POVERTY AS AN ART INSPIRATION

At twenty-three years of age he entered the École Julien, and studied under Jean Paul Laurens and Benjamin Constant. At his very first lesson he discovered to his dismay that he could not draw and his fancied greatness melted away in an outburst of mortification. “My attempt to draw from a living model resulted in a thing which looked like a keg of nails,” he says. The teacher at once set the crestfallen student to the humbler exercise of copying a metal bowl. When Constant saw him struggling, he said, “You are awfully serious but hard as iron; you will make a good draughtsman some time, but you haven’t got it yet”—and the student fulfilled the prediction. He was “hard as iron,” he struggled hard and in a few months was taking the honors of the school for his fine academic drawing. As one looks at his pictures nowadays, it is not easy at first to realise that at this school under Laurens and Constant, and later, at the Beaux Arts under Gerome, his fine academic work was his chief distinction.

That he endured the usual hardships of struggling genius while in Paris we have already seen. He had more than the usual amount of reward, however, his work attracting the attention of a group of influential artists and critics. He regularly exhibited at the exhibitions of the American Art Association in Paris and half a dozen of his pictures were well hung in the New Salon. In 1904 he returned to this country to begin the struggle anew. Some of his canvases have been exhibited in Philadelphia and at the St. Louis Exposition, but he remains practically unknown, a prophet without honor in his own country, still compelled to struggle. But he is young and has abundant courage and faith in himself. By the sale of tiny etchings which he makes for a living he keeps the hunger-wolf from the door and the fire of inspiration burning within himself.

SPRINGTIME

A purple mist on the distant hills,
A swift wind-driven shower of rain,
A burst of sunshine, warm and glad,
All tell that the spring is here again.

—Jean Montgomery Martin.