

· THE FIELD OF ART ·



Holford Landscape. By Meindert Hobbema.

From the Morgan Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

THE PAINTINGS IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. J. PIERPONT MORGAN

THE counsel for the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, Mr. John Quinn, in presenting to the House Committee on Ways and Means, at Washington, January 30, 1913, a brief in favor of repealing the present duty on contemporary art, after reciting the accepted arguments in favor of untaxed importation—"A tax on art is a tax on culture and education," "The United States is the only civilized country in the world that places a tax upon art," etc.—went on to declare that "the educational value of contemporary living art is greater than the educational value of historic paintings or old art, however intrinsically interesting or important." This distinction between the value of the new and the old is scarcely worth making; and Mr. Quinn's statement may be doubted. Civilization never progressed by burning its bridges behind it; it is as important to maintain communications with the base of supplies as to push forward into an unknown country on which alone—it is probable—*this* army cannot live and thrive. In this maintaining connection with tradition, in

founding the new views and the new developments on "the old truth and beauty," all good art comes more or less under the definition which has been given to the "classic." That development and exploitation of the individual, which is held to be of so much importance to the painter and sculptor, can best be brought about in the ways of continuity and general cognizance: "as in water," sayeth the Scripture, "face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." Certes, that artist who—whatever the new call which he feels stirring within him—can go carefully through the collection of foreign paintings belonging to Mr. Pierpont Morgan, recently placed on exhibition in one of the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and not find his ideas and sensations, human and technical (and if his humanity be starved so will be his art), enriched either by encouragement and suggestion or by entirely new things—if from all these pictures he gains nothing, then is he, like Touchstone's shepherd, "in a parlous state." And if the artist, and likewise the layman, be thus benefited, the community at large profits thereby. Attention has been called by some commentators, taking this extraordinary collection

for a text, to the very great advantages enjoyed by those who are now living in the matter of acquaintance with the art and culture of the past, owing to the development of modern facilities and methods: "It has been only in our own day," says Mr. Humphry Ward, in his introduction to Mr. Morgan's sumptuous catalogue, "since the rise of public galleries, and since the beginning of scientific criticism, that Rembrandt's works have not only been collected with passion, but classified, catalogued, and compared with real thoroughness. Such cataloguing and such criticism was impossible before the days of modern photography, which gives us perfect records of all known pictures, and thus enables the scientific critic to have all his evidence under his eye at once." And the special advantages enjoyed by the inhabitants of the United States, millionaires' country, have also been dwelt upon—complacently at home and enviously abroad. The prices of paintings of certain schools, those admitted to that "odd hierarchy," says Mr. Ward, "the class of masters whom the collectors and museums consider worth their notice," have been pushed up to such enormous sums that the regular grants made by foreign governments to their official museums are entirely inadequate, and have to be supplemented, on great occasions, by special appropriations or by appeals for private subscriptions. A recent writer in the *New York Evening Sun* asks: "What, for instance, would the special grant of \$100,000 to the National Gallery have amounted to had Mr. Morgan been as active as he is to-day when the Hamilton Collection was sold?" It is the public-spirited private collector who has enabled this country to repair, in great measure, its own lack of an historic and cultured past; but our sympathies may well go out to the despoiled foreigner, partner though he be in his own undoing.

In thus raising the standard, both of the nation's art treasures and of its appreciation of them, these munificent private and public collections may be of service in increasing its productiveness.

It would be strange if a collection planned upon such broad lines as this, and with a discriminating judgment, and not altogether unfavored by fortune in the matter of unusual chances to purchase, should not have become monumental. We are informed that it was begun somewhere about 1892; that

the intention at first was apparently merely to supplement the small collection made by Mr. Junius Morgan, which consisted largely of modern pictures and drawings, with one or two fine works of the early English school acquired later in his life. But this modest filial motive was gradually replaced by a desire to possess in paintings at least one or two examples of each of the great schools, and these the finest that could be obtained; of the English and French schools of the eighteenth century natural predilections to the acquirement of a much greater

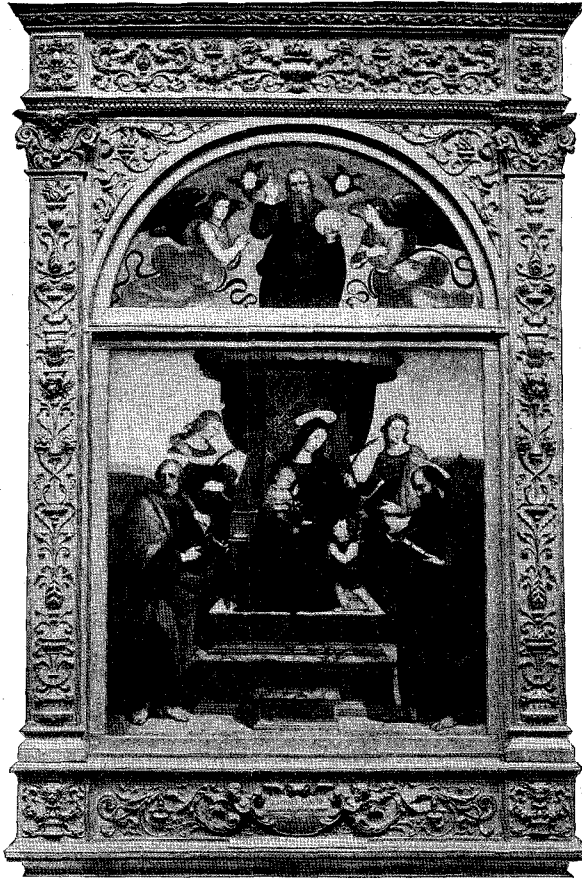
number. Quite departing from the usual custom of contemporary collectors there have not been secured any examples of the Barbizon painters, but many of the older schools are represented, and some of them by works which are unrivalled. It was not the intention to undertake to represent the Dutch and Flemish pictures with anything like completeness, in landscape, *genre*, or marine; but the names that appear are the great ones, Rembrandt, Hals, Rubens, Van Dyck, Hobbema, Aelbert Cuyp, and Caspar Netscher. Of the Italian pictures there are but two, a Raphael and a Canaletto, separated by a period of more than two centuries; and of the first, it is stated that it is the most important work of art ever brought to this country, much the most important work of the artist that has appeared in the market since the Ansidei Madonna was purchased



Portrait of a Child. Artist unknown. Spanish School, 164-?

From the Morgan Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

by the British National Gallery, and probably more important than any other that ever will come on the market. "Short of the possibilities of wars and revolutions," It was painted for the nuns of the Convent of Saint Anthony of Perugia, and was taken to Spain in the baggage of Francis II, King of the Two Sicilies, when driven from his



Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints. Known as the Colonna Madonna by Raphael.

From the Morgan Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

says Mr. Ward, "it is not easy to see where the next great Raphael is to come from. The great private houses of England still contain three or four Madonnas, pictures of small size, but of the large altar pieces outside the churches and museums, the Ansidei Madonna, the Dudley Crucifixion, and the Madonna di Sant' Antonio (the present one) were the last." The Ansidei Madonna was purchased by the authorities of the National Gallery from the Duke of Marlborough, in 1884, for £70,000; like this one it was finished in 1505, after Raphael's visit to Florence, but is smaller in size, having four figures only, while this contains seven exclusive of those in the lunette above.

throne into exile, in 1861. Sir William Gregory, a trustee of the National Gallery, hearing that it might be purchased, went to Disraeli, then in office, and—according to the story—was promptly told to "get it." The French, hearing of these dispositions, had the picture brought to Paris and exhibited in the Salle des Batailles de Le Brun, in the Louvre; the Empress Eugénie and the Parisian press were very desirous of securing it for the Louvre, at the price asked, a million francs, but the outbreak of the war with Germany in the spring of 1870 prevented. The picture was lent by its royal owner to the South Kensington Museum, and after his death his heirs decided to dis-

pose of it. Vasari says: "To these two holy virgins, Santa Cecilia and Santa Catarina, the master has given the most lovely features and the most graceful attitudes; he has also adorned them with the most fanciful and varied head-dresses that could be imagined—a very unusual thing at the time." On the shoulder of the Infant's tunic is embroidered the scapular of Saint Anthony of Padua; the complete clothing of the two children was in accordance with the scruples of "these simple and pious ladies."

Of the brilliant collection of French paintings of the eighteenth century only a very few were shown in the Metropolitan Museum gallery; among them was an admirable pastel portrait of Madame de Mondonville, by La Tour—a beautiful example of the art of lifting the vivid presentation of a sitter, feminine and distinguished, into the realms of high art. To go from this life-like rendering of a serene and charming lady on one wall to Rembrandt's, of one Nicolaes Ruts (1631), on another, appreciatively, was to acquire a liberal education in the art of portrait-painting. If Mr. Morgan's two examples of Frans Hals, De Heer Bodolphe and his wife Vrouw Bodolphe, in another gallery had been visited also, the intelligent visitor could have taken a post-graduate course. In commenting upon the exhibition of these last two canvases in Agnews' Galleries in November and December, 1906, the *London Times* said regretfully: "Mr. Pierpont Morgan lately bought them from the Graf Mniszech collection in Paris, and intends to lend them to the Metropolitan Museum, New York. It may be permitted us to envy that museum its good fortune, for already, among the Marquand pictures, it possesses two fine Hals of similar size to these, whereas our National Gallery is in this respect far behind all other first-rate collections. . . ."

From these to the Fragonards, Bouchers, Lancret's, Natiers, and Paters of this collection is a long cry; and the journey is well worth taking. It might even be said that, from the collector's point of view, from the educator's, from that of the general student of man and his civilizations, these paintings are among the most valuable. Contemporary art can furnish nothing like them; it may be doubted if the art of the future ever will. And to remain ignorant of them, or to repudiate them, would be deplorable. Peculiarly interesting are the first three or four pictures of Fragonard's series, *Roman*

d'Amour de la Jeunesse, commenced about 1772, intended for the new Pavilion of Louveciennes, built by Ledoux for Madame Du Barry, but never placed there. The first two show this art at its soap-bubble best; in the first of all, *La Poursuite, ou La Vierge et l'Amour*, the head of the youthful lover, tilted on one side in his earnestness, silky-haired, diffident, pleading, expressing a boyish timidity too charming to be real, and the wild panic of the little *vierge* at the mere sight of his proffered rose, are both delicately admirable. In the second scene, *La Rendezvous*, the lovers are both older, and are said to be undoubtedly intended for Louis XV (made fifty years younger than he was at the time) and Madame Du Barry; the figure of the girl is very handsome, beautifully balanced and composed, and her expression of apprehension and the sweeping gesture of her rounded young arms quite appropriate to the roses around her. There are also four Paters, examples of his beautiful *Fêtes Champêtres*, inspired by Watteau's, and the success of which, we are told, was said at the time to have been the cause of the estrangement between the two painters.

The portraits selected from the collection for exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum included a Velasquez, the Infanta Maria Theresa, at the age of ten or thereabouts; a stately and beautiful full-length Van Dyck of a Genoese lady and child, whose identity is, rather curiously, not fully determined, and another, of the second Earl of Warwick; several by Rubens; and a most valuable and important representation of the English portraitists of the eighteenth century—including the famous and much discussed Duchess of Devonshire; and—according to Mr. Ward—"what is by common consent the most attractive Lawrence in the world." Certainly that desirable art of giving a beautiful sitter a setting and a representation that are worthy of her is well exemplified in this portrait of the charming Miss Farren. And the spirit of the landscape painting of to-day may pause long before the Hobbema and the Constable seen in this gallery—canvases in which it would seem that the old artist had taken a somewhat broader and more comprehensive view of his mission, occupied himself with a fuller presentation of a larger aspect of nature, and with the building up of a composition that should be varied, detailed, lighted, atmospheric, and approached with something like ambition.

WILLIAM WALTON.