The Salon of the Champs-Elysées

THE STUDIO Mr. Robinson has scored many successes, notably with a series of illustrated primers for infants but lately reviewed in these columns.

If one wished to be critical, there are not wanting points to which exception might be taken, that show Mr. Robinson has not yet found his full expression. Especially unpleasing to many designers is the use of German characters, instead of plain Roman letters. The curves and fussy detail of church-text, if tolerable with the archaic, rigid forms of early Gothic art, are not sufficiently a foil to a freer choice of ornament with a line that delights in well-drawn curves. The straight lines of the Roman alphabet offer a pleasant contrast to the curves of ornament, the wayward lines of mediæval letters are apt to become confused and to lose their own value, detracting at the same time from the detail near them.

This little lecture, although suggested by the *Bible Illustration*, is equally applicable to a number of modern designers, and, like other obvious truths often heard and more often ignored, deserves reiterating whenever an opportunity occurs.

The individuality of these drawings promises a good deal, and if Mr. Robinson, who seems so far to have escaped the influence of three of his contemporaries to quite a remarkable degree, and to be neither Charles Ricketts, R. Anning Bell, nor Aubrey Beardsley, but himself, will go on in the same path, one may expect a personal style that will take a far higher place than any exercises in the style of the three clever designers whose names I have quoted. They, each and all, have their own qualities, their own merits and their own defects, but imitators miss the former, and too often exaggerate the latter. Therefore the best advice to give to any decorative designer to-day, is to be himself; and it is just because Mr. Robinson seems to realise this that one may commend him far more warmly than the intrinsic value of his work at the time this was written could warrant, but for the saving grace of individual effort. Since then, however, much of Mr. Robinson's later work proves that not only has he justified the promise of these earlier drawings, but has developed still more a strongly personal style that may one day do really great things. E. B. S.

THE SALON OF THE CHAMPS-ELYSÉES. BY GABRIEL MOUREY.

ONE may seek in vain this year at the Exhibition in the Champs-Elysées for any work equal to some of the charming and admirable productions at the Champ de Mars to which I had the opportunity of referring in the last number of THE STUDIO. There is a rage for anecdote at the Palais de l'Industrie; "subject" reigns supreme, and the *genre* picture, large and small, triumphs all along the walls. The catalogue is numbered up to 4575—four thousand five hundred and seventy-five works! And these alarming figures weigh on the brow like neuralgia, from the moment one enters the exhibition. In his book on America, *Outre Mer*, Paul Bourget records a remark by our great observer, Forain, on leaving a sumptuous entertainment in some Fifth Avenue mansion—"Oh! voir enfin une loge de concierge!" A porter's lodge! Something plain, simple, real, unartificial. What can one say after a visit to the Salon of the Champs-Elysées? You are no longer able to think of anything, scarce capable of formulating an idea. For here the intellectual mediocrity of the painter is even more manifest than at the Champ de Mars. The members of the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts are impelled by a desire to avoid the ordinary commonplaces of art; they aim at something freer and fresher, with a restless striving to attain results more refined, more delicate, more modern. But an inexorable routine fetters the members of the Société des Artistes Français, and academic triteness is displayed in all its horrors—historical pictures, with neither novelty nor inspiration; military scenes just good enough—thrown on a screen—to illustrate the patriotic songs at a music-hall; religious works quite lacking in sincerity and faith; official portraits full of all the most antiquated conventionalities—all these abound at the Champs-Elysées, and make up the most astounding, the most incoherent, the most deplorably inferior collection of pictures that can be conceived. But let us enter—and suffer!

Notwithstanding the attractiveness of M. Edouard Detaille's portrait of *The Prince of Wales and the Duke of Connaught*, a work of such importance might, I think, have been treated in a broader, more imposing, manner, without all these minute and laborious touches. One cannot in justice ignore the undoubted merits of this composition, but why, one may ask, should it come within the category of the modern official portrait, when it might have followed the inspiring and heroic manner of the great masters of other days—Velasquez, Rubens, and Van Dyck? And the same reproach must be made, even more energetically, in connection with M. Bonnat's