

*Miniatures in the Pierpont Morgan Collection*

## MINIATURES IN THE PIERPONT MORGAN COLLECTION. VI.—THE CHARDIN SNUFF-BOX.

[The preceding articles in this series appeared in our issues of November and December 1914, October 1915, July 1916, and July 1917.]

IT has been well said that the artist who can draw correctly is independent of vehicles. It matters not whether it is in water-colour or in oil, in enamel or in lithography, in pastel or in pencil, that he works; his productions are noteworthy, they constitute works of art. This very facility has at times, however, proved a danger, but at other times a delight, because a great painter loves to turn from one medium to another, and to experiment in some unaccustomed vehicle or technique. The treasure from Mr. Morgan's famous collection which we illustrate is one of such experiments, and in it a great master has proved his skill and his facility. It is, so far as is known, the only snuff-box ever decorated by Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin, and it was executed for the jeweller Godefroy, who made the box, and whose children Chardin had represented in his two famous pictures of *The Child with the Top* and *The Young Man with the Violin*.

It was painted in 1740, and all the scenes upon it were the work of Chardin's own hand, so the tradition states. Chardin is said to have watched the production of a box somewhat similar in design, and to have wondered whether he could decorate one. Godefroy encouraged the idea, and in the jeweller's own workshop the box was painted, and from his heirs Mr. Morgan acquired it through a famous Parisian dealer. The story goes that it took too long to execute, and the work was found too tedious for it ever to be repeated, and so in this box Mr. Morgan claimed to possess an absolutely unique work.

Chardin in his own time was but little appreciated, and so modest was he that he set slight store by his own paintings—on one occasion exchanging an important work with a friend for a fancy waistcoat his companion offered him in return. In his lifetime and long afterwards his pictures sold for quite small sums, and only during the present generation has the world found out what artists always knew, that Chardin was one of the world's greatest painters.

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Born in 1699 Chardin lived to the age of eighty. His father was a maker of billiard-tables, a hard-working, industrious man, who bore a high character for integrity and uprightness. Siméon proved his title to be an artist early in life. Beginning as a pupil to Cazes, in whose studio he at first performed quite menial tasks, he soon gave evidence of his skill, and then went to Coypel, from whom he learned to "paint with minute accuracy whatever his eye beheld." This lesson he never forgot. It influenced all his career, and Chardin's pictures are truthful representations, painted with a Velazquez-like realism and with honest intention to present them in every way as they actually are. He must yet, however, be distinguished from the Dutch and Flemish painters of still-life, inasmuch as his productions are marked by a human interest, a keen sympathy with the objects presented, which the Dutchmen often did not possess.

We have no space to deal in full with his career, or to do more than refer to his first marriage to the girl whom he courted when she was sick, and bravely married when she was poor and in weak health; to the loss of his wife and daughter; to the tragic end of his much-beloved son; to his second marriage with the widow who cheered and encouraged him; to his admission under dramatic circumstances to the Academy; to his terrible illness, and to his indomitable courage and pluck; but we must add to the record some words of admiration for the character of a simple-hearted, upright, honest artist, who won the esteem and affection of his colleagues and was regarded by all who knew him as a man of remarkable probity, tact, and courage. His life was not without its tragedies; poverty at one time came very close to him, and in his later years his sufferings were acute, but he was always fearless and cheerful. He worked up to the very last, and as has been well said, "the portraits of his closing years, in quite a new technique—that of pastel—betray no decline in keenness of vision or in power of expression." His knowledge of shadows and reflections was supreme, his truth and accuracy in drawing impeccable, his sense of colour extraordinary, and his power of grouping consummate. Mr. Morgan's fine box, if it does not show him at his very best, exhibits him in pleasing mood, and is a precious example of the art of a great master.

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