

A GERMAN ART SALE.

How Engravings Are Disposed of in Stuttgart.

At this time of year, the dispersal of art collections at auction is constantly to be observed in New-York, the methods employed in such enterprises have a special interest. Our readers will recall an article which showed in detail what they are like in this city. Serious differences are to be noted in all the great European marts. The procedure at Christie's, in London, departs in essentials from that followed at the Hotel Drouot, in Paris, and environment, if nothing else, serves to give each of these famous places its particular cachet. Perhaps an even greater individuality is to be discerned in the incidents surrounding an auction sale of art objects in Germany. There is something decidedly unconventional about such a sale of engravings, for example, as may be attended at Stuttgart, in Wurtemberg, where the annual sale of prints, or prints and drawings, has become almost an institution.

In the first place, the print dealer, who is also the auctioneer in this case, may have himself bought the collection of engravings which is to be scattered, cataloguing it for sale under the hammer, and relying for his profit on the high prices which may be paid for the "plums" or rarities, as well as for the balance of the prints, since the celebrity of a collection goes a long way toward making prices rise high when it is put up for public sale. Sometimes, if the prints belong to some collector who wishes to dispose of his treasures in this way, the auctioneer may be divided between him and the auctioneer, the latter having the privilege to add things from his own stock which in this way profit from the excitement of a more or less important occasion. In any case, the auctioneer can protect the different lots as they are put up, either by bidding himself or having his clerk do so. It is a recognized privilege, and no one seems to think that it is improper. Besides, many of these bids may be commissions from collectors or dealers, who cannot attend the sale. Another feature that strikes the stranger as rather odd, is that on all lots sold, an extra 5 per cent must be paid by the purchaser, over and above the price at which these lots are knocked down to him. It is distinctly stated in the catalogue, so that no one can claim to be abused. This is done, it is said, in order to defray the expenses of the sale, which include the rental of the auction room, the printing of catalogues, the sending of prints to London, Paris, Berlin and elsewhere for inspection, and other minor matters. It will be seen, therefore, that the man who makes the sale runs practically no risk if he gauges his public with accuracy, which is pretty sure to be the case when an "old hand" has matters in charge. The Koenigsbau is a building in the centre of Stuttgart, with a colonnade and shops which are reached by steps on three sides, the other side being level with the street. Above are rooms in which balls, parties, weddings and so on, can be held, and it is in one of these rooms that the annual print sale usually takes place.

The method of selling is somewhat different from ours, inasmuch as "the public" does not appear at the sale at all, it being apparently got up for the benefit of the handful of men who sit around the outside of the table (shaped like a very long horseshoe), inside of which an attendant moves, showing to each person the lot to be sold, as he rapidly passes from one end of the table to the other. While this is going on another man, also in the centre, calls the bids in a loud voice, and before knocking a lot down always gives warning by saying "for the second time," and then, "for the third time," calling out the name of the purchaser afterward. In front of the latter is a large sheet of brown paper in which to put such lots as may be secured. Each man at the table has one of these wrappers, with his name written on it. The purchasers represent dealers from all parts of Germany, some few German amateurs and the hands of the print departments of the German museums. Dealers are present from London, Paris and Vienna, who buy for stock or for amateurs who have given commissions. New-Yorkers at the table, if there are any, represent themselves only, so far as is known, the rich American not having yet got so far as to buy prints through the eyes of a third person. In England a "gentleman" does not bid at sales, even if he should be present himself; his dealer or commissionaire does so for him. It is the same in France, the service requiring a slight percentage of recompense in both countries.

The sale begins at 9:30 o'clock in the morning, and continues until 11, when the auctioneer says: "We will now have some refreshment," and the company cheerfully disposes of the sandwiches, beer and wine which have been brought in on a long table by attendants, after which the sale is continued until 12:45 o'clock, when all adjourn to their different hotels for dinner, which is eaten in Germany at 1 o'clock. At 2 o'clock the sale is resumed, continuing until 4:30; again beer, wine and sandwiches make their appearance, and the hungry element goes to work with enthusiasm, so that by the time they return to business trays and table are cleaned completely of edibles and drinkables. At 6:30 or 7 o'clock, according to the rapidity of the bidding, the sale is concluded for the day, and the bidders melt away into groups, the New-York, London and Paris people going off by themselves, the Germans by themselves, and the Herr directors ditto. This is not on account of any antagonism, but simply that few of the English speaking visitors understand German, but many understand French, and the Frenchmen certainly do not understand each other. The Germans, however, are good linguists, most of them speaking English and French.

One feature of the sale, to a non-smoker, or one whose nerves are affected by smoke, most disagreeable, is the continual smoking. Nearly every one smokes, and the effect may be imagined in a room with no ventilation. Any effort to introduce fresh air meets with a storm of protests, so that one has to go through the safe inhaling cigarette and cigar (?) smoke to the defilement of every garment, and disturbance of the nerve centres. How can any one not accustomed to it endure the smoke of a hash of tobacco, carpets, old paper, etc., commingled? On the other hand, a peculiar episode in the dinner which is given by the auctioneer on the last day of the sale to the strangers within the gates. This function usually takes place at the Hotel Marquand, where good things to eat are provided, and are washed down by the wine of the country, or Rhine wine if you prefer it, winding up with a glass of old Heilbronner

Cleaver, a local wine of considerable reputation. This is a very agreeable occasion. Views are interchanged, mostly on professional subjects—the quality of an impression, perhaps, and its relative excellence compared with a famous one in a well known collection; "chaff" on account of payment of too high a price for a print, late additions to some museum, etc. It is a source of great astonishment to the Germans to be told that there is not a public print cabinet or department in America worthy of the name. "But," they say, "look at the sums that our wealthy men disburse for houses, blooded horses, diamonds and jewels of all sorts, as well as paintings! Surely they can spare something for a fine collection of prints by old masters!" There is scarcely a town in Germany of any importance that has not a collection of prints, an industrial museum, or both. Even Brunswick and Cassel have fine collections of prints. Toward the end of the dinner speechmaking begins, any one who desires to say something rises, as in a Quaker meeting, and says it in the language he can speak most fluently. Different healths are drunk, and the diners walk around and about the table to clink glasses with a friend and see "prost." After all the speeches are made (always brief), and the healths drunk, the diners adjourn once more to the auction room. Strange to say, the sandwiches and beer and wine appear as usual at 4:30 o'clock, and are disposed of as if there had been nothing to eat for hours!

VICTOR HUGO'S GUERNSEY HOME.

It Has Some Curious Features.

From The Pall Mall Gazette. The study wherein much of Victor Hugo's literary work was performed is on the roof, and built mostly of glass. He always wrote standing, and his desk was nothing more than a shelf of black wood, fastened by hinges to the wall, such as often seen in the houses of middle class houses for the convenience of table service. Next door to this glass study was the novelist's bedroom, where was the most valuable collection of which perhaps the truly wonderful single item is a carved wooden bedstead of Francis I of France. Another very unusual article is a huge seven-branched candelabra, which he made himself but never used. Many of the paintings and carvings all over the house were the work of the great novelist, and in no one of his books is the originality of his mind or the full merit of his artistic conceptions brought home to the reader as it is in the course of an hour's ramble through the beautiful island home which still seems to breathe his living personality.

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