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THE TACTICS OF PAINT

By Y

We must expect it. We are going to have a great flood of military pictures. That will be the expiation of the victory. It has begun already. Only the other day there was displayed in the show window of a shop in one of the boulevards a picture representing some French soldiers bringing a German captive to a hut. It is the first attempt of our painters to depict the present campaign.

To tell the naked truth, most of our painters have more important things to do at the moment than making sketches. Only a few venerable, beretted, moss-covered landscape artists remain at their easels, permanent as the centenarian willows they so love to paint; and there is no indication that they will ever change their ways. And then there are the women painters. If the half-length portrait is no longer wanted, if Breton fisherfolk will not longer sell, if nurslings at the breast no more tempt picture buyers and collectors—why, the women painters will have to turn their brushes to battle pieces.

It is a difficult art, military painting; difficult because a battle is invisible. Read the story of the battle of Friedland told by an eye-witness. The sky was clear and the air calm but the battalions of Ney were enveloped in a dense pall of smoke from which they, unseen, fired at an invisible foe. Suddenly from this blanket of smoke the watcher saw emerge a rout of soldiery. Thus, and only thus, he learned that the Russian guard had charged. It was all done in a fog bank, out of sight. The battle of Ligny, accurately represented, would be nothing but a cloud. It is true that the cloud concealed a stream piled with dead and two burning villages; but nobody could see anything of that. On the day of Eylau nobody saw anything but snowflakes; and from 6 o'clock to 10 at night the fighting was done in absolute darkness. Nor could anyone see anything at the battle of Craonne, the two armies being enveloped in dense fog.

Today a battlefield presents still fewer themes for paintings. The fighting men are hidden in trenches. The artillery is deployed and undiscoverable. All the art of the outfitters and quartermasters has been exhausted to make the soldiers invisible. Such tactics are disastrous indeed to the painters of battle pictures.

But, you say, the painters must try to depict episodes and anecdotes of war. Still more difficulties. I see every morning in a shop window a water color of infantry taking a garden by assault. The singular thing about it is that nobody in the front rank is wounded, whereas the rear ranks are falling like autumn leaves. This singular fatality is found in all similar pictures and for a very simple reason.

If the men in the front rank were to fall like the leaves in October, their fall would make a sorry hole right in the center of the composition; hence the front rank must be made as invulnerable as Achilles. The soldiers in the rear ranks, on the contrary, may be massacred without mercy. They are put precisely in the place where they may throw up their arms, and in their fall "pull the composition together," as painters say. That is why they perish in crowds.

Ah, yes, painters, no less than generals, have their tactics.—Paris Journal des Debats.

Monsieur wanted the picture hung to the right; madame wanted it on the left. But monsieur insisted that the servant should hang the picture according to his orders. Consequently Joseph stuck a nail in the wall on the right, but this done, he also went and stuck another on the left. "What is that second nail for?" his master inquired in astonishment. "It's to save me the trouble of fetching the ladder tomorrow when monsieur will have come round to the views of madame."

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