THE UNUSUAL WOODCUTS OF M. FELIX VALLOTTON: BY GARDNER C. TEALL

Ust at a time when we were forgetting that some of the most interesting examples of the art of the little school of Pre-Raphaelites were to be found in their designs for woodcuts,—designs which, in their way, speak quite as much for the spirit of art-rebellion that stood forth in the hearts of Watts, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Madox-Brown, Hunt, and the rest of them, there appeared on the Parisian horizon a young Swiss, Felix Vallotton, who had been born at Lausanne in eighteen hundred and sixty-five, Christmas Day. He had struggled along in various ateliers under French masters almost without success, and had become so discouraged that even the good luck prophesied to all Christmas children seemed a thing no longer worth hoping for, when, and quite to his amazement, one of his portraits received an honorable mention from the Salon of eighteen hundred and eighty-five.

Doubtless he looked upon this somewhat unsubstantial honor as a rare piece of good fortune. It was as if that restored optimism to him, but in the work itself there was no luck; the blunderers of the Salon simply again had honored a mediocre picture. The canvas scarcely deserved attention, and it may be said to the credit of this bodyguard of French painting, that the succeeding committees of eighteen hundred and eighty-six, eighteen hundred and eighty-seven, and of eighteen hundred and eighty-nine promptly declined Vallotton’s paintings. They were, without doubt, crude and somewhat violent in color; surely anything but indicative of their painter’s really remarkable abilities in other art-directions. His first success in the Salon had raised him to that seventh heaven of paint and turpentine whence now he fell with a thud that set him thinking.

Vallotton had been what most young artists are either too listless or too lazy to be, a student of many things. He found himself interested in Dürer’s prints, in Cranach, in the early Italian designers of woodcuts, and, not least of all, in the woodcuts after the designs of the little group of Englishmen first mentioned. Mechanical processes had come to crowd out the graver and his block of pear-wood, and Vierge was being shown up in zinc. To Vallotton there was a significance in all this, and he decided to have a little renaissance all his own, one which, curiously enough, came close upon the heels of the English aesthetic movement in which the journals both at home and on the continent were finding vast amusement.
In eighteen hundred and ninety-one, Vallotton, having got to work, produced a portrait of his friend Paul Verlaine, the poet, curious phenomenon of French letters. Although this portrait exhibited plainly Vallotton's experimental handling, the whole conception was assuredly somewhat of a new note everywhere. Now we are used to the products of Aubrey Beardsley, and of his apostles, their disciples and all followers of the bizarre in black and white, but at the time Vallotton began putting forth his woodcuts, nothing of the sort had been seen in France.

Ever eager to welcome a novelty and to approve of the unusual, the French public began to make three meals a day, or perhaps it would be more properly continental to say five, possible. At any rate, publishers waited on him at every turn, and he found his hands full. Fortunately, his ideas always kept pace with his diligence, and it must be admitted that he be off this peculiar in an astonishing time. While the method of old woodcut in the fifteenth centuries, the practice with his own originality, choose to call...
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now and then, but never in his ideas, nor does he try to get out of the wood the artificial qualities that are produced naturally by copper. Whether in the series of sixty portraits to illustrate Rémy de Gourmont’s “Livre des Marques,” or in later things, every one of his woodcuts bears the unmistakable imprint of Vallotton’s personality. He shows himself to be an acute psychologist, but his sense of humor, almost always present, prevents him from falling into the slough of *macabre*, in which, too often, a native Frenchman loves to tramp about, imagining he treads in a wine-press. This quality of humorous insight has made “The Bad Step” anything but gloomy, although a coffin occupies the important part of the picture. Again in “The Demonstration” Vallotton has caught a Paris mob in a manner only approached by Steinlein, and there is a delightful feeling of “before and after” in the series of portraits of Nietzsche. His portraits invariably are likenesses, and nothing human is discarded by him as being uninteresting, though he shows remarkable reticence in the matter he introduces in his compositions. It is not without interest to note that when “The Bath” was printed in a little American magazine, “The Chap Book,” some years ago, quite a little storm of journalistic protest came out of the west, and into it from the east, for that matter, the critics considering it productive of an undue tax upon the blushing capacities of the pure in heart and in Kankakee. However, art has progressed over here, and one never needs to hold hand before face, peeking through finger chinks at M. Vallotton. In the little picture entitled “The Execution” note that, tiny though they be, each of the faces of the
guards has a distinct clothed with apparent would have drawn in a mies. Indeed, Vallot artist, and he com serious attention as do or men like William Pryde in England, the junction, gave us the de with the name of the Felix Vallotton’s art is never runs itself dry a stupid subject. In thoroughly worth our study, not as something to be imitated, but as an inspirational quarry from which may be hewn out those solid blocks of the understanding that thoroughness in anything is the foundation on which to build enduring edifices.

PUVIS DE CHEVANNES.  
By Felix Vallotton.

A HINT OF SPRING

Drops of rain and drops of sun,  
And the air is amber spun.  
From the winter’s coma pass  
Golden tremors o’er the grass.  
Little sparks of memory  
Flash upon the soul and die.  
While a child amid the way  
Thrusts arbutus, hithered gay.  
From a somewhere full of bloom  
Earth’s exultant hope finds room,  
And the poorest, in the shower,  
Longs to buy a little flower.  

—Agnes Lee.