

AMERICA'S ADVANCE GUARD IN ART

Three of the World's Famous Living Portrait Painters Belong to This Country



DANIEL C. FRENCH, ONE OF THE FINEST OF LIVING SCULPTORS

BY DEXTER MARSHALL

LONG on money, short on art—that was America's position for a good many decades. Of late years, however, art in America has been advancing lustily, so that today even Europe, long a scolder at our materialism, generously admits that in our array of painters and sculptors we have a rather formidable advance guard in art, speared with a big A.

In 1878, when he was 20 years old, John W. Alexander, of late years one of the most prominent members of America's advance guard in art, traveled from Allegheny, Pa., his birth town, to New York with \$25 which he had managed to save for that purpose.

As a mere lad he had busied himself with "making pictures" and dreaming dreams of the day when he would win fame as a painter. About the first thing he did when he reached the metropolis was to seek out the publishing-house of Harper & Brothers and in to the art manager, Mr. Parsons, some pen and ink sketches which he had made on the pages of an account book. He sat a long while on the bench in the outer office before Mr. Parsons saw him, and then he received the chilling word that there was no chance for him.

Now among young Alexander's dreams there was one of the day when his signed work would appear in the Harper publications, and his disappointment was naturally keen. The art manager noticed his dejection.

"No, there is no chance," he repeated, "a little less brusquely, and then added, "but you may call again."

"I did call again a week later," Mr. Alexander told me. "Mr. Parsons had been having trouble of some kind that day and he looked over his glasses at me as he remarked rather testily, 'I told you there was no chance.'"

"But you said I might call again," I ventured.

"Yes, I know," he said, still testily, "but unless you want to take that boy's job, nodding at the office boy, 'I can give you nothing.'"

"When does he go?" I gasped.

"My apparent eagerness to take the job plainly startled Mr. Parsons, who hastened to explain that he had no idea that I would turn office boy. Besides, the pay was only \$2 a week, and the boy who held the job was the son of the head of one of the mechanical departments."

"Again my face fell. Again Mr. Parsons noted my disappointment. He begged to be excused for a moment while he could get out of the office, but he did not go. On his return he told me to begin work on the following Monday."

"I did, and the Saturday evening of the first week I cleaned up the place more thoroughly than it had ever been cleaned before. I swept under the tables and desks, which, as you know, had never been swept under before, and when I had finished I had built up a little mountain of dirt. I looked not unlike a coal-heaver. I sat myself thoroughly awash and the dirt stuck to me.

"Worse than that, everybody had come home but not when I tried to get out, down on the street level, after climbing down the cylindrical stairs between the two buildings, the janitor or watchman or whatever he was, who had never seen me, proposed that I should be arrested. I had a hard time trying to convince him that I was all right, and it looked very white as if I were slated to be locked up till the following Monday morning at least.

"It was kept pretty busy as an office boy, but I had time to draw a little, and once in a while my drawings were used. By and by I got \$3 a week instead of \$2 and drew all the time. The pay was still small, but I was happy, for I was established with Edwin A. Abbey, C. S. Rhenbaldt and other artists—illustrators whose signatures I had watched for week after week, in Harper's Weekly. If you've ever watched for signatures week after week on pictures, you know how like Edwin's art department of Harper's was to me.

"On the \$3 salary I finally saved enough to go to Europe and study."

"For the next 24 years Mr. Alexander lived abroad. He received his art education in the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, and both there and while he was struggling to make his way in the art world, he was frequently of a party with his New York efforts to make a living and at the same time be faithful to his art. Finally he triumphed, and today he is recognized in all the art centers of the world as one of the leading painters. He has won enough gold medals to hide the expansive chest of a comic opera general. In 1888 his picture 'Knowledge as the Bowl' was bought by the French Minister of Fine Arts for the Luxembourg collection, an honor that has come to only a very few Americans. Three years later he was made chevalier of the Legion



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Like the late Whistler, another member of America's advance guard of art, Mr. Alexander works with marvelous rapidity, and nervously. Physically he is slight, five feet nine or thereabouts, with a blond and full, but not bushy, beard and mustache and rather scant hair. His raiment is that of the prosperous banker and his patriotism has not been weakened a whit by the two score years' residence abroad.

Abbey the Coronation Painter.

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The other members of the party were attracted to the spot, and for the next half hour the King kept up his quizzing, while the royal personages and the artists grouped about were alternately amused at the King's queries and Mr. Abbey's struggle between his modesty and his desire to give his visitor the information sought.

Mr. Abbey afterward admitted that this was one of the worst half hours he had ever lived through. But it was instrumental in ultimately bringing him world-wide distinction. When King Edward was casting about for the proper artist to execute the coronation painting he chanced one day to bring the matter up in conversation with King Oscar, who recalled the time he had been shown through the Royal Academy by Mr. Abbey and the satisfactory answers the latter had given to all questions propounded to him on the technique of painting. Thereupon King Edward, for the first time, though he had long been acquainted with Abbey's work, began to consider him for the commission.

Abbey was hardly more than promoted from his cradle when he began to draw. His first efforts on the fly leaves and margins of books and magazines, attracted serious attention in the family and among his friends. He was then four years old. By the time he had reached baseball age he had littered the house from cellar to garret with sketches of his family, his home and his playmates. He divided his time about evenly between the great American game and sketching, and at school, when he should have been poring over the three R's, he was deeply engrossed in the pleasant pastime of making pictures.

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Though Abbey is a painter of the past he has never been guilty of an anachronism in his finished product, so far as the critics are aware. Above all things else he despises such a "break." To the end that his paintings may be true of the times they represent, even in the slightest details of dress, he has made what is probably the most wonderful and valuable collection of antique habiliments and accessories known to the modern world of art.

He considers time spent in avoiding an anachronism or undoing one doubly well spent. That he might not be guilty of an anachronism in "The Castle of King Amfortas" he made a journey to Brittany simply to sketch and model certain peculiar details of architecture; and when he found that he had made a slight mistake in the heraldic design on the skirt of Lady Anne in "Richard Duke of Gloucester and Lady Anne" he did the skirt all over again.

This passion for minute correctness he displayed as a boy. Among his first sketches to be published was one entitled "Tracking Rabbits." He used his brother and another playmate as models, and so insistent was he that their dress be correct in every detail that the two models

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Of an exceedingly retiring disposition, Sargent has gathered a reputation for eccentricity little less pronounced than Whistler's. One of his peculiarities is to charge for a portrait according to the pleasure he gets out of painting it. Hence some sitters have paid him as little as \$2500, while others have been compelled to part with \$10,000. The more pleasure in the work



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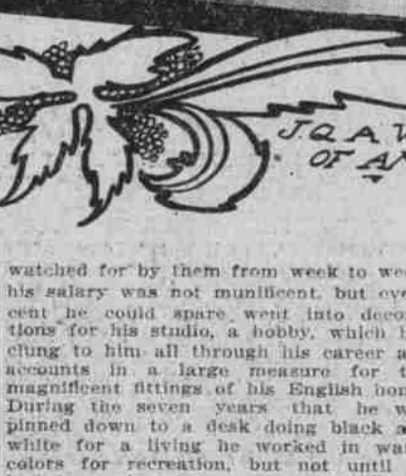
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This was a delightful task until the King found himself before his conductor's exhibit, "The Trial of Queen Catherine." The royal Swede, noting the name of the painter, planted himself firmly before the canvas and began firing questions after question at its creator.

The other members of the party were attracted to the spot, and for the next half hour the King kept up his quizzing, while the royal personages and the artists grouped about were alternately amused at the King's queries and Mr. Abbey's struggle between his modesty and his desire to give his visitor the information sought.

Mr. Abbey afterward admitted that this was one of the worst half hours he had ever lived through. But it was instrumental in ultimately bringing him world-wide distinction. When King Edward was casting about for the proper artist to execute the coronation painting he chanced one day to bring the matter up in conversation with King Oscar, who recalled the time he had been shown through the Royal Academy by Mr. Abbey and the satisfactory answers the latter had given to all questions propounded to him on the technique of painting. Thereupon King Edward, for the first time, though he had long been acquainted with Abbey's work, began to consider him for the commission.

Abbey was hardly more than promoted from his cradle when he began to draw. His first efforts on the fly leaves and margins of books and magazines, attracted serious attention in the family and among his friends. He was then four years old. By the time he had reached baseball age he had littered the house from cellar to garret with sketches of his family, his home and his playmates. He divided his time about evenly between the great American game and sketching, and at school, when he should have been poring over the three R's, he was deeply engrossed in the pleasant pastime of making pictures.

The boy's father, a merchant in Philadelphia, turned to the sketch book and brush for recreation throughout his life; the boy's grandfather, also a merchant in the same city, had found his relaxation from business cares in the same way. Edwin's father planned a business career for his son, encouraging him, meanwhile, in his drawings, that he, too, might find peace in it when business cares came to him. But one day the father had his eyes opened when Edwin suddenly declared for an artist's career. Several years later he began his art education at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where

watched for by them from week to week