Studies of French Gothic

Van Veen Collection and O.S.A.

Show at Toronto Art Gallery

By Constance G. Mackay

Among the pictures on view at the Toronto Art Gallery at present is a valuable collection of paintings of the gothic cathedrals of France, by Mr. Pieter Van Veen. When one looks at the pictures one would think that the artist himself had not seen black and white instead of color. Perhaps this is some prejudice, for he is familiar with all the most important edifices in the collection: Chartres, Bourges, Rouen, Amiens, Beauvais and Sens. In this sense, the pictures may be regarded as more important than the original edifices, for they are not only more beautiful in themselves, but they are also more instructive in their use of color and line. In the case of the gothic cathedrals, the artist has succeeded in retaining the essential characteristics of the style, while at the same time he has avoided the errors of the later periods. In the case of the Romanesque cathedrals, the artist has succeeded in retaining the essential characteristics of the style, while at the same time he has avoided the errors of the later periods.

CATTLE AND SHEEP

By Constant Troyon

Recently sold by the J. Merritt Mallen Gallery to Mr. John A. Hackett, Toronto. Troyon (1810-1865), was one of the distinguished figures of the Barbizon school of romantic painters.

The chief fault in the pictures is the too lavish use of a curiously unpleasing sort of sky blue which is used everywhere for the sky, for black, substitute for black, and for all the dark colors. This is a weakening of all the effects, and such a place has been the Imman Cathedrals, which demands bold treatment in black and white. The colors are not so strong, nor so harmonious, nor so well composed. The effect is more due to the artist's own style than to his knowledge of the subject.

The paintings of the Ontario Society of Artists is not of outstanding interest. Passing through the first room several pictures catch the eye by their charm, and few by their strength. They are three very attractive studies in tempera by Stanley, Turner, and Forbes. The figures of Victoria and Royal Yacht of which the latter is particularly good. White figures of the latter is particularly good, white figures of the latter is particularly good, white figures of the latter is particularly good, white figures of the latter is particularly good, with a suggestion of a dark background. Two pictures by Peter Sheppard, "Hazy days," and "What's done," make excellent use of subdued color. The flower studies of Clara Huntington always delightful, and F. W. Harris' four paintings are fine in their decorative effect. Two pictures by Kenneth Forbes have a soft atmosphere reminiscent of Vermeer in some degree.

Among the paintings the most interesting are in the last room where the more modern styles and the more daring experiments are grouped. Two of Lawrence Harris' most important studies show his style at its best. They are powerful works, especially No. 35, called "Lake Superior No. 3." It is a richly colored picture and has an air of augmentation which is well displayed in the National Exhibition last fall. These, with Frieze's "Portrait of a Blond Woman," are the most interesting pictures in the collection. Simplicity in color and composition characterize this latter work, and above all vigorous modeling that places it far above any other portrait in the gallery. It compares very favorably with Mrs. O. J. Proctor's "Monocle," shown in London two years ago, whose style Miss How ard's resembles to a marked degree. Some other pictures in the room are cubist in character. Cubism has run its course in Europe, and has long since had its salutary effect in painting and all the allied arts. It is a tone, a little of which goes a long way, but little is of real value, not in itself, but in its action. Mr. W. Maclean's extremely clever satire on the cubist style, is valuable as an excellent parody, and provides the same laughter that stands in the way of exaggeration. Some of the most interesting things in the collection are in the upper gallery, the scissor-cuts of Mrs. Edna Horne, and the pen-and-ink drawings of Benjamin Brooker. The silhouettes of Mrs. Horne are exquisite things, perfect in proportion and spacing, displaying a rare decorative sense, and an enchanting imaginative gift. Careful examination discloses these delicate little designs a very sure sense of rhythm that accounts in part for the great satisfaction one has in looking at these charming cuts.

The drawings of Mr. Brooker are probably quite the finest thing of the kind being done in Canada. The Etching studies are particularly fine, some of them displaying the influence of Blake, as is to be expected, for Mr. Brooker is a Blake student and enthusiastic. Even the experiments in more geometrical forms and in line are interesting to themselves, but particularly in the power such studies give the artist in his drawings of some intrinsic value. An interest in forms for their own sake is everywhere apparent, and an ability to create the maximum of forceful effectiveness with the minimum of means. One criticism there is to offer. In such a conception one re-appears in the catalogue. "The wind by whirlwind into Heaven," one finds a talent, a technique, and composition that in spite of their characteristic simplicity, is the reverse of naive. The ascension in the whirlwind is expressed by the very naive, almost absurdly means of an irregular spiral track into the opening of heaven. Such attempts can only be convincing in an artist whose whole work gives evidence of the essential naiveté of his character and talent. Otherwise it seems incomplete.