AMERICA’S PAINTER OF SHEEP: THE ONLY PUPIL OF GEORGE INNESS, SR.: BY JEANNE BERTRAND

PrACTICALLY every country has first acquired its reputation for a definite individual art through its genre painters. When we think of the great simple art of such Dutchmen as Rembrandt, Holbein, Frans Hals, Dürrer; what France has done in the flower of her art with Manet, Monet, Rodin, Cezanne; of Germany before the days of the Secession art; of Italy’s art in convents and churchyards; we realize very fully that the art which must of necessity make a nation famous, is that undeniably associated with phases of life in which the mass of people are interested and familiar. England has had very little genre art since the days of Hogarth. Her paintings and her sculpture have been in the last decade most formal and conventional; in other words, British art during the Victorian Period has presented to the public what they wanted most to see,—court ladies, sentimental rural love scenes and groups of children in which light and dark hair was always evenly distributed. Thus art may add to the glory of the country or the humor of the onlooker.

Here in America we have been true to art traditions, in so much as we have painted for our own art world and critics those subjects which most inherently interested them; first landscapes, as we began to realize through the medium of George Inness that our American landscapes were worth painting; next portraits, as we came to the conclusion, with the aid of foreign countries, that our women were beautiful, and later on the more intensely human men began to realize that at least one good result of our immigrant population was to be found in the picturesque scenes of our metropolitan streets, and then these were painted and much admired. Perhaps we should not have appreciated these scenes quite so quickly if Daumier and Steinlen had not already opened our eyes to the interest of Paris and Munich streets. In any case, we have realized from what our artists were doing that what we wanted them to do were landscapes, portraits and metropolitan scenes; because art always has and always will express the interest of the nation.

But as yet we have scarcely an example of old world genre art, if we except Horatio Walker, who is really a Canadian, and John A. S. Monks, whom we have not known as widely and as sympathetically as his art deserves. It is an interesting story, the way in which John Monks decided to become this particular kind of a painter which America needs in her art history, and has lacked so completely. There was no background here for Mr. Monks’ ideal of painting and he had
not traveled abroad where he could imitate the enthusiasm of the French, Dutch and German artists to reproduce on canvas their rural scenes.

As the American people had very little interest in rural life, in fact, were somewhat ashamed of it always—seeming to feel that not to like the country was to be aristocratic—we naturally had no painters of rural scenes. The Hollanders loved their gardens and their animals and their back porches and all the beautiful colors of their vegetables and flowers. This is almost equally true of the artist of the Provence. Always whatever has made for the comfort, health and happiness of France has been of interest to all her people, including her writers and her painters. But in America we were ashamed of our New England orchards and our old-fashioned houses and most of all of our kitchens and stables. Our pigs were to be scorned and our chickens to be ignored. As for painting them, I think our New England grandmothers would have thought we were crazy. Whoever could imagine such a thing! The result is that some of the most picturesque and charming scenes in the history of our growth as a nation, have never been depicted,—a definite loss to our museums and to our art galleries.

AND so we find with surprise and pleasure a man whose interest in art has always been in the genre phase of painting. From the beginning of doing exactly what he wanted to do, he has painted sheep. He has taken care of the sheep, he has lived where they were in the winter, he has been their shepherd in the summer. In the beginning of his career he shared the shepherd’s hut. Whatever was essential in order to become absolutely familiar with this chosen subject for his canvases he was willing to do, indeed, enjoyed doing, because it brought him closer to what seemed to him one of the most interesting phases of life. Jean Francois Millet felt this same way about the people and the animals that he painted. He knew the French peasants, he knew the barnyards, the gardens, the doorways, the fields of Barbizon. He lived amongst them, and there was no joy, or tragedy or pathos in the lives of these folk that he had not lived out with them.

While a very young man Mr. Monks was an engraver; he was interested in his profession, and yet after a visit to Boston to a friend who was a painter, he was seized with such a desire to handle brushes and to create beauty on canvas that when he returned home to Meriden, Connecticut, where his business was located, it was only to turn the key in the door of his workshop. Once back in Boston he decided that he would be a landscape painter. For a few years he met and worked with various artists, failing to accomplish anything
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH OF JOHN A. S. MONKS FEEDING A GROUP OF FAVORITE MODELS.
“SHEEP BEFORE THE STORM,” FROM A PAINTING BY JOHN A. S. MONKS.
"AT PEACE." FROM A PAINTING
BY JOHN A. S. MONKS.
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH OF GEORGE INNESS, SR., AMERICA'S FIRST GREAT LANDSCAPE PAINTER.
very special, beyond his joy in the work. He was always a faithful student and a tenacious worker. The study of an old willow tree made from the yard of an artist with whom he was working, eventually led to the beginning of his success. This tree was painted over and over again. It seemed to Mr. Monks that it would never show all the interest, and grace and charm of the original tree. To him the tree had a personality which he felt he must put into the picture. It chanced one day that George Inness visited the studio, where Mr. Monks had been painting his tree. Catching sight of it, he said, "Show me that, who did it. Send Monks to my studio and tell him I want to see him."

One can picture how gladly and nervously the young artist responded to the call. "I am the young man that painted the willow tree," he said, "you wanted to see me." "Get your brushes and easel and place your work beside mine," said the great master of American landscape. "I will teach you all I can." And so they worked together, not merely as master and adoring pupil; but as friends; both rather quiet, the elder man indeed reticent. Once when these two friends had been separated for a short time, the younger man returning found the master painting in the fields. Hurrying across the meadows he met Mr. Inness standing quietly, almost with embarrassment, and was greeted with a simple, "Well, how are you?" But the close comradeship with so vital a personality as the elder Mr. Inness brought about an interest in genuineness and a sympathy with nature, which eventually enabled Monks even to leave his master and start away to find his own field of expression. It was then that he began to paint sheep.

In the black and white reproductions which we are showing this month, of course, we can only give the outline of these intimate, sympathetic genre pictures, leaving to imagination the brilliancy, the exquisite harmony of color. Painting out of doors, studying all the beauty of nature, as well as all the interest and complexity of domestic animal life, has awakened in this painter a knowledge of the wonder of out of doors, a poetical appreciation of the hills and pastures where he has strayed as a kindly shepherd, that give a value to his pictures, which perhaps he would never have found had he sought solely to become a landscape painter. For it seems in life that some of the most satisfying experiences are brought about when we are searching earnestly and honestly for a goal quite unrelated to the achievement which eventually is ours.

One phase of Mr. Monks' work is interesting to record,—that while through an intimate life with these favorite animals he must have grown to know every phase of their nature, all their discords and diffi-
WILD DUCKS

culties, all the minor ways in which they resemble the human race; yet in his pictures we find them presented always in the gentle, gracious mood. It is as though through his love for these animals Mr. Monks could only let us see them in their quiet, happy, peaceful scenes.

Not only has he painted sheep indoors and out, at play, sleeping in sunshine, in twilight; but he has modeled them most interestingly in clay. And although he began painting the sheep of the New England hills, he has since painted them all over the country,—North, East, South and West, each with their separate characteristics, for sheep vary as people do in different localities; but always they are presented with kindness and with the devoted friendship, which must win for things loved, the interest and the appreciation of the public.

WILD DUCKS.

I

HEARD the wild ducks passing in the night,
From shadowy skies their call came dimly down,
And the soft magic of their yearning flight
Swept the dull spaces of the sleeping town.

Into my chamber came the breath of spring,
Pregnant with promise from awakening buds;
Into my heart came fancies, billowing
With the glad rhythm of sun-loosened floods.

I saw the wind-blown crocus on the hills,
With the fresh starring of anemones,
Heard the thin laughter that the brown brook trills
Under the shelter of low-stooping trees.

A car clanged distantly. Across the way
A drowsy watchman waked with sudden fright.
On the dim court a soft enchantment lay.
I heard the wild ducks passing in the night.

ROSE HENDERSON.

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