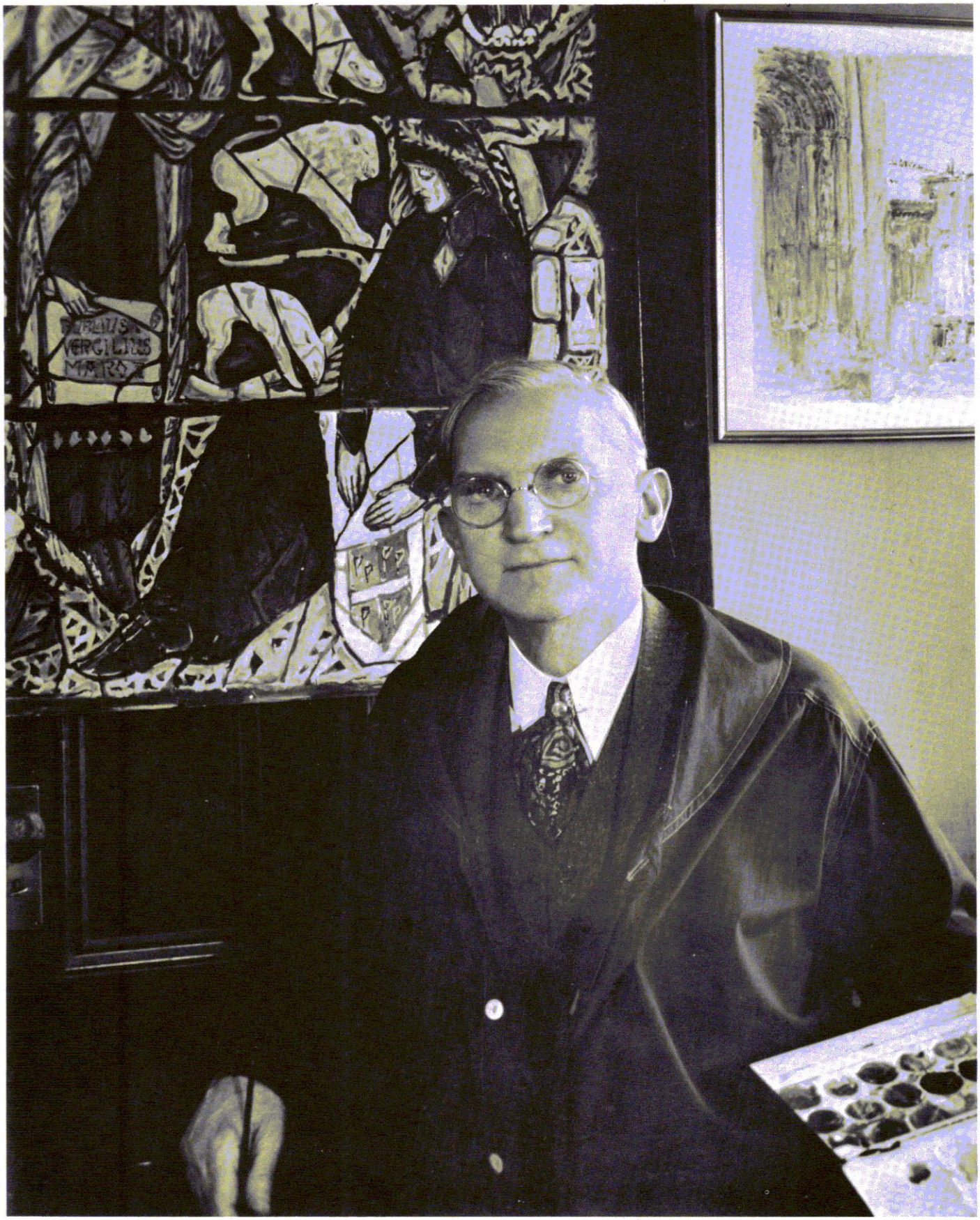

Charles J. Connick with preliminary drawing for introductory medallion to Dante's "Divine Comedy," Choir, Princeton University Chapel.

El Razi narthex window, Princeton University Chapel

Connick in Retrospect

Orin E. Skinner

WHENEVER I WRITE or talk about Connick I am confronted with a problem. Whatever I say about him I realize immediately that the opposite is almost equally true. He was a living paradox.

I imagine this is true in some degree of all great men. This is why it is so easy for biographers, who want to belittle them and bring them down to their own levels, to do so.

Connick was a perfectionist. It was hard for him to start a project for he realized it would not be easy. But once underway he drove himself and his associates to the limits of endurance to achieve what he was sure were the best possible results. This was hardly a virtue. He simply did not have the ability to compromise. He had worked hard for his achievements, fighting his way up and putting all his energy into the effort. He believed in his ability acquired the hard way, and had developed the instinct to defend it vigorously.

We have always had little signs around the studio, showing John Curran's text, — "ETERNAL VIGILANCE IS THE PRICE of LIBERTY." Connick was well aware of the hazards of his craft. He wrote, - "When I glory in the early masterpieces of Chartres, I often have the feeling that they are there as inevitably as though they had grown in their places like great flowers. I must make a mental effort to realize that the men who designed and made them might easily have blundered and failed in those adventures. The brilliant bits of colored glass that are so eloquent in vast designs might as surely have been jumbled into ugly things. Early craftsmen played with fire even as we do today."

Connick had a keen sense of humor and could laugh at himself. However, he could not take criticism or stand to be laughed at by others. In the later years when he was not well, he would react violently to any suggestion of criticism. He would dictate defensive letters in anything but complimentery terms. We would hold them until the next morning. Then he could often be persuaded to modify them. Looking back now, it occurs to me, that may have

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The author is president of Charles J. Connick, Associates, designers and workers in stained, leaded and faceted glass.

Fra Angelico narthex window, Princeton University Chapel

been just what he expected us to do.

He could be very tolerant. He wrote of himself,-"I am humiliated and chagrined when I follow the history of that young glassman, for it took him an unconsiderable time to discover working values in the light that was around him and through him all the time. His conversion, instead of being a glorious burst of light, like the great conversions in history, was a slow and painful process through many years of lingering shadows. So patience and tolerance should certainly be expected of me as this youngster's historian, as well as in my own right as a human being who learns slowly. I should certainly not fly into rages over friends or strangers who consistently refuse to see the 'light' that it took me so many years to find."

Connick was always ready to welcome students and beginners. Lectures at art schools lead to competitions and prizes. The winners reward, or punishment, was in coming to the studio to carry out his design in the actual glass. Art classes from fashionable girls schools came and literally worked their fingers to the bone.

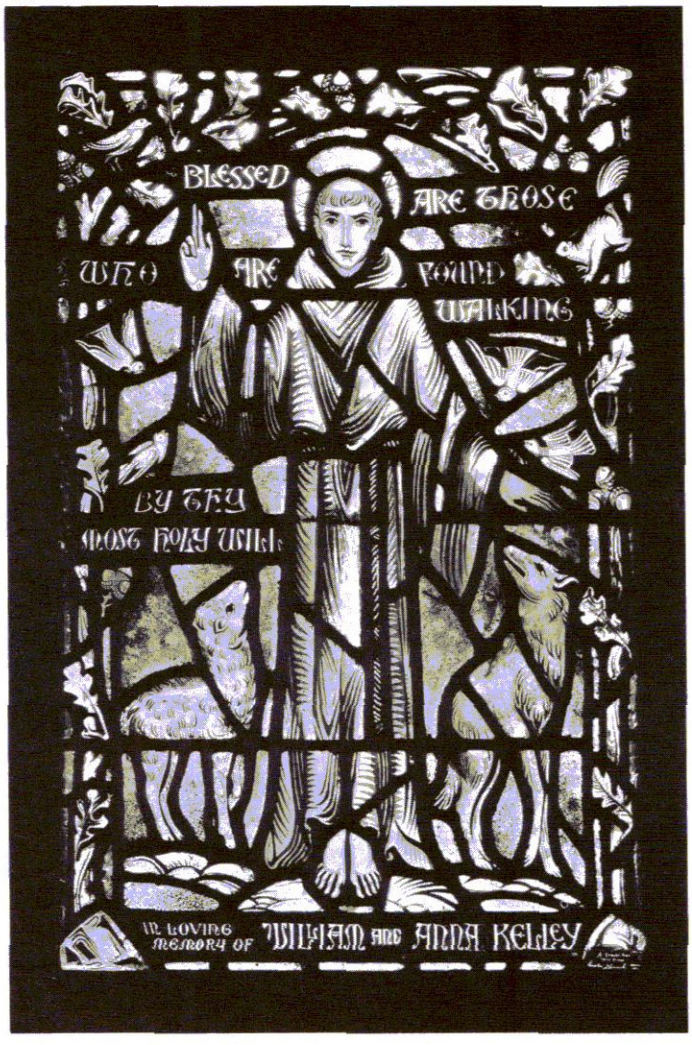
He had no secrets from his contemporaries, I shall not call them competitors, and all the studio was open to them.

Although he developed a pattern for success,- a personal type or trademark, as do all great artists, ("one can always tell a Connick window"); he was also an experimenter. There were "blue" years, and a time when a shade of canary yellow, accidently discovered, was in generous use. He was among the first to try "gelva", and others of the earliest plastics. A panel of colorful glass imbedded in one of the synthetic resins in sections glazed with zinc cames was exhibited at the Metropolitan. The plastic curtain pulls sagged out of shape in the heat of the sun, painted glass blocks blew up in the kiln. He even tried buttons with fragments of glass in plastic, backed with gold and silver foil.

Although Connick never finished high school he was one of the best educated men I ever met.

It all began way back in Pittsburgh in Professor Gage's Sunday school class. He introduced young Charles to the golden world of poetry, to Shakespeare, Tennyson and Browning. "One Sunday morning the Bible was changed as by magic, from a collection of commandments and pre-

St. Francis Window, St. John's Church, Winthrop, Mass.



cepts he was to learn and recite, into an anthology of inspired poems. Later the youth realized that those poems culminated in a Life that is itself a beautiful Poem, the inspiration of sensitive poets from the days of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to our own troubled times".

He knew and loved the classics, had a passion for good poetry and a deep appreciation of music. For years he seldom missed the Boston Symphony concerts, and knew many of the musicians. It was one of these who exclaimed when he came to the studio to see a great window just completed,- "Is it that you know Brahms, his First Symphony? And do you know the place where the sky, it opens? This is that place!" He had good friends among the authors and poets, including Robert Frost who came to studio parties and "said" his poems.

Connick knew a great many fine works by heart and as we sat around a campfire, would recite by the hour.

He loved all manifestations of nature, especially running water. He always had his sketch pad and colors near at hand and would stop to record a brook, even at the risk of being late for an important appointment. Many of his finest water colors and oils are of streams, waterfalls and ocean waves. He loved their patterns and saw close affinities to glass in ever changing light.

He studied writing with the same sincerity he devoted to glass. Some of his articles were later to become part of his great book, "Adventures in Light and Color." He said the light comes first; the color naturally follows.

His honorary degrees from Princeton and Boston University were earned through his contribution of distinguished stained glass to both institutions.

He served as President of the Stained Glass Association of America during the difficult years of 1931 to 1938 when practically the only sign of activity in the organization was the magazine. He kept it alive, contributing material and support in many ways until its revival in the Boston convention of 1939.

After his death a jury of his peers passed judgment on him in the Spring, 1946 issue of STAINED GLASS. He was characterized as "a great artist, greater soul; an inspiration to many; fighter of ignorance and prejudice; poet and dreamer; gentle and modest genius and a bright star in the skies of American culture." He was all that, and more!

Connick adapted Pegasus, the mythological winged horse, as his symbol. He designed it in stained glass and we carved it on his gravestone.

Legend has it that the fountain of the Muses gushed forth from the ground at the blow of his hoof. So when Connick would exclaim in somewhat less than elegant terms that he would like to kick a hole in the premises, he was actually announcing his desire to make an opening through which the creative spirit would enter to inspire us all.

Dr. and Mrs. C.P. Deems of Saint Mark's Church, Minneapolis, had the custom of composing limericks about their overnight guests. After one of Connick's stays they created this masterpiece:

There is a bright fellow named Connick
Whose visits are always a tonic
He dabbles in glass which is always first class,
With results that are simply symphonic.