taste of the people and was mainly responsible for the general exodus of American art students to Paris in subsequent years. La Farge, a pupil of Hunt, carried on the work and became famous for his mural paintings and art win-
dows. It has been said of him that he anticipated Manet and the "Impressionists" in his canvasses.

The influence from the Barbizon group of painters filled a need in the American life of the nineteenth century. "Their idealism," says Caffin, "was of a new kind, based, not upon a material perfection, but on spiritual expression. This again was a wonderful anticipation of what came to be the need of the nineteenth century. In the rapid advance of materialism, the claims of spirit were being overlooked; and not the least of the benefits conferred in painting by men of Barbizon was this restoration of spirit to its proper relation to matter."

To Yale College must be given the credit for successfully inaugurating professional art training. For many years it had enjoyed the distinction of being the first and only institution of learning in the country having an art collection, the famous Trumbull paintings. As early as 1857, a course of art lectures was given at the college and, in 1864, Augustus Russell Street built the Yale School of Fine Arts and endowed a professorship in art for the purpose of not merely founding an art museum but "to establish a school for practical instruction for those of both sexes who are desirous of pursuing the Fine Arts as a profession, and to awaken and cultivate a taste for and appreciation of the arts among the undergraduates and others." But important as this work was it did not reach the masses. To Massachusetts belongs the honor of inaugurating in this country a course of study which was planned to attain this end.

By an act of April, 1870, the Legislature of Massachusetts provided for free instruction in the arts to persons over fifteen years of age in all schools, either day or evening, in towns or cities of 10,000 inhabitants or over. A school was established at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston to serve as the crown of the system of art training in Massachusetts. Thus an effective organization for the preservation of artistic traditions, the disciplining of new
artists, and the training of the general public to appreciate artistic work was provided for. Nine years after the establishment of the system it had won recognition throughout the country as the best general graded scheme of instruction in the study of art inaugurated up to that time.

The greatest single event in American history that stimulated art appreciation and furnished the impetus to greater production was the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876. A correspondent writing in Scribner's the same year about the artistic features of the Exhibition says: "One of the most notable facts connected with the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia is the universal devotion to the art galleries. Every day testifies to it, and every writer speaks of it. Whatever portion of the superb show may be neglected, or only thinly attended, the art galleries are always full. However rapidly other departments may be skimmed over, here the crowd lingers. . . . . It is here, among the pictures and the statuary, that the great masses of visitors find their highest satisfactions, and the return for their fees of admission. Now, these facts mean a great deal with relation to the future of art in this country. They mean that there is an innate love of art—of the beautiful in picture and sculpture—in the average American, from which it only needs time and opportunity to reap grand harvests of achievement and appreciation."

Notable results flowed from the Philadelphia Centennial. The public became more interested in artistic productions than ever before; art students flocked to Paris for inspiration; a number of art museums and private collections were established or enlarged; and several schools giving art instruction were founded to meet the demand for art instruction. The year following the Centennial, La Farge organized the Society of American Artists. Its membership included John F. Weir, Will H. Low, Kenyon Cox, Abbott H. Thayer and
J. Alden Weir, and was constantly augmented by newly trained artists from Paris. This organization contributed considerably to the raising of the standards of painting in America during the last quarter of the century. Its members represented various movements in painting, such as the Academic, Naturalistic, Impressionistic and the "Plein-air," and brought the art of America on a plane with that of a number of the European countries. To this result Whistler and Sargent, both living abroad, contributed in large degree.

A notable development during this latter period was the growing encouragement of mural painting and its relation to architecture. The first true mural piece in this country was that of Trinity Church in Boston, painted by La Farge in 1876. The architect, H. H. Richardson, thought that the interior effect of the structure would be improved by a scheme of painted decorations; that the only purpose of such a scheme should be complementary to the architecture. In 1878 W. M. Hunt was commissioned to paint two decorations for the New York State Capitol in Albany. The Chicago Exposition of 1893, however, gave this branch of painting its greatest impetus, and with the building of the Library of Congress and numerous federal, state and municipal buildings since that time, mural painting has become widely popular. One of the best examples of an historical incident adapted to the purpose of a mural decoration is Turner's work in the Federal Court House in Baltimore depicting the burning of the "Peggy Stewart" at Annapolis in 1774. In St. Thomas Church, New York, unfortunately burned in 1904, was combined in an harmonious manner the work of three artists, architect, sculptor and decorator, the reredos being modelled by St. Gaudens with a painted scene from the Resurrection, by La Farge, on each side. A mural painting by La Farge in the Church of the Ascension, New York, picturing the Ascension of Christ, is
considered one of the finest examples of the mural decorator's art.

The mural movement has truly evolved into an independent school with many artists figuring prominently in it. Those who have done excellent work in this art are, besides La Farge, Edwin Blashfield, Kenyon Cox, John S. Sargent, Albert Hunter, C. Y. Turner, Miss Violet Oakley, Will H. Low, Robert Reid, Edward Simmons, H. Siddons Mowbray, G. W. Maynard, and others. In adhering to the ideas of the architect, Richardson, and the painter, La Farge, of making their work not mere embellishments like pictures on a wall but "integral parts of architectural units," these artists have probably blazed a new trail in the history of art.

SCULPTURE

Another distinct advance in artistic production and appreciation has been in sculpture. There were a few sculptors of some note in America even during the eighteenth century, for example, Mrs. Patience Wright, who made figures in wax, and whose statue of Lord Chatham is in Westminster Abbey; John Dixey, who executed figures for the City Hall, New York; Giuseppe Ceracchi, an Italian, who made good busts of Washington, Hamilton, John Jay and Paul Jones; and William Rush, of Philadelphia, whose bust of Washington is in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and whose "Water Nymph," originally executed in wood, was reproduced and set up in Fairmount Park.

In the early nineteenth century American sculptors went to Rome for instruction, and consequently the classical influence is everywhere present in their work. Frazee, Greenough, Hiram Powers, Crawford, Story, Thomas Ball and Rinehart represent this school. Crawford, a pupil of Thorwaldsen, is best represented in his Liberty statue on the top of the Capitol dome and his
bronze doors of the Capitol in Washington. Ball's best work is the equestrian statue of Washington in the Public Gardens in Boston. Rinehart is famous for his statue of Chief Justice Taney in Annapolis.

Though Henry Kirke Brown studied in Italy he was among the first of the sculptors to devote most of his time to American events and life. Two fine examples of his work are the equestrian statue of Washington, Union Square, New York, and of General Scott in Washington. John Quincy Adams Ward, a pupil of Brown, followed his teacher. Trained entirely in America he nevertheless produced some notable work. His fame rests on a monument to Henry Ward Beecher in Brooklyn.

In modern sculpture there has been perhaps a more pronounced growth in production and appreciation than in painting. Most of the striking work in this field certainly has been done in the last generation, its originality in conception and technique placing American sculptors in the forefront of the world's living artists. Three or four factors in American life since the Civil War have contributed in large degree to this happy result. After the war many communities both in the South and North desired to commemorate the heroism of the soldiers and statesmen participating in that struggle, and though much of the work in the earlier years displayed little or no artistic merit, American taste was steadily advanced as the sculptors trained in Paris began to return. In consequence, we see today a considerable number of noble examples of the sculptor's art gracing our civic centers, parks, squares and boulevards. Another movement stimulating interest in sculpture was the widespread erection of public buildings during the sudden expansion of the country in the seventies and eighties, the plans of which called for sculptured embellishments. The monumental sculpture adorning the buildings and grounds of the Columbian Exposition, as well as the collection of works assembled there, not only furnished a strong incentive
to the artists themselves, but focussed the attention of the whole nation upon what was best in sculpture. Finally, the romance of the frontier with its life of the Indian, the trapper, scout and cowboy, stimulated sculptors to do some of their finest work.

Among the first of American sculptors to be trained in Paris was Olin Levi Warner. A fountain group in Union Square, New York, and another in Portland, Oregon, were done by him. The three outstanding artists representing this school, however, are Augustus St. Gaudens, Frederick MacMonnies and Daniel Chester French. Fine examples of St. Gaudens’ genius are: “Lincoln Memorial” in Chicago, “The Puritan” in Springfield, Mass., the memorial statue, “Grief” in Rock Creek cemetery, Washington, and the “Shaw Memorial” in Boston. MacMonnies, who was a pupil of St. Gaudens, has one piece, “Bacchante” in the Metropolitan Museum, and another, “Nathan Hale” in the City Hall Park, New York. Daniel Chester French did the “Minute Man” in Concord, Mass., and “Mourning Victory” in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. He also executed the notable statues: “Gallaudet and the Deaf Mute” and “Death and the Sculptor.” Another work by his hand was the remarkable statue to “Liberty” erected in the Court of Honor at the Columbian Exposition but which unfortunately was not preserved.

A brilliant galaxy of stars have followed in the footsteps of St. Gaudens, MacMonnies and French, but only the names of some of them can be given here. Philip Martin modelled the grand staircase in the Library of Congress, and Herbert Adams the bronze doors in the same building. Rhind’s “Learning” was executed for Alexander Hall at Princeton. Paul Bartlett is represented in his equestrian statue of LaFayette, presented to the French nation by the school children of America. Karl Bitter’s “Signing of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty” has been described as a fine example of illustration in sculpture. Lorado Taft has likewise done notable work. The
names of Gutson Borglum, Dallin, and Solon Borglum represent a considerable group of sculptors who have devoted themselves to animal life and to the frontier.

ARCHITECTURE

In architecture there was developed a style in colonial New England, which was probably original. The extensive use of wood instead of stone or brick as in Europe was perhaps the chief reason for a new departure. With this exception the architecture during the whole period of American history until a generation ago was more or less an imitation of European styles. The colonial style as represented by Independence Hall, Fanueil Hall and the Old State House, Boston, was copied after English models. From the Revolution to the War of 1812 the French influence in this country, arising from our alliance with France, was dominant, Louis XVI style being represented in the State House on Boston Common and the New York City Hall. The Greek revival in Europe is reflected in the central portion of the National Capitol at Washington and in other federal buildings erected up to 1840, such as the Treasury and Patent Office buildings in Washington, the Government Mint in Philadelphia and the Federal Sub-treasury in New York. By 1840 we recognize a Gothic revival resulting in such structures as Grace Church, St. Patrick's Cathedral and Trinity Church in New York and the State Capitol in Hartford, Connecticut. From 1875 to 1900, however, the Gothic style was employed only in the case of churches.

The date 1875 is usually fixed to mark approximately the beginning of the modern architectural movement in America. There are several reasons for this. The rapid growth of wealth and the vast expansion of our population after the Civil War produced a demand for public buildings and handsome private mansions. This demand was materially increased on the account of the great
fires in Chicago (1871) and in Boston (1872). Then, too, as in painting, the Philadelphia Centennial with its beautiful buildings awakened the American people to an appreciation of the artistic in architecture. A school in architecture had in the meantime been founded in Boston in 1866 in response to the needs of the time, but it was the work of two men, Richard M. Hunt and H. H. Richardson, which gave both direction and inspiration to the new impulse. The style used by these men and their many followers was the French Romanesque, represented notably in Trinity Church in Boston and the County Buildings in Pittsburgh.

Thomas Jefferson had once imagined an "American order" of architecture in a column and capital based on Indian corn, and there had been many others after his time who evinced enthusiasm for an American style. However, no truly American style of architecture appeared until the days of the "skyscraper," and this innovation was mainly the result of circumstances. The rising prices of land, resulting from the limited area of Manhattan Island, combined with the problems occasioned by the concentration of business, compelled the architects to adopt the so-called vertical style. This became possible only because of the invention of the elevator and the cheaper production of steel by the Bessemer process. While at first the "skyscraper" merely answered a practical purpose, of late years more attention has been paid to artistic lines and embellishments, as for example, in the Woolworth building in New York and the Methodist Temple in Chicago.

MUSIC

In music let it suffice to say that our present enthusiasm for this art has come during the last thirty years. The story of the growth of appreciation in this field is an interesting one, but I shall only quote from an article
in Scribner's, written by Theodore Thomas in 1881, to show the contrast between conditions then and now. He writes: "We have no public instrumental performers of American birth who can rank with our singers in public estimation, nor is there at present more than a very limited demand for instrumentalists. New York is the only city in the country in which an orchestral player can make a living, and even here he must give lessons or play at balls and parties, thereby losing or injuring the finer qualities of an orchestral player. Boston, in spite of many efforts, cannot support a large well-balanced orchestra. Philadelphia has no standing orchestra and in Cincinnati and Chicago the orchestral musician must eke out a living by playing in beer gardens and saloons." A far cry to the days of the Metropolitan Opera Company, Chicago Opera Company and the great orchestras of Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati and other cities of our day!