

Notes on the Crafts

as implying that they are slight and effeminate in conception. The fact that the figures are larger than life and that the main lines have a freedom of sweep, ensure for them a dignity. Like all French's work, these doors have a certain high-bred feeling; breadth, combined with delicacy, amplex with refinement; they are not compelling and assertive, but subtle and gracious. Therefore, his choice of design is exceedingly characteristic; probably the best for him, because closest to his habitual artistic motives. For this very reason, it is to be hoped that the fascination which these doors excite may not lead to other sculptors trying to work in the same manner of design, for the latter's chief merit is personal to the sculptor himself, in that it is the one in which he could most naturally and effectively express his artistic creed. As such we recognize its beauty, while inclined to question its advantage from the general point of view of the sculptor's art.

As is apt to be the case with French's figures, their chief elements of beauty consist in the movement of the bodies and in the management of the draperies; the latter reaching its highest point of pure dignity in the figure of *Wisdom*, while the former is most happily manifested in the lovely poise of *Poetry*. But of these two elements, the more original is the treatment of the draperies.

Few modern sculptors, certainly no American ones, can approach French in this particular. It is here that all the feeling of his nature and the resources of his skill combine most eloquently. The flesh is apt to be dry and expressionless, wanting freedom and finesse of modelling; but the draperies in every case represent a poem, exquisitely lyrical and melodious. It is not only that they are disposed so naturally and yet with such delightful tact of studied purpose, but their actual surface rendering—the subtle variations of planes, texture, and light and shade—is extraordinarily full of expression.

When it is noted how large a part these draperies play in the whole design, one recognizes how completely justified the sculptor is in having adopted this pictorial method. But we may go much farther in our appreciation, and feel that these doors represent the ripest fruit of French's maturity; the most enjoyable example of what he can do best.

They were cast in bronze by the John Williams Company, front and back in one piece, and with so sensitive a fidelity to the most delicate touches of the originals as to constitute a triumph in the art of the foundry.

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WE CALL the attention of our readers this month to a very noteworthy evidence of artistic activity in a direction which does not seem so far to have attracted much public attention. There are some examples of mechanical construction which would almost seem to defy the possibility of artistic adornment, and which certainly represent a very difficult task for the artists who undertake to accomplish this end. There is no doubt that very often pianos, particularly uprights, are, as pieces of furniture at any rate, blots upon the artistic harmony of a room. Yet it appears that there is no reason why this should be. The Steinway pianos, as instruments, are well known to be amongst the most perfect, acoustically, of the modern makes. Amongst the multifarious details which have to receive the attention of the makers, that of the case struck them as containing possibilities for improvement. It is true that the "stock" cases of pianos, as seen in a hundred and one stores, are sufficiently satisfactory for the usual homes, for the least tasteful of such cases are nowadays inoffensive, and are a great improvement over the clumsy instruments of a few years ago. But while the art of this country has progressed during the last ten years with immense strides, it is only recently that the piano as a piece of furniture began to receive equal attention. In the meantime, Messrs. Steinway have been steadily improving the artistic lines of their pianos, to keep pace with the art development elsewhere, utilizing their highly trained staff of workers with that view.

The following are a few of the most distinctive examples of the artistic cases, of which we are able to show our readers the illustrations.

No. 1 is a rich mahogany case, with Bombay and Intaglio surface, fitted with ormolu mounts of old Louis XV. character, after the style of a piano in the government exhibit of furniture in the Louvre. In executing the metal work for this piano, Mr. J. Burr Tiffany, who is responsible for the reproduction of the design, procured permission from the authorities at the Louvre to make wax impressions of the beautiful instrument there. In spite of the fact that there are no less than seven hundred pounds of metal ornamenting the woodwork of this case, there is, owing to a special method of affixing the metal, absolutely no resonance therefrom. The whole work is gilt, and the painting under the lid is after a Watteau design. The piano is lighted by electric fixtures. It is now in the residence of Mr. Thomas F. Walsh, Washington, D. C.