

The Boston School of Stained Glass

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"Milton Dictating to his Daughter Deborah." Introductory Medallion to "Paradise Lost." Detail of one of the series of Great Christian Epic Windows, for the Choir of the Princeton University Chapel.

Designed and Made by CHARLES J. CONNICK, BOSTON

A well known Bostonian said to me recently: "What's this I hear about a school of stained glass in Boston?"

I knew that he had seen the Christmas number of a de luxe magazine devoted to the successful business man. I rallied him for his lack of interest in the doings of Bostonians. "Do you have to go to New York magazines to find that there is a Boston school of stained glass?"

"Well," he replied, "You fellows don't advertise. If you had electric signs and full page ads in the newspapers, we would know about you." I laughed at this, for I remembered hearing a newspaper man say of some of the younger glass men: "They are swell publicity hounds!"

The answer to both these suggestions is a comment on

this curious craft, stained glass. The craftsman is greatly handicapped unless he is a creative artist. He also labors under difficulties if he has not some characteristics of the successful business man. Fancy an artist whose controlling medium is light; whose palette covers many square feet of floor space and weighs tons; who must have many helpers, and who must pay tribute to that ruthless old pirate, "Overhead."

A dependence upon business methods, and a shrewd adherence to them have often wrecked the stained glass craft. So it is not strange that the recent article on the subject has called forth discussion. Its appearance in a big business magazine disturbed some lovers of the craft as an artist's

medium. They wondered if it were entering the lists with quantity producers, and if it were to be admired as a means of money-making.

The picture of an artist starving in a garret has long been associated with sincerity in the world of art. The artist with ideals is supposed to be lean and hungry; but this idea is often challenged. Some modern painters of undoubted integrity are as prosperous as pork-packers or bootleggers. They are equally capable of making a wise use of their money.

An attack still made on successful painters of modernist pictures is related to their monetary success. They are branded as charlatans. But although modernism is suspected in Boston, its spirited adherents are considered worthy of reward in many parts of the world. We may hope that the Boston School of Stained Glass will endure long enough to prove that an artist may be successful as a craftsman and still pay his rent like a good business man. Such proof will be worthless unless it implies first of all a devotion to ideals unrelated to money making.

The history of the craft in this country is badly smirched by evidences of unworthy financial success. Ugly windows were easy to make, and easy to sell. Artistic talent and aesthetic taste worried neither the Art Glass man nor his clients.

For many years, stained glass was a lost art in the United States because artists, capable of using it in its colorful purity and honesty, ignored it. It fell into the hands of manufacturers and money-makers. There was some point in the question asked of a lecturer on the subject in Boston some time ago.

"Is the art of stained glass a lost art?" A light titter ran over the audience at the time, for the speaker had just shown important windows of his own on the screen. His embarrassment somewhat clouded his wits. Otherwise he probably would have answered that it had long been lost in New England. He might have added that if we are to recapture its old glories, we must know what it is all about.

Talk of schools as they are related to painting or craftsmanship is often confusing; and when the term "Boston School of Stained Glass" is used, we are quite right in asking what it means. The writer of the article in the New York magazine implied that it meant something more than a mere regional distinction.

He implied a fresh and enthusiastic use of an old medium by artists of today. If he is right about this, Boston has a real distinction. Stained Glass is a mediaeval craft. In its

revival the tendency very often is to copy ancient windows. Good copies are pleasing to many architects, and to many lovers of art. This is especially true when excellent reproductions of old windows are contrasted with the awful monstrosities of art glass that came down to us from the eighties and nineties.

But a copyist always functions under a handicap. Some whimsical force seems to joggle his elbow. He seems to copy the wrong things. He gets unfamiliar forms that are often unattractive because they belong to another day. They must be explained; and explanations do not reveal the flare that first gave them significance. It is rare that a copy of a window or a picture carries with it the original fire. Even when the right thing is copied, the enthusiasm and lift of the moment are rarely copied with it.

We recognize the glory of the masterpieces in glass labelled Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. To know them is to realize that the center of their loveliness is related to the artist-craftsmen behind them. They are the flowers of original impulses and enthusiasms, and they give a beautiful glow to that chapter in history we call the Middle Ages. Efforts to copy them are unsuccessful, when they are not ludicrous, for the great incentive cannot be recaptured.

If the Boston School of Stained Glass is to be worth talking about or writing about, it will be because artists and craftsmen glory in the possibilities of this medium as an answer to their own spiritual needs. Success in following precedents or in making money will not matter much.

Patterned color in light is like music in its emotional power. It is at its best in expressing ideas and emotions in terms that are vibrant in changing light. It invites its devotees forth to adventure in the field of science as well as in that of art.

When Mark Twain said that classical music is better than it sounds, he might also have said, "Significant stained glass windows are better than they look." One must learn to listen to music; one must also learn to look at stained glass windows. The modernist painters are helping the stained glass man, for they are bringing the pattern and the symbol into the plastic arts. Boston has not been over cordial to the modernist, and she is not too enthusiastic over the stained glass man. If she is interested in this talk of a Boston School, she will learn to look at stained glass windows without the aid of electric signs and full page advertisements.

Special Notice - Plant Trees

The American Tree Planting Association is making a nation-wide appeal for tree planting as a feature of the George Washington Bicentennial which comes in 1932. This should interest New Englanders, and it is hoped there will be many trees, dedicated to the "Father of Our Country," planted throughout the six New England states. Let us never forget that Washington took command of the Continental Army under a New England elm at Cambridge. A copy of the "Bicentennial Tree Planting Book" may be had for the asking. Address: "American Tree Planting Association, Washington, D. C."