In the Realm of Autumn Art Books

Reviewed by DR. CHRISTIAN BRINTON.

DR. CHRISTIAN BRINTON, the litterateur and art critic, who has assumed the task of reviewing art publications for THE NEW YORK HERALD *book section, began his professional career some twenty years ago as associate editor of the Critic. Educated at Haverford College, Heidelberg University and the Sorbonne, he has specialized in art history and criticism. Dr. Brinton was a member of the International Jury of Award of the Panama-Pacific Exposition, has been made a Knight of the Royal Order of Vasa of Sweden, and is the recipient of numerous academic honors and distinctions. He is the author of Modern Artists, Impressions of the Art at the Panama-Pacific Exposition, as well as the Introductions to Scandinavian Art, the History of Russian Art, by Alexander Benois, and numerous current exhibition catalogues.*

THE pageant of autumn art books embraces virtually the entire panorama of æsthetic aspiration. It stretches from the communal and collective endeavor of remote, rudimentary days to the conscious individualism of contemporary production. Looking backward to the anonymous legacy of the Neolithic vase painters of Bœotia, Phocis and Thessaly and the naive figurative terra cotta of Etruria and Latium, it reaches down the ages to the stressful Gauguin, who succumbed in a defiant attempt to recapture this same lost primitivity of eye and hand.

One can of course consider each book separately without striving to establish any sense of kinship, real or fancied, between the contribution of our various authors. The piecemeal method possesses advantages, yet it is more stimulating to view, and to review, them in sequence, for one phase of æsthetic activity blends imperceptibly into the next. Moreover, the time is past when art can be treated as something independent of the general trend of social evolution. The slogan of *l'art pour l'art*, which used to ring buoyantly in studio and gallery, is to-day obsolete. It savors of a period prolific in painters though deficient in creative impulse.

It is with the Stone Age ceramic of North and South Greece that our survey of plastic achievement begins, and no surer guide to this particular field has thus far appeared than Dr. Buschor. ("Greek Vase Painting." By Ernst Buschor. Translated by G. C. Richards, M. A. With a preface by Percy Gardner, Litt. D. E. P. Dutton & Co.) At first restricted to crude household vessels fashioned by hand out of poorly cleansed clay, burnt black in the open fire, the evolution of jug, bowl, vase and urn is carried onward through kylix, krater, psykter and amphora adorned with severe geometric, ornately floral or pretentious legendary composition. Yet follow the development of the vase as outlined by Dr. Buschor and you are confronted with the indisputable fact that the greater the technical mastery displayed the less is the actual artistic merit of the work. The use of brush, the employment of perspective, the simulation of light and shade and the increasing elaboration in the treatment of the figure, each contributed to the extinction of that which was vital and organic. From the vigorous abstraction of the Kamares ware to the contribution of post-Pheidian days the story is one of increasing æsthetic degeneration. It is a phenomenon we encounter not alone in Dr. Buschor's erudite pages, but elsewhere in the course of this review. It was indeed because of the ascendancy of this same sterile formalism that Gauguin rebelled and sought refuge among his simple islanders of the Southern seas.

Overlapping the period of Hellenic potter and vase painter is the epoch of those deft fashioners of terra cotta antefixae, akroteria, and temple friezes so ably discussed in Mrs. Van Buren's monograph on this little known subject. ("Figurative Terra Cotta Revetments in Etruria and Latium." By E. Douglas Van Buren. E. P. Dutton & Co.) That the fictile adornment of the ancient italic temples was of Greek parentage is attested by Pliny, who avers that when Damaratos fled from Corinth to Etruria he was accompanied by three potters, "Eucheir, Diopos and Eugrammos, who introduced the art of modeling into Italy." Without vouching for Pliny's veracity as an art historian it is nevertheless manifest that even before the advent of Damaratos there was a well defined art movement throughout Sicily, while at Veii and other points in Etruria were flourishing colonies of potters and figure modelers whose activity found congenial expression in the field of architectonic terra cotta.

We owe Mrs. Van Buren a debt of gratitude for describing and classifying this rare and diverting art form. The Hellenic tradition here takes on an inventive fantasy that frankly presages the grotesques of the Gothic era. One surveys with joy these freely modeled gorgone, and these satyrs and maenads into which has flowed a fresh creative vitality doubtless due to altered conditions, racial and physical. They rank indeed among the most precious fragments of early polychromatic plastic art.

The cultural legacy of Greece and Rome was, however, shortly to be crushed beneath the surge of barbaric hordes, and well-nigh obliterated during the so called Dark Ages. Life again became precarious and unstable and beauty retreated to monastic cell and palace stronghold. Of the two art forms that flourished during this period—the delicate craft of jeweler and goldsmith and the art of miniaturist and illuminator of missal and manuscript—the former claims priority. Although the fascinating and colorful pages of Joan Evans's work treat the jeweled production of Great Britain only, the theme is one that reaches back into the remotest antiquity. Classical, Oriental and pre-Christian influences are fused in most of the early work. Roman culture sweeping northward through Germany and Gothland, Oriental motifs flowing across the face of Europe from the magical South East—each added to the pagan Anglo-Saxon tradition its imperishable stamp. ("English Jewelry. From the Fifth Century A. D. to 1800." By Joan Evans, B. Litt. E. P. Dutton & Co.)

Enjoying exceptional facilities in the preparation of the text, and bringing thereto ability of an unusual order, the librarian of St. Hugh's College, Oxford, has produced a model work devoted to one of the most absorbing of the minor arts. The story of English jewelery as told in these pages reads like a veritable romance shot through with flash and gleam, taking its inspiration here from Celtic monasticism, there from the brave age of chivalry, submitting to influences now French, and now Italian, yet ever remaining sturdily British in spirit and form. All thanks to the librarian of St. Hugh's for a book beautiful to eye and hand, and replete with literary distinction and sure aesthetic discrimination.

If the social aspect of life through the ages is eloquently reflected in ring, clasp and brooch, in miter, crown and crozier, in pilgrim's sign and retainer's badge, it is not less significantly embodied in those priceless illustrated parchments, miniatures and "Paradise pictures" to which one must turn in order to discover the actual beginnings of present day painting. In his imposing volume on the Van Eycks, the former Slade Professor of Art at Cambridge offers a distinct contribution to the

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