

Some American Artists

By Susan M. Ketcham



R. JOHN S. SARGENT was recently asked, in London, regarding American art. "American art!" he exclaimed; "there is no such thing." Entering the splendid galleries of the Fine Arts Society, in Fifty-seventh Street, near Seventh Avenue, New York City, where forty of the strong American artists are now represented in the "Group Exhibition," one must protest that Mr. Sargent is "neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet."

Mr. Howard Russell Butler, as President, should head the list; for his brain conceived the idea of the Fine Arts Society, his pluck and push transformed a "castle in Spain" to this solid marble monument marking an epoch in the history of American art. Mr. Butler, "a man of few inches—every inch a man," summoned together the clans—artists, architects, and members of the Art Students' League—and organized the Fine Arts Society. They bought ground, drew plans, and erected this building (at a cost of \$400,000), where the three societies in one dwell together in millennial peace. For the last six years Mr. Butler has devoted himself to marines, painting on the coasts of Cornwall, of Brittany, and at his summer home at East Hampton, L. I. His is never "a sea of glass," but always in motion, "an everywhere of silver." One specially charming picture is a shore view of tender color in quiet evening light, except the summits of three sand-hills which have caught and held the afterglow. This note of rosy light seems to sing in the prevailing gloom as a final chord of music—the harmony hangs and vibrates in surrounding silence.

Mr. William M. Chase (whom Indianians proudly claim), re-elected for many times President of the Society of American Artists, is the busiest, as he is the most versatile, artist of America. He gave himself ten years in Munich to find whether he had talent. Every morning, before class hour, he visited the old masters at the Pinakotek. "Then I flew to my easel at such a rate that my coat-tails stood straight out behind, that I might not lose the inspiration." His master's opinion of his talent was proved, beyond a peradventure, in giving Mr. Chase the order to paint his (Piloty's) children.

Mr. Chase's summers are spent in his beautiful cottage on Shinnecock Hills, where pupils flock by scores from north, south, east, and west. The remainder of the year he teaches two painting-classes at the Art Students' League, one at the Brooklyn School, and at his own studio a class for women, mornings, and for men, afternoons. The wonder is that he finds time or strength to paint. But one always sees something delightful under way on his easel, and something fine just finished. He is often called upon to talk to men's literary clubs, as well as to the prominent



J. Carroll Beckwith

art schools of the large cities. His talks are epigrammatic, his quick intuitions and clear comprehension driving directly to the point.

Mr. Chase's studio is a Mecca to art-lovers. The open-sesame (a heavy iron knocker) reverberating through the corridors, setting the mysterious music of the Dutch door-



W. M. Chase

chimes a-going, is followed by Mr. Chase's cordial greeting. The walls are covered with studies dating from his student days, and with pictures by his friends, old masters and the new. Antique hangings, bric-à-brac, unique ornaments from the ends of the earth, make the place rival Aladdin's palace. On reception days the faint odor of incense and soft harmonies of the harp add a charm.

In the Fifty-Seventh Street gallery Mr. Edwin H. Blashfield shows a most impressive group. There is dignity, almost majesty, in his work. His "Choir-Boys," painted in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, through the courtesy of the church authorities, was done during the siestas of summer noons, from twelve M. to four P.M., when all Italy dozes and dreams in "dolce far niente." Thus Mr. Blashfield escaped the ubiquitous critic. The boys posed with swinging censers, singing in processional.

Mr. Blashfield, tall, slender, fair, with a gentle, courteous manner, is an ideal American, though he has lived abroad twenty years, going with Mrs. Blashfield, on an average, every two years. They seek some quaint old town, and settle down for months of study and for writing—articles written by Mrs. Blashfield, illustrated by her husband, and published in "Scribner's" and the "Century." These show careful study, profound thought, and wide research in art, history, and literature. Speaking of her husband's not teaching, Mrs. Blashfield quoted: "We are born so young, and the world is so old;" adding, "One must have ideas in order to paint."

"The Angel of the Flaming Sword" Mr. Blashfield considers his best picture. The strange light emanating from the two-edged sword, making the "outer darkness" visible, illumines the inflexibly upright figure with its pitiless blue eyes and its firm, untender mouth. It is a wonderful portrayal of immutable, irrevocable moral law. "The Bells" was hung, in the Philadelphia Academy exhibition, at the head of the entrance stairway. Looking up, it was as if one were in the tower—the bells actually swinging high above. Studies for the angels were made separately from Italian models in Paris. Men were used for the bodies, as more perfect in violent action, and women for the heads, as more beautiful: thus carry-



Charles C. Curran

ing out the accepted idea that angels are neither male nor female.

Mr. Blashfield went to Florence for the bells, but, finding those of Giotto's Campanile too shut in, he returned to Blois. Here, in the Church of St. Nicholas, the bells hung in the open, and there were twin towers. His studio was seventy feet high; its cracks and crannies were filled with flora and fauna sown by the wind. Swallows and pigeons hovered round as he painted, and a rook constituted himself critic, croaking and scolding like a veritable master! The old sacristan, who had rung the bell for forty years, looked on with loving interest.

Mr. Blashfield is a member of the Board of the National Academy of Design, and originator of the Municipal Art



Edward A. Bell

Society (which through its wide membership is to have money to pay competing artists for the decoration of public buildings; thus the new Criminal Court Room is now in process of decoration without cost to the city treasury); in fact, he is a member of every important art society of New York.

Edward A. Bell always shows in his work originality, individuality, and refinement. There is real intrinsic beauty in his pictures. One of his last successes was achieved in the "Fire Dreamers," which took a National Academy prize last year. Mr. Bell has a remarkably bright and happy face, is thoroughly alive, and enjoys the battle of life in a sunshiny world, yet he is thoughtful, quiet, and dignified. He lives unostentatiously in the beautiful home of his mother and married sister, devoting his days closely to his own work, to his studio class, and to his Fifth Avenue school. June locks his studio door, and metamorphoses this painter into a sailor. The proud owner, captain, and crew of the yacht Daphne, he rides the gales or sails the calm seas of Peconic Bay till November. Twice a week he lands to criticise his summer class, located alongshore in the pleasant farm-houses of New Suffolk. Mr. Bell's art studies began in boyhood. Later he went to Munich for ten years of study and work in his own hired house in the village of Etzenhausen. Here, with two friends (often suddenly increased to seven), he lived, paying \$1.50 rent per month for his house, orchard, and vegetable garden. There were three stories in the high roof—light being let in by inserting occasionally a pane of glass instead of a tile.

Mr. J. Carroll Beckwith was born in Missouri, and lived in Chicago until the great fire. He might easily be judged a Frenchman from his appearance and bearing; but his cordiality marks him Western, "to the manner born." After years of study in Paris with Carolus Duran, he and Mr. Chase crossed the ocean together and were together installed instructors of the Art Students' League—for life, it would seem, as after fifteen years each continues to hold his place. Mr. Beckwith is teacher of drawing from the antique. He is the one man who insists upon the study of the antique. Many of the younger men, as Messrs. Du Mond and Wiles, began the study of art with him. His informal talks are in manner felicitous, in matter full of interest and information. On his easel is a life-size portrait of a Seventh Regiment officer in full uniform. He laughs as he exclaims, "How they love to be painted in their uniforms!" The background is the old Armory, for which he made a careful study in color. "So this will be historical," he said. He has already painted five of these portraits, and will do others. Mr. Beckwith has just been elected a member of the National Academy of Design—one of the three (out of eighteen) candidates who successfully ran the gauntlet of the conservative Academicians.

Mr. Charles C. Curran was born in Kentucky just before the war, when the political climate was too warm for comfort, and migrated early to Ohio with his parents, who established an academy at Marietta. He has the fine physique and hearty manner of a thorough American. His subjects are either intensely ideal—as syrens—or peculiarly American, as boy in a corn-field entertaining himself with the music of a corn-stalk whistle. He has taken several important prizes. On his easel is a design lately exhibited in the New York Athletic Club for the decoration of a room for athletics in the house of Mr. Clark (donor of the prize fund of the National Academy of Design), the finest room of the kind in the country. F. S. Church has decorated a similar space in the room with a burlesque—a company of bears fencing, caricaturing the members of the athletic club—size, form, and feature indicating plainly the men. Mr. Curran's picture is a company of nymphs disporting themselves gracefully on greensward flecked with that artist's favorite purple iris. In the center of the group and foreground two nymphs are fencing with long blades of grass. There is every opportunity for the grace of movement and the delicacy of color which always appear in Mr. Curran's work. He anticipates great trouble in finding a model who knows the art of fencing. He says, "So far they all insist on running the hand straight out before them, as if they were going to stick a needle into a fly!"

Parsifal

By Elbert F. Baldwin

Some persons interested in the Munich and Dresden Wagner representations have been declaring of late that Baireuth has failed because the performances there this season of "Lohengrin" have not seemed to them on a par with those of the other music-dramas. Indeed, one foreign journal avers that Baireuth may continue to exist as a place of amusement for splenetic Englishmen and rich Americans, but no longer as the Mecca for Wagner-lovers. It seems well, therefore, to say that the Baireuth performances continue to be, with few exceptions, as superb as ever. If this be true of Wagner's works in general, how emphatically true it is of that great religious music-drama not given outside of the *Festspielhaus*!¹ To transplant "Parsifal" from this serene and classic soil to noisy and vulgar city streets would be to blaspheme both art and religion. Even should other dramas decline, "Parsifal," that unique wedding of church and stage, celebrated with unheard-of scenic effect by Wagner the mechanic, and in this theater designed by Wagner the architect—"Parsifal," I say, the immortal story told by old Wolfram von Eschenbach, put into vigorous text by Wagner the poet, and then set to immortal music by Wagner the composer—this alone will ever attract pilgrims by a mightier magic than that which brought the Greeks to their Olympic games.

If in other Wagner works both acting and singing must be of the highest, how pre-eminently necessary is it for the symbolic personality of the "Parsifal" characters! For the part of Amfortas, the type of suffering humanity, Reichmann, of Dresden, was the composer's own choice, and Reichmann is still singing at Baireuth as unrivaled as ever. Kundry, exerting no will-power to break the bands of sin—in short, the Magdalen—who could better give to this rôle its unspeakable pathos than Therese Maltén, of Dresden, or Rosa Sucher, of Berlin, the greatest sopranos of the world, and both on duty this season? In the characterization of the hero himself, the Christ-symbol, we have in Ernest van Dyck, of Vienna, an ideal Parsifal. The orchestral conductors this year, too, are equally eminent—Hermann Levi, the veteran Director of the Munich Opera, and Felix Mottl, the Court Kapellmeister at Karlsruhe. Added to them for the first time appears Richard Strauss, the composer of "Guntram."

Not gayly as in man-made town, but reverently as befits the God-made country, do the Wagner worshipers bend their steps toward the—I had almost said church, so powerful is the impression made by the insistent seriousness of the *Festspielhaus*. The pilgrims move on through the long avenue of trees leading up the hill and out into the country. If some Romanist were to count his beads in passing, it would seem only appropriate to this really religious journey.

At last we are on the height and in front of the theater. The little capital of the old Margraves of Baireuth lies far below. It is near four o'clock. On the balcony above us now appear trumpeters, who play a *motif* from the first act of "Parsifal" to call the great assemblage within. What an assemblage it is—the music-friends of many nationalities, and not looking so splenetic, either!

We enter the theater. It is a nobly proportioned auditorium, with but scant decoration, and that in severe simplicity. There are no boxes, nothing but rows of seats, and back of all a gallery. Wagner said that he would repeat a Greek theater, and he has. We find our places, and in an incredibly short time every one has done the same. It becomes very dark, and soon nothing can be seen. Complete blackness and stillness reign. These are the moments of silent consecration. Now are heard the first chords of the orchestra. The overture is nobly given, and is a "song without words," telling us the Parsifal story.

In the northern mountains of Spain stands the Castle of Monsalvat (Mountain of Salvation), and in this castle live the Knights of the Holy Grail. The ancient legend runs

¹ *Festspielhaus*, the name of the Wagner theater or opera-house in Baireuth, literally means "Festival-play House."