FRENCH railway station is a Tower of Babel to the uninitiated, and on a Sunday morning when the heavens smile and the sunshine beckons all the world to the countryside, one accustomed to a quiet American Sabbath experiences a curious and interesting impression of French temperament and French character. The railway runs through meadows and green fields, past charming little farmhouses nestling their white sides in a bright bloom of flowers and cool green,—for the French gardens are glowing and lovely as those of England,—and one catches glimpses of fascinating old chateaux set in a landscape rich with the mellow beauty of late summer.

One hour’s ride from Paris, at the fifth stopping-place, one reads, “Meudon” and alights on the platform in the sweet, fresh morning air. The birds are all atwitter with joy of the weather; the valley of St. Cloud and the winding river lie far below, the town of Meudon rises above; and, up still farther heights, in imposing and magnificent command, crowning the hilltop, stands the Villa des Brillants, the home and workshop, the atelier and the museum of Rodin.

After an uphill drive of two miles, through pretty village lanes hedged with flower and vine and shrub and tree,—a tangle of sweet odors and luxuriant growth—the roadway stretches still farther upward and then, on a long, level sweep, brings one to a fine, old French homestead reposing in the midst of beautiful gardens.

Standing in the gateway, waiting, with a smile on his lips and a welcome in his eyes, the most distinguished sculptor of the present century bends with charming courtesy and,—in French fashion,—with simple dignity and winning grace, kisses the hand of his guest in greeting.

One walks with the sculptor a hundred or more yards up the garden path, under trellised grape-vines and arches of foliage,—here and there embowering and half-concealing rustic seats,—and comes upon the edge of a cliff which commands one of the finest views in all France. Some two hundred feet below flows the winding Seine with its two arched bridges; far away to the front rise the minarets of St. Cloud, and all about are the rolling hills and fertile valleys of northern France, a billowing sea of vivid green.

The sculptor pauses for a moment before a Greek torso at the entrance of an inner garden—a softly rounded woman’s form, a won-
drous Aphrodite of ages gone by, resting on an old marble pedestal beneath the shadows of overhanging branches of green trees. The sculptor’s hand with loving lightness of touch follows sweepingly over the swelling bosoms, the perfect lines of shoulders and hips.

“This is Art perfected!”

Farther on he points out the white colonnades that flank the entrance of the home of his art—the Museum—a separate building from his dwelling, though close by—and he refers with interest to his book on Architecture now in the hands of the publishers.

He speaks of the Greek and Roman coins and medals.

“It is interesting to note that the finest and most beautiful heads we find on these coins are those of women whose apparent age is bordering on forty—or perhaps between thirty-five and forty-five”—says the sculptor. “That is the time of fullest development not only of the intelligence and spiritual perceptiveness, but also of physical charm—the time when life is most keen, the faculties, the senses, most alive and awakened.”

He speaks also of the world’s great masterpieces of Art as the fruition of emotion carried to its highest. “We speak of the ecstasy of religion; this ‘emotion’ we know not whence it comes—it is God given. It is that same power that has inspired great lovers, great artists—great saints—‘Ecstasy’ that produces—that generates—that creates—gives birth to all that is greatest and most noble—to Art—to Life itself.”

And Rodin’s blue eyes flash with the fire of the inner flame of youth and keen interest and zest in life as we pass lingeringly through the winding leafy garden paths.

IT IS in this garden that Rodin places his completed work for final pronouncement. One has glimpses of white forms of heroic mold through the branches of interlacing trees. In an open sunlit space a workman with mallet and chisel puts some ringing strokes on a great figure emerging from a marble block, and one watches with interest the slow development and rhythmic flow of line following the flashing steel. Walking all about the growing and unfolding contours, one seeks each point of view with keen delight in the firm roundness of the arm, the strength of the torso, the fine poise of the shoulders and throat, the noble carriage of the head.

The garden is a fit setting for these creations of Rodin; the vast background of the faraway hills; and the open air,—lighting to vivid tints the frame of surrounding green,—brings out to a fulness of beauty the noble forms and the powerful sweep of lines of his conceptions.
BUT IT IS IN THE MUSEUM THAT ONE FINDS THE GREATEST VARIETY AND
SCOPE OF HIS WORK.

There is "The Man Who Awakes to Nature"—stretching out
his arms in a fine passion for life, in a first perception, a dawning
consciousness of being, an awakening of body and soul to beauty
and joy and knowledge and power.

The Saint John the Baptist might be the incarnation of Suder-
mann's "Johannes"—that Saint John whom we first perceive strid-
ing forth from the shadow of the wild and rocky fastnesses near
Jerusalem, the distant horizon lighted up by the reflection of the
fires of the great altar of burnt-offering. There is another figure of
Saint John, incomplete, without the head and arms. Look at this
figure in the garden of Meudon, bathed in the dewy light. See its
tremendous movement, its power, its spring of muscular vitality,
its magnificent action.

Turn from the statue of Saint John to the marvelous little bronze
"La Vielle Heaulmierge." There in that reincarnation of Villon's
ballad is contained "the strength and depth of tragedy, the whole
drama of the human body's ruin."

FREDERIC LAWTON, in his life of Rodin, says:

"How many types of women Rodin has reproduced, each
with peculiar psychic qualities looking through the eyes and
revealed all over the physiognomy, can hardly be ascertained.
The bust of Mademoiselle Claudel is well named "Thought." There
is a deliberate suppression of the sensuous element, even to the hair.
The face appears between the mob cap that hides the ears with its
cremmed curve, and the block of marble that rises to the nape of the
neck and the chin and has some fashion of resemblance to a body
roughly hewn. The beauty of the features is less physical. The
cheeks are thinner, the nose more masculine, the brow and chin
sparer, the mouth firmer. There is another attraction, however;
it is the spirituality spread over the countenance and shining in the
eyes,—those unmistakably feminine. It is a spirituality of reflection
and self-communion that has burned and refined the material into
something more purely lovely."

What a variation from this theme is expressed in the splendid
group of the "Bourgeois of Calais," that memorial of brave men
who gave themselves to save the lives of the inhabitants of the van-
quished and doomed city. Although the monument was suggested
by the "Chronicle of Froissart," "the six figures, heroic creatures
of an untoward fate, are sufficiently typical of the destiny which over-
hangs them and has overhung others."
ARTHUR SYMONS in his essay on Rodin in his “Studies in Seven Arts” sums up Rodin’s work in a masterly fashion. “All Rodin’s work is,” he says, “founded on a conception of force, the force of the earth, then the two conflicting forces, man and woman; with always, behind and beyond, the secret, unseizable, inexplicable force of that mystery which surrounds the vital energy of the earth itself, as it surrounds us in our existence on the earth. Out of these forces he has chosen for the most part the universal, vivifying force of sex.

“In man he represents the obvious energy of nature, thews and muscles, bones, strength of limb; in woman, the exquisite strength of weakness, the subtler energy of the senses. They fight the eternal battle of sex, their embraces are a grapple of enemies, they seek each other that they may overcome each other. And the woman, softly, overcomes, to her own perdition. The man holds her in the hollow of his hand, as God holds both Man and Woman; he could close his hand upon the fragile thing that nestles there and crush it; but something paralyzes his muscles in a tender inaction. The hand will never close over her.”

To quote Rudolph Dircks, “Rodin has expressed in ‘The Kiss,’ ‘Eternal Springtime’ and in that singularly beautiful group, ‘The Idol of Eternity,’ the theme of the eternal man and woman, the creation of a mind which sees in the act of a lover’s caress, in its passion and mystery, a universal and permanent symbol.

“In Rodin’s drawings, which constitute in themselves so interesting a development of his art, there is little of the delicacy of beauty. They are notes for the clay, instantanées, and they note only movement, expression. They are done in two minutes, by a mere gallop of the hand over paper, with the eye fixed on some unconscious pose of the model. And here, it would seem (if, indeed, accident did not enter so largely into the matter) that a point in sentiment had been reached in which the perverse idealism of Baudelaire has disappeared and a simpler kind of cynicism takes its place. In these astonishing drawings from the nude we see Woman carried to a further point of simplicity than even in Degas: Woman the animal; Woman, in a strange sense, the idol. Not even the Japanese have simplified drawing to this illuminating scrawl in four lines, enclosing the whole mystery of the flesh. Each drawing indicates as if in the rough block of stone a single violent movement.”

According to Arthur Symons, “Every figure that Rodin created is in the act of striving toward something: A passion, an idea, a state of being, quiescence itself. His ‘Gates of Hell’—that great door for the ‘Musee des Arts Decoratifs’—which derived its subject
from the cantos of Dante’s ‘Inferno’ — are a headlong flight and falling, in which all the agonies of a place of torment, which is Baudelaire’s rather than Dante’s, swarm in actual movement. ‘Femmes damnées’ lean upward and downward out of hollow caves and mountainous crags, they cling to the edge of the world, off which their feet slip, they embrace blindly over a precipice, they roll together into bottomless pits of descent. Arms wave in appeal and clasp shuddering bodies in an extremity of despair.”

Of the much disputed statue of Balzac Arthur Symons says:

“Here is the Balzac, with its royal air, shouldering the crowd apart, as it steps into the final solitude and the triumph. It is the thinker of action, the visionary creator of worlds, standing there like a mountain that has become man. The pose is that of a rock against which all waves must dash themselves in vain. There is exultation, a kind of ferocity of enjoyment of life, in the great beaked head, the great jaws, the eagle’s eyes under the crag of eyebrows. And the rock suggests the man, the worker wrapped in the monastic habit of his dressing gown, all supple force under the loose folds of molded clay, stands there as if growing up out of the earth, planted for the rest of time. It is the proudest thing that has been made out of clay.

“It is Balzac, but it is more than Balzac; it is the genius and the work of Balzac; it is Seraphita and Vautrin and Lucien and Valerie; it is the energy of the artist and the solitude of the thinker and the abounding temperament of the man; and it is the triumph of all this in one supreme incarnation which seems to give new possibilities to sculpture.”

Standing in Rodin’s studio at Meudon where the work of his life is so largely represented, one is affected by a sense of the universal. These various forms and groups do not speak to one with the art of Greece, of eternal beauty; but, as it were, with a suggestion of the voice of the stars, of forces curiously blending the primeval and the contemporary.

And looking upon the man himself as one takes one’s farewell, one thinks of “that psychological moment which is the supreme test of character, when we either sink into the pragmatic stolidity of middle age, or rouse ourselves into a more intense appreciation of the romance of life.” Rodin is an embodiment of that romance where one stands “ecstatically upon the verge, no matter what the end may be.”