

The Royal Academy (Second Letter). By A. Besnard

rigid discipline his powers both of observation and of expression. There is observation equally acute, though the way of expressing it is less agreeable, in Professor Von Lenbach's *Emperor William I. of Germany*, a powerful interpretation of pathetic old age; and there are fantastic expression and curiously individual appreciation in M. Boldini's canvases, of which *Madame S.* is the prettiest and the *Portrait of a Boy* the most *bizarre*. The *Coquelin* (Cadet), by M. Roll, is vivacious, and has great significance of movement and action; technically, too, it is preferable to the *Madame Jane Hading*, which is somewhat incoherent and irresponsible. Mr. Guthrie's *Major Richard Hotchkiss* is cleverly painted, and Mr. Clausen's two studies of his children have the charm of simplicity and directness; but Mr. J. J. Shannon is not seen at his best. He has painted pictures much better than either the large group of *The Children of the Marquis of Granby* or the two portraits in the Long Gallery. Mr. Emslie's *Henry Rawcliffe, Esq., J.P.*, is a good example of his work; Mrs. Jopling's pastel drawing of *Samuel Smiles* is well expressed; and both Mr. Roussel and M. Fantin-Latour exhibit successful work in the same medium. Among the rest, attention may be directed to Mr. J. H. Lorimer's *Colonel Anstruther Thomson*, to M. F. Cormon's *T. Portaels*, to Mr. F. M. Skipworth's two canvases, and to M. Boutet de Monvel's quaint drawings of children.

A. L. BALDRY.

THE EXHIBITION OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY AND OTHER GALLERIES.—BY A. BESNARD. SECOND LETTER.

OUR fellow-countrymen are always struck before English pictures by the vagueness of the drawing of the figures, which never absolutely expresses the form itself and certainly not the logic of the form. The law of the wedding and uniting of lines, which is the greatest force in the expression of drawing, they do not seem to feel at all. The heads but appear on the respective bodies as objects which have been placed there as though to beautify a shelf—a little to the right, or a little more to the left. I have often asked myself what could really be the reason of this apparent ignoring of drawing amongst English painters, of the want of flowing junction in the traits, and thinking that this might perhaps be suggested by their models, I began to look about me.

And now I have studied the people who walk up and down the streets, and talk and ride, and those less fortunate beings who should at least have the right to be natural, and everywhere I have seen an artificial creature chiefly preoccupied in trying to make the person before him understand that he is really a greatly superior object to what exterior appearances would show. Thackeray has christened this characteristic, and called it "snobbishness."

Very well, this snobbishness has grown so in-

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veterate in the spirit of the English that it goes so far as to deform them, imposing upon them a certain dress and figure and facial expression according to the fashion of the day. The Englishman who ridicules us on account of our light character is infinitely more of an actor than we are, and the proof of this is that the sense of his costume and of his pose is much more developed in him than with us. Ten years ago his walk, stiff and heavy, his stare fixed and dull, was intended to perplex people. To-day he is entirely changed, and his attitude rather that of *mauvaises têtes mais bon cœur* of the moral plays.

Do not, then, in any way, compare this kind of factitiousness with that of our own society. There is no resemblance. With us it is a toy, here it is a necessity. "To remain incomprehensible" is the great thing. What is the painter to do in the midst of all this? Let me also add that the race being purer in England, its type is more accentuated. There are more large noses and receding chins, and the features are more jumbled together. Even amongst the young girls one meets, so bright and fresh and strong, whose lovely heads always remind you of some famous statue or other, you find one feature which, I won't say, tends to make them ugly, but somewhat flaws their beauty. . . . How dare I talk in this manner of women whom no one admires more than I do!

But it is my subject which has carried me away, and my wish to explain the drawing of my English *confrères*, whose excuse is, perhaps, *au fond*, the certainty of their inability to render individualities which seek only to screen themselves.

Perhaps, too, it is simply a passionate desire to reconcile the type of their own country with the ideal they have gleaned from the Italian masters which has made the English painters of to-day produce this type of conventional beauty with which they think to represent nobility and moral beauty. At any rate, it is to a convention certainly, often elevated enough in its expression, that we owe this vast quantity of works representing beautiful women—according to the formula—and heart-stirring portraits of children before which the enchanted public crowd. And if you add to that the absolute obligation for English painters to show nothing which could possibly shock or be in any way disagreeable, you will understand the impression of placidity which weighs on Burlington House.

The President of the Royal Academy, Sir Frederic Leighton, is incontestably the one who, of all living painters in this order of ideas, by his genuine erudition and distinction of mind, represents the most completely this ideal which differs so entirely from our own. Any one will understand me who has seen the studies of women which he exhibits under the titles of *Atalanta*, *Farewell*, *Corinna of Tanagra*, and the *Frigidarum*.

Again, a curious thing to notice in the works of our neighbours, is their aptitude to see nothing in the human face excepting only the feature which interests them, and then to isolate it from the ensemble.