

Reviews



"LA NATIVITÉ"

BY E. RAVEL

easy grace the surface of things, but incapable of any deep emotion. That this is but a superficial judgment is proved by the work of many a master of literature and art, whose productions are pervaded by deep melancholy, a profound sense of the pathos underlying even the most favourable conditions. How infinitely sad, for instance, is much that has been written by Victor Hugo and Georges Sand, not to speak of the tragic realism of everything from the hand of Emile Zola. What suffering is expressed in Millet's scenes of peasant life, and how suggestive of tragedy are some of the compositions of Bastien Lepage. The work of Eugène Carrière is an even more striking case in point, so deep is his insight into the stern realities of life, and so reverently does he lift the veil shrouding the sad mysteries of the human soul from the indifferent gaze of the casual observer. His portraits are real revelations of the inner ego of those he represents, not in their comparatively rare moments of happiness, or when they are posing for effect, but when self is forgotten and the individual

heart is in touch with all humanity.

M. Geffroy, in the deeply interesting study accompanying the portfolio of fine reproductions of typical examples of Carrière's work, justly remarks that the French master has avoided the trap set for the portrait painter, by his rigid selection of those he chooses to represent. They are, with very few exceptions, members of his own family, his personal friends, who as a matter of course are in true touch with his own noble and refined nature, or men and women of talent, whose essential character he has in every case caught with sympathetic felicity. It is not, however, by his portraits, beautiful as are those of Alphonse Daudet, Gabriel Scailles, Edouard de Goncourt, and Jean Dolent, or by such *tours de force* as the

celebrated *Théâtre de Belleville*, a wonderful realisation of an animated scene in artificial light, but by his interpretations of motherhood and childhood amongst the toilers of crowded cities, that Eugène Carrière stands alone. His compositions of this class are not only literal renderings of actual incidents observed by him; they are poems of human life, and will speak direct to the heart so long as mother-love endures and the little ones, brought into the world at the cost of so much suffering, instinctively turn to that love for protection and solace. Never before has the infinite yearning of motherhood, the mournful passion that foresees all the stress, the toil, and pain which are in store for the loved ones in the future, been interpreted in a manner alike so simple and so masterly. Never before has art been the medium of teaching so lofty yet so unconscious, for deeply important as are the lessons conveyed, there is absolutely nothing intentionally didactic about them. The secret of their power is their absolute truth; they haunt the memory like some sweet but melancholy refrain of

227