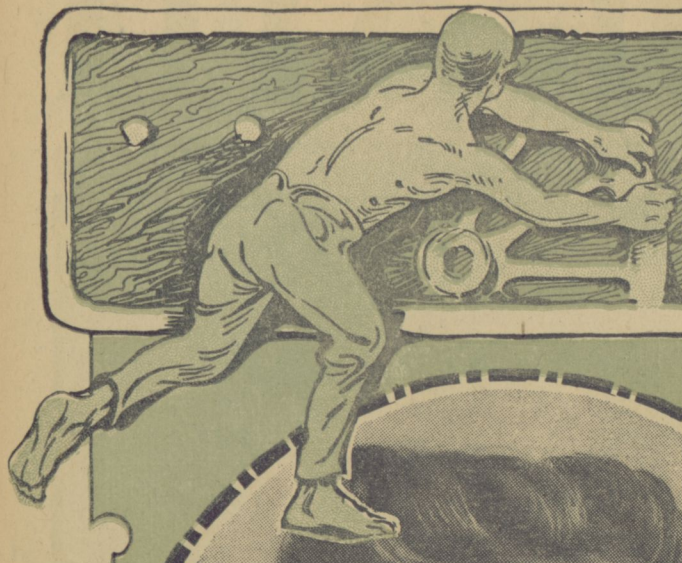


MEUNIER

THE SCULPTOR OF THE PROLETARIAN



CONSTANTIN MEUNIER.



MINER'S WIFE WITH SHOVEL (PAINTING)



THE HARVEST.

FOR the first time in America the sculpture and painting of Constantin Meunier, the Belgian master, is being shown. Reflected in these stalwart, these honest and uncompromising figures is the spirit of the typically American man. Here in this country, of all places on the civilized globe, the message of Meunier should be understood and appreciated. For this message is the glorification of toil, the honest portrayal of the dignity and grace of work, of its force and power and possibilities, hidden though it is beneath an exterior of pressure and distress.

Meunier's spirit and sympathy were with the man of the factory and the forge, the worker in the mine and in the quarry, and the toiler before the blast furnace and the blowpipe. No work was too hard, too monotonous, too wearying, but this sculptor could wring from it its element of honorable dignity. His work is the epic of modern indus-



INDUSTRY.



THE HAMMER MAN.



A DOCK HAND.

trialism. He is the apostle of labor.

Years ago there were reproach and incomprehension when Millet portrayed the peasant at work in the fields. Realism had no place in art, the critics said. But his realism is only a faint shadow of the truth beside Meunier's courageous portrayal of the most common types of everyday life, the basic features of our industrial world, the minute cogs which before have been only recognized as a part of the machine, not of human beings.

His "Smith" he calls the "knight of labor," and his "Dockhand" is a perfect representation of the dignity and grace of the proletarian spirit. The artist's constant theme is the struggle of man against the eternal fatalities of nature and the pressure and strain of work.

Not an Appeal or a Protest.

Meunier knew what he was portraying. Born of humble people, he spent his youth in the suburbs of Brussels, and watched ever with keenest interest the struggles of the miners, the ambitions and hopes of the quarrymen, and the patient endeavor of the workers at the forge and the blast furnace.

At first he was draftsman only—later painter, and last as the finished product, sculptor. And these two early occupations have given to his work a finesse and precision not to be found in many of the modern sculptors where so often the energy is put entirely into the idea instead of into line and modeling.

It was at the glass works of Val Saint-Lambert that the great vision of his future work came to him, and as he watched the earnest preoccupation of the workers, their spirit of unity and cooperation, there came to him the idea of the great "aesthetics of work."

His art is not an appeal to the sympathy or to the emotions. He scorns sentimentality or weakening pity. It is not an appeal or a protest. It is a courageous acceptance of conditions as they are, and an effort to wrest from these conditions all that is noble and fine. He gives esthetic expression to the modern worker as the Greeks gave it to the gladiator or the wrestler. In his work the social and the artistic interests are welded. To the Greek idealism has been added a deep modern humanitarianism. His sympathy is for that section of labor where the toil is great and the reward small.

In the catalogue written for the present American exhibition, Christian Brinton says of Meunier:

"There can be no question concerning the relative status of Constantin Meunier. Though in a measure restricted in scope, it ranks in general significance beside the pellucid and spacious vision of Pavis de Chavannes, the penetrant humanity of Eugene Carriere, and the sensuous unrest of Auguste Rodin. At once the poet of the past and the present, his artistic heritage may be traced through the sober majesty of Millet and graphic vehemence of Honoré Daumier, back to the fountain heads of medieval and ancient sculpture. Bearing with manful mien their burden of earthly toil and tribulation, these somber figures take up their position

in the plastic procession of all time. And just as assuredly does their earnest souled creator find his place in the pantheon of modern art. He possesses, indeed, dual claim to his hard won haven. His triumph was not alone esthetic but spiritual. He wrought in beauty and nobility and his also was a conquest of human hearts."

Exhibition to Come to Chicago.

So far the exhibition has not been the success that one could have predicted for America. The collection of about 150 of the best pieces of this master has been shown in Buffalo and Pittsburgh and in New York. In all of these places the exhibition was free, the time was limited, and it was announced that this would be the only opportunity to see these works. In view of this one might suppose that the galleries would be full. But M. Jacques-Meunier, son-in-law of the sculptor, said significantly to an interviewer recently:

"On week days practically nobody came. On Sundays there were more people in the

buildings, and as they wandered through the halls they might peer into the room which held the sculpture and wonder in as if saying, 'Tiens! There's something here, too!' In Pittsburgh the exhibition seemed to be in competition with the elephants and giraffes which fill the near-by zoölogical gardens, and in New York people seemed to regard it as a serious pilgrimage to get to Columbia, and it suffered there."

Surely when the exhibition comes to Chicago March 24 there will be no excuse, with the institute at the foot of Adams street, for not going to see the sculpture which is representative of the root and core of our working nation—the ordinary man at the ordinary work, and yet so dignified and idealized that the tribute to industrialism cannot be missed. In the nobility of his esthetic philosophy and in the grave beauty of the modeled figures, the pity of which is breathed from his work, there is an invigorating joy in life, a renewed pride in labor, and a lesson to the rebelling and dissatisfied.