OUR WESTERN PAINTERS: WHAT CHICAGO IS DOING TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VITAL NATIONAL SPIRIT IN AMERICAN ART: BY GARDNER TEALL

RT is so thoroughly the visible record of a state of mentality that it is easy to understand how the thought that conceives it, directed by certain impulses, must in turn clothe with like influences everything that receives its impressions. Thus we read the manners and the morals of the people in the art of the masters of the Renaissance, and thus we know why the manners and morals of the time of Louis Fifteenth produced the art of Antoine Watteau or of Fraquard.

I suppose that the fundamental characteristics common to the work of a group or school of artists in any locality,—the Glasgow School, for instance, or the Düsseldorf School,—is the phenomenon produced by the fact that a group of congenial mentalities have come in local contact. We have only to imagine that the men of the Glasgow School are men from Edinburgh, Dumfries, Aberdeen, all possessed with the state of mind that produces a quality of work strongly marked by distinct characteristics. In fact, it would be possible to conceive that Glasgow herself contributed no artist to the group, simply being the ground whereupon these artists met, the city where they choose to live and to work out their soul reflections with paint upon canvas.

We have chosen to speak of an early group of American artists, George Inness the elder and others, as the Hudson River School, because they so well expressed in painting the glory of the landscape of this river section of our country. Beyond that, we Americans have bothered little about any American “schools” that might be imagined out of the mass of painters this country has produced. In art, as in other things, our interest in the individual has been, until recently, much greater than our interest in anything like communal progress, whether in philanthropy, charity, education or culture. Now, however, there has sprung up a widespread and sincere desire to study all phases of intellectual and industrial movements, and we are turning to what we have done in art with an eye to discerning its general trend and to a study of its usefulness in the development of our culture.

Boston, as James Spencer Dickerson once aptly said, is a state of mind, Chicago a movement. At all events, art in Chicago in all its phases means much more than the pursuit of an entertaining occupation, the expression of some single outburst of aesthetic en-
OUR WESTERN PAINTERS

thusiasm; the struggling attempt to be imitative, or the harnessing of art’s service to commercialism’s yoke. With Chicago, art has come to be a matter of fundamental communal interest. Mr. Whistler once opened his startling remarks in “Ten O’Clock” with the announcement, “Art is upon the town.” In Chicago it is nothing of the sort; it is, instead, of the town, and a vital part of its evolution.

The East is accustomed to look upon the West with tolerance,—being spoiled and made vain, perhaps by the more kindly fact that the West has always looked upon the East as an elder brother from whom lessons were to be learned. That the East has learned much from the West is admitted cautiously, but that the West has much to teach the East must be insisted upon. Time always softens and wears smooth the edges and corners of an established center of culture. Thus we find Boston and Philadelphia, and now New York, impressing us with the sense of established position in the finer things of life that so often stands forth as a contrast to what exists in newer communities, a contrast whose advantages we often misinterpret.

Half a century of critics have squabbled over the question of nationalism in art. Whether or not there is anything of the sort does not seem to have been settled upon paper, but the vital importance of nationalism in shaping art remains with myself a firm conviction. You must know a country’s people, its institutions, its history and its ideals, to know whether or not the work of its artists embodies the spirit that has breathed life upon the nation fostering it. The American character, from a conglomeration that we once mistook for a unit, is slowly evolving into a definite entity. As a natural result, we should in intellectual characteristics most closely resemble the nation that brings the strongest and most individual mental quality to our composite national life. Therefore, our art may resemble that of many nations, or even that of some one nation; since our own state is somewhat akin to the conditions that found Greek art molding that of the Romans, until the dominant nation had thoroughly absorbed and assimilated the characteristics of all its tributary states, and began to establish its own claim to a national art,—which in turn was swept aside by alien influences until, in the work of the cinquecentists, we find its distant impress faintly visible in the national art of Tuscany or the national art of Umbria. So in America we may one day step forth completely from the leading strings of foreign art into our own fair heritage.

THERE has grown up in Chicago, since her phoenix-like resurrection from almost overwhelming disaster, a sturdy group of strong artists whose honest endeavor, persevering pluck, and
“THE BORGHESI GARDENS”: BY FREDERIC CH. WALTON.
ARNO: A WATER COLOR: BY FREDERIC CH. WALTON.
"AN ARMLOAD OF WOOD"
BY ADAM EMORY ALBRIGHT.
"PORTRAIT OF MISS GRACE":
BY LOUIS BETTS.
"FISHING FOR TAUTOG" : BY ADAM EMORY ALBRIGHT.

"LOOKING FOR CLAMS" : BY ADAM EMORY ALBRIGHT.
"THE CONNOISSEUR": BY WALTER MARSHALL CLUTE.
PORTRAIT OF W.M. O'BRIEN'S SON: BY LOUIS BETTS.
devotion to their calling have given them claim to something higher than praise,—appreciation. These men and women,—painters, architects, sculptors, designers,—in expressing their own feeling about the things that surround them, are laying a foundation that very strongly suggests the beginning of a national American art. Perhaps Chicago finds herself little affected by immediate alien influences; her atmosphere little disturbed by the nervous impressions that vibrate within New York, or Boston, or Philadelphia,—all gates of a world’s commerce, and doors to a world’s culture. Howbeit, it is true that the art movement in Chicago, now free from any exotic faddism that might endanger the whole fabric of its service, is one of extraordinary interest.

Some one has said that the encouragement of art implies the necessity of discriminating patronage and generous support. In such patronage and support the artists of Chicago have been deservedly fortunate. Only a few years ago, for instance, the late Benjamin F. Ferguson bequeathed the sum of one million dollars as a fund whose interest is to be expended on monuments and sculpture commemorating famous American men and women and events in American history, all these works to be placed on the boulevards and elsewhere in Chicago. This bequest has therefore opened to Western sculptors a wonderful opportunity, inciting them to the full development of their abilities. Then, public interest in art matters is so great that nearly every one of the many clubs for the advancement of culture offers a substantial prize each year for the best work exhibited by Chicago artists. Probably there are more organizations of this sort in Chicago than in any other American city. Over fifty women’s clubs alone are federated, and each year the federation purchases some worthy work of a Chicago artist. Since the federation of the Chicago Art Association with the Municipal Art League in nineteen hundred and one, art in Chicago has received even greater encouragement than before; however, fortunately there has always been a corrective and constructive discrimination to temper and strengthen the quality of approbation. This may well be illustrated by the fact that at one exhibition but two hundred and sixty-nine pictures were selected out of six hundred and twenty-nine submitted, showing that no puff of local pride weakened the judgment of those who, in a sense, have to measure the standard to which art must attain. This is not meant to imply that many Chicago art juries have not made terrific blunders, or that now and then they have not let chaff keep out the wheat, but that on the whole the process of winnowing has been and continues to be carried on in a responsible, sensible, and reliable way.
OUR WESTERN PAINTERS

I have already hinted that native art is something broader than the native artist; that it is possible for even a foreigner to represent thoroughly the art of his adopted country when his soul and spirit are in accord with the inspiration of the country to which he comes. However, out of one hundred and twenty-one artists represented at a recent exhibition of the Chicago Society of Artists, but seventy were educated in Chicago. In local education, the Art Institute has been a potent factor. It is a great museum of art, but conceived upon lines that give it more of the nature of a helpful school than merely an entertaining museum. The principle upon which its school is founded is that of maintaining to a high degree of efficiency the severe practice of academic drawing and painting,—from life, from the antique and from subjects,—and to group around this fundamental principle, as around a living stem, the various departments of art education. This school holds forth several valuable prizes, among them the John Quincy Adams Foreign Travel Scholarship, limited to American-born students who have not previously studied abroad; an American traveling scholarship, the Woman’s Club Scholarship entitled the holder to three years’ free tuition; the Friday Club Scholarship and many others. Then, through the liberality of Martin A. Ryerson, an art library has been established which is really a marvel of its kind, containing among other things the largest collection of photographs of art objects in America. Added to these is the bequest of the late Maria Sheldon Scammon, by which a foundation was provided for an important course of lectures on the history, theory, and practice of the fine arts. John La Farge, Russell Sturgis, William Angus Knight, and Alphonse Mucha have been numbered among the Scammon lecturers. Moreover, Chicago does not let her art interest lag with the coming of the dull season. Almost alone among American cities, she arranges a series of excellent exhibitions during the summer months,—a plan that might well be followed to advantage elsewhere.

IT HAS been necessary to speak of these things that we may understand the attitude of Chicago’s public toward her art, and the advantages she places in the hands of the aspiring. Having presented these facts, one is better able to explain some of the characteristics that enter into Chicago art, giving it a fresh and virile life that seems peculiarly its own. A dozen years ago one might have catalogued upon the fingers of one hand the artists of this metropolis of the interior. Today a history of impressionism, the story of symbolic art, or a narrative of the classicists, might be illustrated by the work of artists selected from the various groups that
our Western Painters

now make Chicago truly a center of art activity. Best of all, the Chicago of today seems to be bringing to her artists a sense of the new Americanism that has awakened within the hearts of the strong, and they are introducing into their work the spirit of the West which clears from the aestheticism of certain European schools all that is weak, diseased, discolored, or sickly, substituting instead that sort of healthfulness that makes a picture appeal by the freshness of its conception.

No city in America has given its painters so many walls to decorate, thus producing a condition favorable to art's development along the lines of mural painting and bringing forward many artists of exceptional ability and some of real genius, in whose work appears perhaps one of the strongest impresses of Chicago's genius loci. There is not, for instance, in all America a master who has within himself a clearer conception of art's proper application to architecture than Frederic Clay Bartlett, who, although he studied under Collin, Whistler and others, brings a striking originality of his own to bear on every one of his paintings. He is a young Chicagoan of thirty-five, and it will be remembered, received a silver medal at St. Louis and an honorable mention from the Carnegie Institute. In the remarkable mural paintings with which he has decorated the Bartlett Memorial Gymnasium of the University of Chicago, one discerns an Italo-Teutonic spirit that forms a sort of Gothic expression which is all Mr. Bartlett's own, and is not only perfect in drawing and color harmony but original in feeling and in subject, since the work, which is in panels seven feet high, depicts athletic diversion of mediaeval times,—a subject which no other artist has as yet turned to his purpose. There is another man, even younger, whose designs for mural decoration command attention, although he is better known by his water colors. This is Frederic Ch. Walton. These two men seem almost destined to be the founders of a "school" of their own, for their color in itself is a revelation. Both are painters of landscape as well as of mural decorations, which brings one to remark that no artist who has not at least lived in Chicago a long time succeeds so well as her own artists in putting into local landscape the soul of the soil. And when her artists go forth to France, Italy, England, or elsewhere, there is always in the things they paint under foreign skies the note of a power to penetrate Nature's secrets and reveal to others the precise quality of the things they see in alien lands. I do not mean by this a literal transcription of Nature's prosaic presentment, nor the putting in of what might be left out, but a translation of what is before the eye, not literal, but absolutely true to the spirit of the original. Words alone never translated Dante suc-
cessfully, the rhythm and inflection are required to convey the full meaning, and so it is in landscape painting, as such Chicago men as Charles Francis Browne, Charles L. A. Smith, Carl Roeker and others have shown us. This year Mr. Smith exhibited some twenty-four landscapes of Californian country at the Art Institute. They were all done with the effect of that mellow golden glow characteristic of the Pacific State, and perhaps no Californian subjects ever shown have been more successful.

In genre painting there are many strong men and women in Chicago. Adam Emory Albright and Walter Marshall Clute are names that come to one first, perhaps. Where in all the realm of modern art is there anything that touches more surely the chord of American national appreciation than Mr. Albright’s paintings of the American boy? It is one of the distinguishing marks of the Chicago artists that they choose their subjects near at hand and, instead of trying to give artistic expression to pretentious ideas, they clothe simple subjects with the very garments of Art herself.

Mr. Albright entered the Art Institute at nineteen. In later years he visited Munich and Paris, in the latter city studying under Benjamin Constant, but when he returned there was no train swift enough, he says, to take him westward over the Alleghenys, home to Chicago. Mr. Albright writes, “I always liked children and wanted to paint them, but the pictures of children had been such slight things, lacking art in the true sense of the word, that I determined to make an effort to keep from such trivial, tiresome things as the everlasting ‘Little Girl with a Doll’ or ‘Boy with Slate,’ so instead of that I have painted children in the fields and children around the home, children occupied with the little tasks that they are always given to perform in any new country.” In his first exhibition of some thirty pictures, he had chosen such subjects as “Boys Fighting Bumblebees,” and “Boy Carrying Wheat Sheaves.” Mr. Albright never stunts a tree to make it come into a picture, and when the grass before him is nearly to the top of his canvas, he knows just how to paint the ruddy face under its battered little hat peeping out as though the child were wading through a sea of grain. His studio is a delightfully picturesque log cabin, wherein he has painted nearly all of his canvases. That no one else in America paints just such subjects and in just such a way as does Mr. Albright, again strengthens Chicago’s claim to an art of her own.

Mr. Clute bought and remodeled a quaint barn in one of Chicago’s suburbs, and all of his recent genre pictures have been painted with its various rooms as backgrounds. As yet the old garden,
teeming with motifs, has been unused in his compositions. All this is interesting since it shows the love of an artist for his home, a love which leads him to paint not only in and about it, but to depict the very place itself, an influence that is evidenced in the sincerity of his work and leads one to wish that studio life in general were less a matter of north lights and junk and more a matter of home. This love of home seems to be strong with Chicago artists and strong in their art. Mr. Clute’s wife is also an artist of ability and their little four-year old daughter has often been painted into their pictures.

Ralph Clarkson, Chicago’s most widely known portrait painter, was born in the town where John G. Whittier lived. I mention this because Mr. Clarkson’s portraits have much the quality of the poet’s verse. There is a refinement and eloquence about them, not aesthetic, but harmonious. They are always “well-bred” and are typical of what there is of conservatism in Chicago art.

With another portrait painter, Louis Betts, it is safe to say that the world of art will be much concerned henceforth. His portraits are the most remarkable that have come from so young an American artist at any time. His brush has found what was worth while in Velasquez, has left out what is disagreeable in Sargent, has assimilated the balance of William Chase, but above all remains true to Louis Betts, which is strong praise, deserved but not extravagant. When you look upon his work you know at once the value his art will lend to Chicago’s prestige.

What Chicago sculptors have done is better known. Men like Lorado Taft have won laurels from the inspiration they have received there by the lake shore. And who could fail to be astonished at the architectural genius of such men as Louis H. Sullivan, who may well be called the Brunelleschi of the West.

I have not chosen nor desired to describe the separate works of Chicago artists, nor would it be possible within even the cover of a large volume to discuss with any degree of thoroughness so large a subject. Instead, I have attempted to make clear not only that there is art in Chicago, but that there is an art that is of Chicago; that in the land where so recently the pioneers of our civilization erected their log cabins has sprung forth a glorious city that has managed to retain in the art it has welcomed from other countries and other times the fresh spirit of those glorious days before nature bowed to the necessities of artifice.