

ANTONELLO DA MESSINA.

Some New Light on the Career of the Sicilian Master.

The Sicilian town which has so recently been laid in ruins preserves in its annals one of the brightest names in Italian art. Antonello da Messina is a figure of deep interest to the student of fifteenth century painting. Little, however, is known about him, and that little has been the cause of much debate. His biography is still obscure, but something has been added to it by two delvers in Sicilian archives, M. La Corte-Cailler and M. Gioacchino di Marzo, and on the fruits of their labors M. Henri Stein has based a valuable study of the painter in the current number of the "Gazette des Beaux-

may be seen from our reproduction, it is assuredly of a type strongly suggestive of Antonello's art.

In other portraits of men by him, portraits that are among the jewels of the museums in Paris, London, Berlin and Milan, you find the same traits of simple, bold modelling and extraordinarily firm draftsmanship. In a certain plastic grandeur the Sicilian painter is almost comparable to Mantegna. The painter of the wonderful "Cardinal Mezzarotta" would not have disdained to produce some of these statuesque heads of Antonello's. The man who made them had a sense of style and of color. In respect to the latter point in his work it is probable that the extent of his indebtedness to the influence of the Van Eycks will ultimately be measured even more economically than at present. If foreign influence must be reckoned with in his development, M. Stein may prove to be right in



PORTRAIT OF A MAN.

(From the painting attributed to Antonello da Messina.)

Arts." From old notarial documents it would now seem possible to fix the year of his birth at 1430, and that of his death at 1479. He married in 1455. His father was a master mason, evidently a solid citizen of Messina, and it would appear that Antonello was comfortably launched and soon met with favor as an artist. Various contracts show that he was employed to paint pictures and banners. In connection with the difficult question of his travels in the north of Italy and in Venice, a question on which more light remains to be thrown, M. Stein cites documentary evidence of Galeazzo Sforza's lively interest in the master, whose fame, indeed, was of fairly rapid growth and widely spread.

Just how many paintings he left it is impossible to state, until patient scholarship may have thoroughly overhauled the museums of Europe, and especially the churches and private collections of Italy. We know, at any rate, that he was a master of the religious subject and even more of the portrait. In paintings such as the "Entombment," at Vienna, and the beautiful "St. Sebastian," at Dresden, there are elements of feeling which, if not as profound, as poignant, as those to be discerned in the works of divers other old Italian masters, are certainly significant of no shallow nature—despite Morelli's skepticism. It may be noted, by the way, that M. Stein, glancing over the body of art attributed to Antonello, is inclined to doubt the authenticity of certain familiar examples. There was another Antonello, the son of our Antonello's brother-in-law, Giovanni Risaliba, who was trained in the tradition of the master, and whose work bears a family likeness to that of the latter. To this Antonello di Saliba, as he is known, M. Stein would give the well known "St. Sebastian" at Berlin. On the other hand, the brilliant "Portrait of a Man" in the museum at Antwerp, which M. Wauters would regard as a portrait of Nicolo Spinelli, engraver of seals to Charles le Temeraire, executed by Memling, M. Stein would bestow upon Antonello. He would even like to believe that this is a portrait of the painter himself, though it is impossible to speak dogmatically on the subject. As

bringing in the name of the Spanish primitive, Luis Dalmau. But no researches will ever deprive Antonello da Messina of his rank as a painter with great inborn gifts. R. C.

ART IN PARIS.

An Exhibition of Japanese Prints at the Louvre.

Paris, February 6.

The committee of the Central Union of Decorative Art has organized a highly interesting exhibition of Japanese prints and engravings in the Pavillon de Marsan, in the Louvre. It is a loan exhibition, comprising upward of three hundred numbers, and comes as a revelation to most amateurs accustomed to the somewhat elementary Japanese prints on silk or linen. Engraving is the most recent of Japanese arts, and, like those of painting, bronze sculpture and lacquer, porcelain and pottery, came from China. It was not until 1630 that the earliest specimens of Japanese prints were made in black lines by Moronobou, after the fashion of the primitive Chinese Buddhist drawings. The Moronobou designs were subsequently enriched by red or orange tints, applied after each proof by the artist's brush, and finally the engraver, by means of successive blocks, was enabled to print his plates in various colors by direct methods. An interesting feature of the present exhibition is a collection, in chronological order, of the implements, tools, blocks of cherry wood, inks, colors and steel points used by the Japanese engravers of the seventeenth century.

For many years the Japanese refused to consider engravings as works of art. They only did so as a concession to European students, who discovered the remarkable qualities in the Nippon prints, now universally recognized. The great classic schools of Japanese painting worked under rigid secular traditions. They drew their subjects from court life and nature, making use of an extraordinarily subtle technique, and their

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pictures appealed exclusively to an aristocracy educated to appreciate all the delicate shades of vision. The engravers broke away from these traditions, and had the courage to deal with and describe home life, popular amusements, children's games, hunting, fishing, athletic sports and the everyday lives of artists, actors and courtesans. Their somewhat mechanical methods, notwithstanding a wealth of fancy and ingenuity, came as a shock to eyes accustomed to the delicacy of touch obtained by the brush. Consequently the higher nobility turned their backs upon the engravers and left them to the people, who soon acquired a liking for the popular homely national prints. After Moronobou—memorable for his black, archaic Buddhist designs—came two artists of wonderful talent, who developed his ideas and improved his methods. They employed seven or eight cherry wood blocks, by means of which they imparted great varieties of tones.

The art of engraving soon became divided into two distinct schools—that of the Torii and that of the Okoumura. Kiyonobou, founder of the former school, portrayed theatrical scenes and the gestures and play of actors and courtesans. His son, Kiyomassou, continued his father's work. On the other hand, Massanobou, founder of the Okoumura, was the engraver of familiar

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street and house scenes—the Japanese Hogarth. Some beautiful engravings by these artists may be seen in the exhibition. One is struck by strange faults in proportion and defects in drawing, but mathematical exactitude was not an essential quality in Japanese art, while the harmonious rhythm of line, truthfulness of movement and happy disposal of spots of color were elements of the highest importance. The present exhibition, which presents the art of Japanese engraving from 1630 to 1760, will soon be enlarged by a number of admirable specimens of engravings by Outamaro, Hiroshige and engravers who flourished as late as 1840.

In the Pavillon de Marsan, adjoining the six rooms devoted to the Japanese engravings, may be seen the most beautiful set of First Empire bedroom furniture in existence. Almost every piece is historic. The objects came mostly from Fontainebleau. They were collected by the late M. Charles Ephrussi, whose niece, Mme. Théodore Reinach, has lent them for three years to the Museum of Decorative Arts. The walls of the bedroom are covered with paper painted *en grisaille* by Lafitte, pupil of Prud'hon, and representing the story of Psyché. The mahogany gondola bed, ornamented with exquisitely chiselled bronze, belonged to the Empress Josephine. It is draped with rare taffeta and