THE ANNUNCIATION IN MODERN PAINTINGS.

A New Ideal of Womanhood.

Of the five different epochs in the pictured life of the Virgin, the Annunciation seems the natural accompaniment of the Easter season, and is the theme that appeals most generally to modern painters of sacred subjects. It is scarcely necessary to say that there are comparatively few painters of religious themes in this country. The life of the art student of today is in the Latin quarter rather than the cloister, and naturally Madonnas do not abound in the Paris salon. In America there are practically no painters of note who treat religious subjects. In England, here and there great men like Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Seymour, occassionally select a theme for a picture from the life of the Virgin.

Burne-ones' "Angel of the Annunciation," with its marvellous-beauty, original treatment, and intricate workmanship, and his "Angel at the Tomb," are both excellent examples of the handling of sacred subjects by modern artists. But Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the English post-palater, in his "Ecce Ancilla Domini," is far more poetical and spiritual in his treatment of this theme than any other modern English painter. The Virgin is white-robed and beautiful, an ideal of girlish innocence; while the Angel Gabriel is graceful and dignified, with a strange, mysterious beauty of face and mien. In his hands he bears the stalk of pure white lilies, stripped of leaves and stamens, the symbol of the Annunciation, the Virgin's flower, from earliest days. In the Annunciation by Walter Seymour there is beauty of form and outline but little spirituality. It is the characteristic modern treatment of the subject. A conventional stak of Easter lilies is a somewhat necessary aid in telling the story.

Bouguereau, the typical French modern painter of sacred themes, returns to early Italian treatment of the Annunciation, even to introducing a work-basket near the pot of lilies, thereby symbolizing the domestic qualities of the ideal woman.

Pictures of the various epochs of the Virgin's life occasionally come from the brush of Delaroche and Hebert in Paris, and from Mueller, Plockhorst, Gabriel Max and Sinkel in Germany; but the enthusiastic spirit, the religious symbolism, the ideality, is almost always lacking. Gabriel Max's pictures of the Virgin are of hearty, wholesome, red-cheeked frauleins, who suggest rollicking girlhood and a comfortable, fat, old age, but never a spiritual ideal.

The question has been asked again and again why are there so few painters of the life of the Virgin in modern times—why are there absolutely none in America?

And the answer seems to be, that this century has brought to us a still newer conception of womanhood, not a nobler, perhaps, but a broader womanhood. Every one, consciously or unconsciously, is familiar with the new type of woman.

She is just as patient, gentle, tender and self-sacrificing as of yore, but to spirituality she adds intellectuality. She can think as well as love, she is brave as well as good, she can play golf as well as sew. She is exerting a vast, and on the whole probably a beneficial influence on the art and literature of her times. The poet or painter no longer looks to mediaeval models. He has in the typical American girl of today a new ideal.

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