

*Sir William Orpen's War Pictures*

SIR WILLIAM ORPEN'S WAR PICTURES.

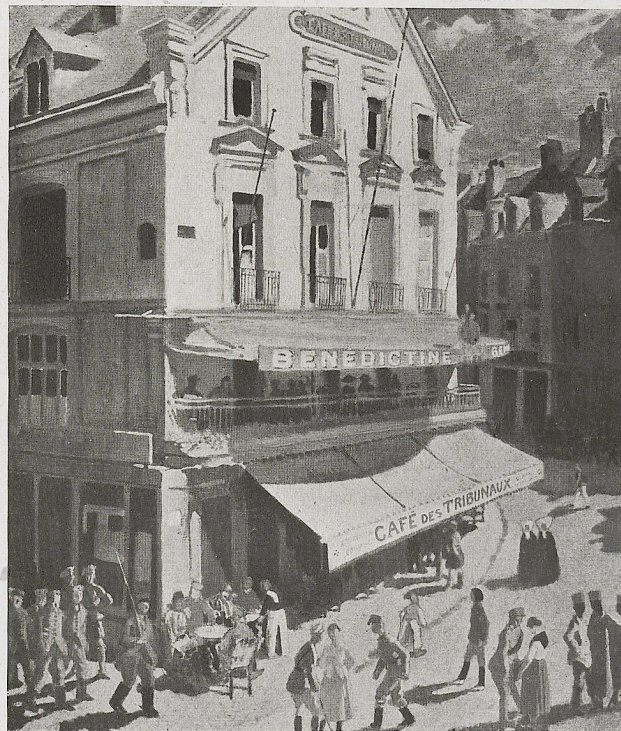
A GREAT array of Sir William Orpen's pictorial records of the scenes and the events presented on the Western Front, records shown lately, and still shown it may be, at the Agnew Galleries in Old Bond Street when these words shall reach the reader, has its Catalogue prefaced by a popular writer of Fiction, Mr. Arnold Bennett, who, however little he may consider himself an expert in Art Criticism, has really hit it off—his task on this occasion—extremely well in a couple of sentences which I make no apology for quoting. "These pictures," says Mr. Bennett—writing of Orpen's work *en bloc*: at least that part which is exhibited—"are painted in a new manner, in the artist's War manner, very broadly, very rapidly, sometimes very summarily, perhaps thinly. Their success is largely due, apart from the reality of the inspiration, to an extreme competence in the choice and employment of means."

But there are, we should remember, many methods open to a painter of choosing means with judgment, and of wisely employing them; and it has been interesting, to me at least, in going over the singularly varied themes and almost as frequently varied treatments visible in the Old Bond Street Galleries through the energies of the Ministry of Information, sometimes to halt and consider, and to say, "Well done, excellently done; but how would it have been done had another and quite different travelling artist of great competence—had Mr. Muirhead Bone especially, for he is in some respects the strongest of them all—felt impelled to give his version also, his rendering at the least, no less

unique and characteristic, of brilliantly recorded fact?"

Whatever particular thing, whatever particular object was before William Orpen, two things in relation to it are sure not to have been overlooked. These two are character and colour. And there are two things—on the other hand: two very different things—which, if Muirhead Bone were concerned in the matter, are sure not to have been overlooked. And these two things are character and line—character varied, line dexterous and economical, line certain in any case to be charged with the very maximum of meaning.

But the typical, or everyday, visitor to picture galleries—the visitor whose point of view is not an artist's, in any substantial measure—goes to these picture galleries to be occupied more with the question of what is done in this or in that canvas than with that other, and endlessly more interesting question, how it is done. And he who does not go to picture galleries at all,



"DIEPPE"

BY SIR WILLIAM ORPEN, A.R.A.