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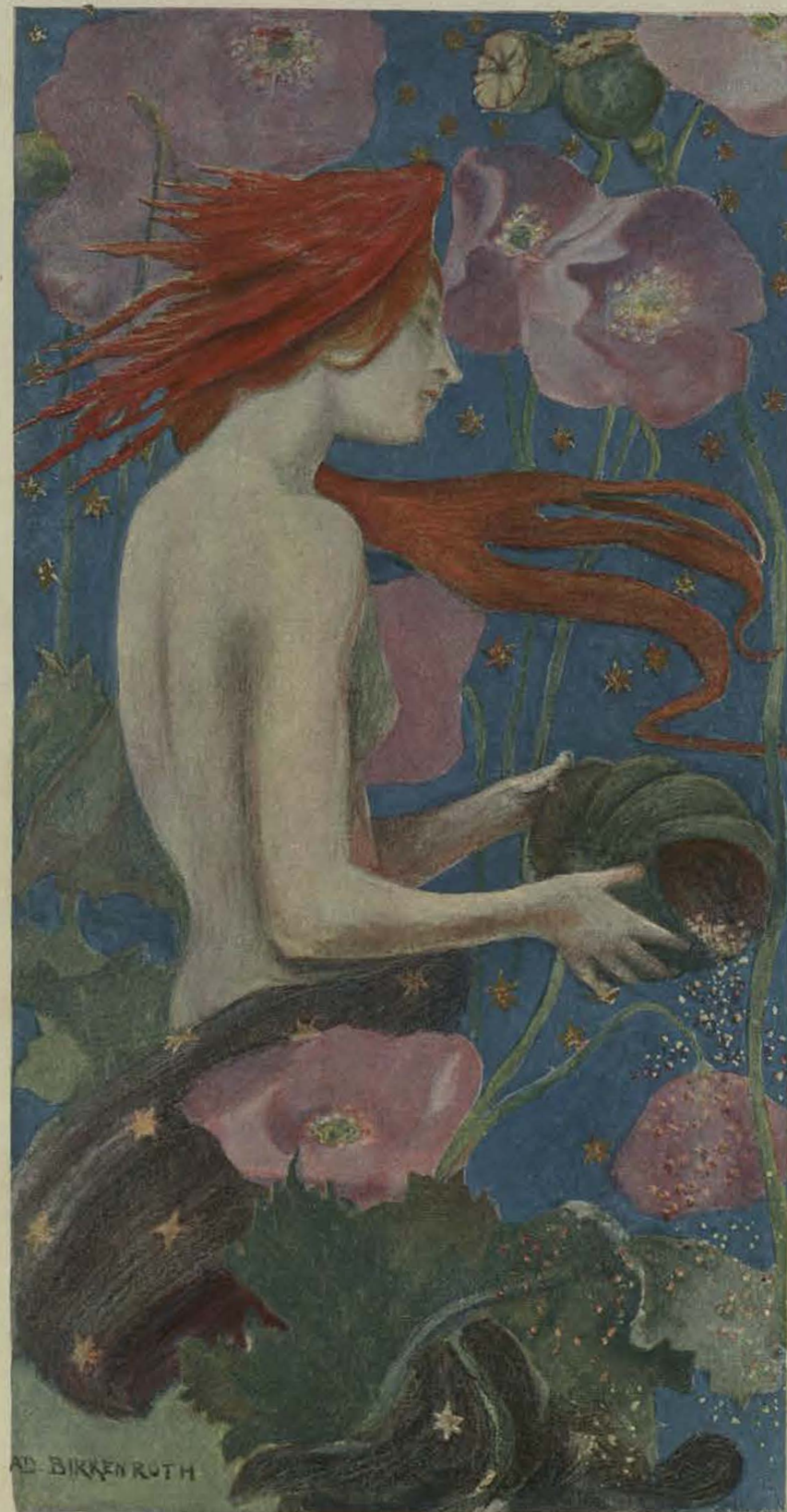
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"THE PROMISE OF SLEEP"  
BY A. BIRKENRUTH

## Albert Baertsoen

**A** PAINTER OF DEAD CITIES:  
M. ALBERT BAERTSOEN.  
BY GABRIEL MOUREY.

GREAT, and ever growing, as his fame may be outside his native country; remarkable as have been his successes in France, where he is a regular exhibitor, in Germany too, and in Austria and in Italy, M. Albert Baertsoen would, I feel sure, take it ill of me were I to dissociate him from the valiant group of artists who are an honour to Belgium to-day—Léon Frédéric, Constantin Meunier, Emile Claus, Mellery, Georges Minne, Georges Morren, and Fernand Khnopff, to name a few of the more prominent among them.

It has become a commonplace to declare that "art has no native land": however this may be, it is an incontestable fact that every artist has one. Forgetful of what he owes to his Fatherland, the artist too often repudiates his home; but the really honest, the really great will ever remain faithful to the land of their birth. They well know whence they owe the development of their individuality; they realise that the knowledge of their inner being has come to them while breathing the atmosphere of home, with all its wealth of association and tradition; that in this native soil the very soul of their race resides. What if their birthplace should at first have failed to understand, should have been cold and discouraging? What matter? Let the artist return covered with honours earned elsewhere, and he will find in his native place the best reward of all, the warmest and most affectionate welcome and esteem. There he will

gain new strength to struggle on and conquer in the end.

This love for the native soil is seen in all its fulness in Albert Baertsoen's work; it impresses one, quite apart from his exceptionally fine artistic gifts, and is, indeed, one of the leading characteristics of his genius. It is the unfailing source whence springs his inspiration; it was his solace in moments of discouragement, those sad, and all too frequent, hours in the life of one possessing the true artistic temperament. He knows all the secrets of this birthplace of his, this spot wherein his heart long since took root; there he has plunged deep into the very soul of Nature, and felt and understood its every mystery. And we may see



ALBERT BAERTSOEN

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH





# Albert Baertsoen

now how he has expressed these things. Others, tempted by his success, have followed him on the self-same scenes; but in their work only the mere outline is there: the spirit, the soul of the place, which shine forth and quiver in Baertsoen's canvases—all this has evaporated.

That which we term "sentiment in art" is a quality that has for years back been quite neglected until lately. Its revival sprang from the excesses of impressionism, and we may be glad indeed that it was so. Is there a single great master who has dispensed with this "sentiment," or escaped its influence? However much the most extraordinary feats of technique may surprise and interest us, it is the moving manifestation of a true artistic sensibility which charms our eyes and takes our fancy captive. What could be lovelier than the emotion of the artist in the presence of Nature? and what greater delight than to share it?

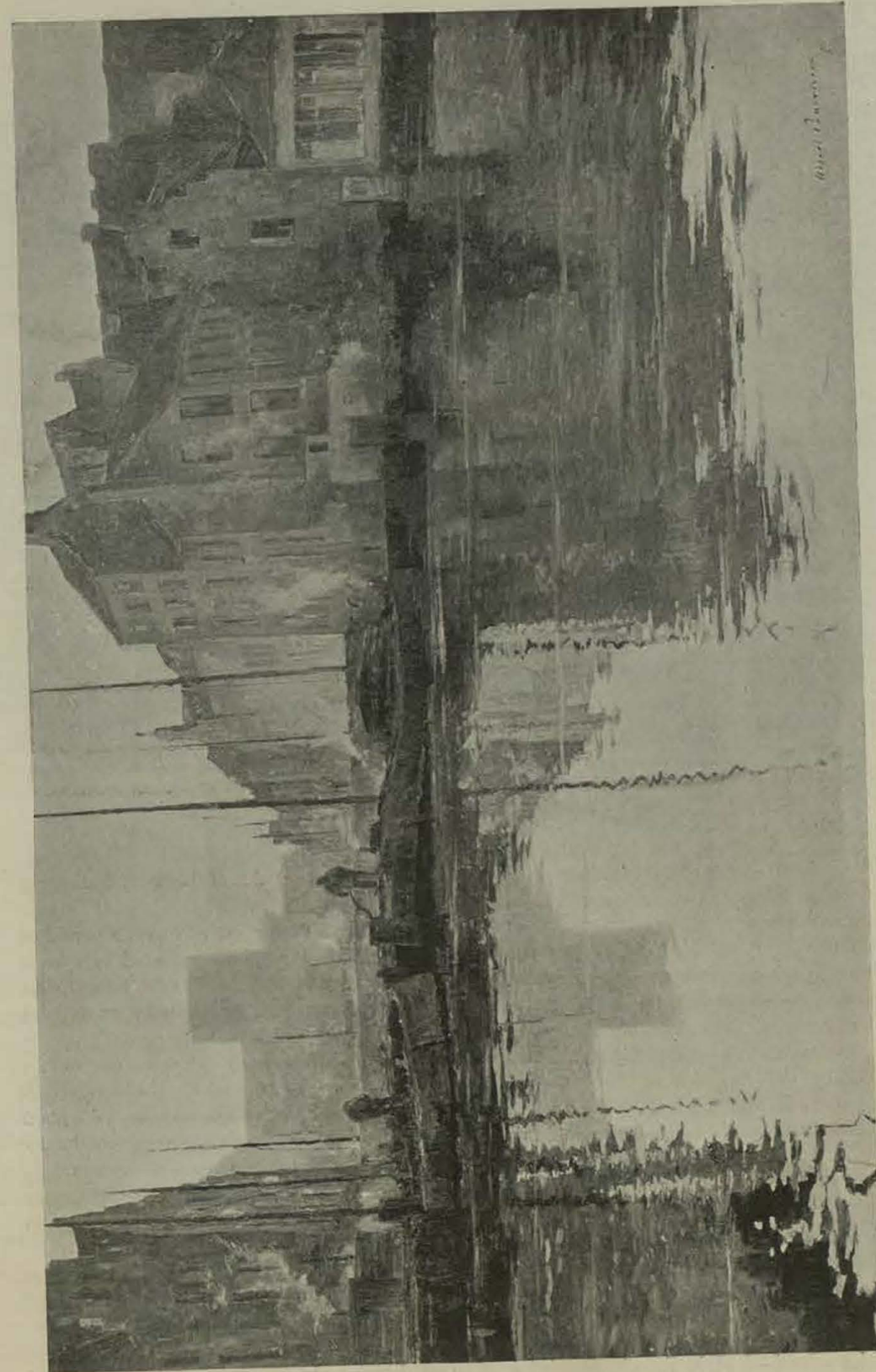
The scenes displayed before us by M. Baertsoen, the landscapes of which he has made himself the interpreter, are, indeed, altogether captivating. He has the delicate art of catching Nature in her most attractive moods. It is delightful to wander with him through these "dead cities" of Flanders, where life flows as slowly and peacefully as the waters of the canals that traverse them; to linger in the shadow of the ancient belfries, whose chimes ring out the melancholy song of the ages. The grass sprouts between the pavement, and moss clings to the mouldering walls; along the deserted quays the heavy boats are moored; everything seems dead this snowy weather; a funereal stillness hangs over the town; but in the snug houses, behind the little windows with white curtains raised to let in the scanty light, a humble, simple existence is running its dull course, amid a peacefulness almost monastic. Women are sewing or making



"LE VIEUX PORT, YERE"

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FROM AN ETCHING BY ALBERT BAERTSOEN



"EN VILLE FLAMANDE, LE SOIR"  
FROM A PAINTING BY  
ALBERT BAERTSOEN



(By permission of M. Borguet)

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"DEVANT L'ÉGLISE, FLANDRE"

FROM A PAINTING BY ALBERT BAERTSOEN

(By permission of M. Franchomme)

lace in the window corners; their mothers, bent with age, seated in low chairs beside the wall, seem wrapt in meditation or prayer.

Such is the little world M. Albert Baertsoen has shown us in all its picturesqueness; and, let me add at once, no one who has followed in his footsteps has come within measurable distance of him. Subjects such as these speedily pall, unless accompanied by the qualities of sincerity and delicacy and true affection which mark the work of this genuine artist. It is this concentration, this intensity of feeling—qualities which, say what one may, are becoming more and more rare in the general scramble for fame—it is this endeavour to express in its integrity the spiritual nature of things, if I may so term it, that endow the work of M. Baertsoen with so much character. Add to all this remarkable technical gifts, and a freedom of style which has ever refused to assimilate itself to any particular school—a style the characteristics of which I hope presently to define—and one may

have, I trust, a general idea of this most fascinating artistic personality.

M. Baertsoen's career extends over a period of about ten years. His family intended him for a business career, and thus at first he took up art merely in an amateur way. Still, he began to paint when quite young, and he was scarcely twenty years of age when a fairly large picture of his, *Canal, matinée de Mai*, was accepted and exhibited at the Salon of 1887. This canvas excited a good deal of attention, and the encouragement he received induced him to abandon commerce and go to Paris to finish his artistic education. He spent two years in Roll's studio, devoting himself to figure-painting, and had no cause to regret the instruction and the advice he received from the genial artist, who took the greatest interest in his pupil's work.

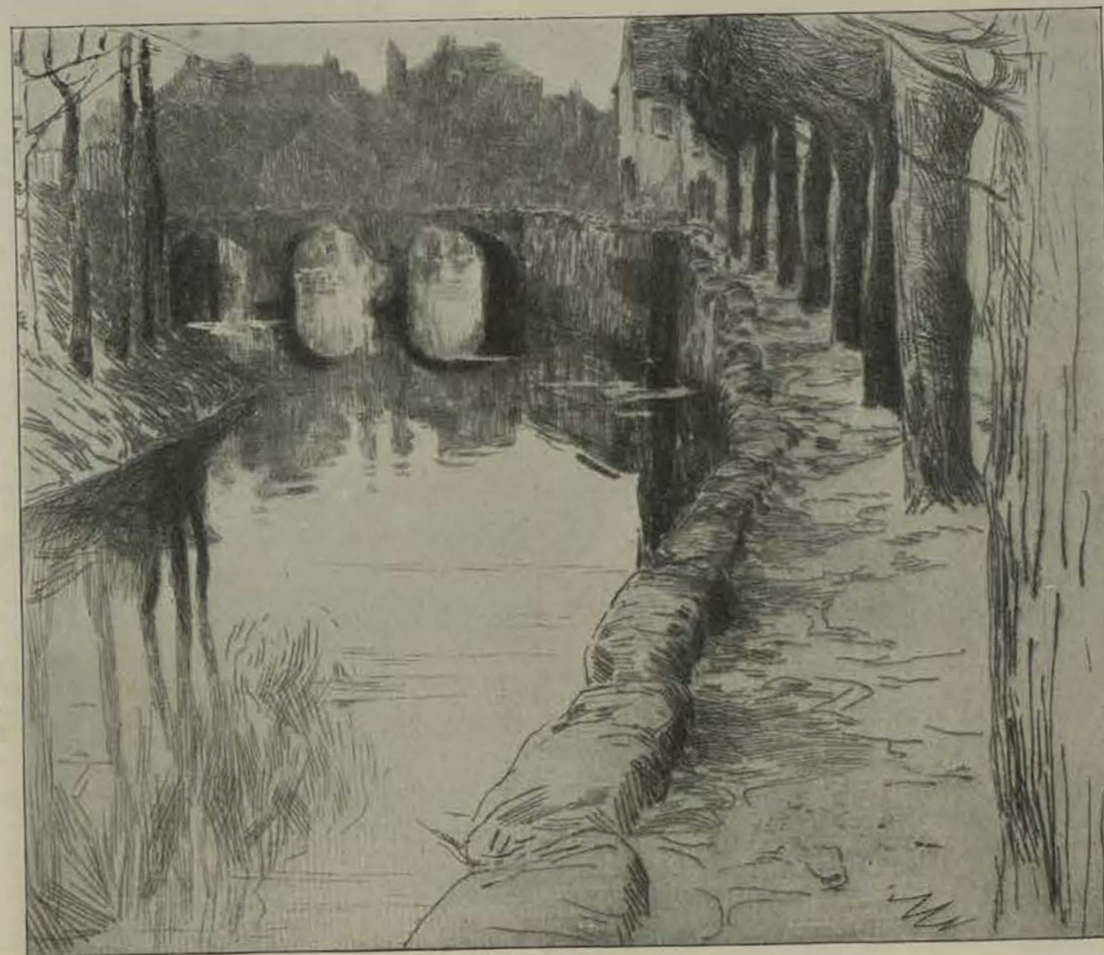
In 1889 he was represented at the Salon des Champs-Élysées by a huge canvas, entitled *Dernier Rayon*, a first version of *Soir sur l'Escaut*,

exhibited at the Champ de Mars in 1896, and reproduced in *THE STUDIO* (Vol. VIII. p. 20). Although this work earned for him a "mention," he did not hesitate to leave the Société des Artistes Français for the Salon du Champ de Mars, which offered a freer scope for his ideas. Since then he has been a constant exhibitor at the Champ de Mars, each year giving evidence of a genius developing naturally, wisely, and surely. The amateur of 1887 has become a true, honest artist, disdaining to tread the easy roads towards notoriety, but striving rather to gain esteem by his own genuine merit, and succeeding, moreover, to the full.

Many works of his there are that I should like to describe at length did space permit; for, wonderful as are his studies of broad daylight, he is no less expert in seizing the delicate beauties, the infinite subtleties of the hour of dusk and nightfall, as, for example, in his *Soir à l'Asile*, with its deep

melancholy charm; or, again, in *Soir sur l'Escaut*, where the whole scene is wrapped in the soft, rich-coloured haze of the lovely day just ending, as though the night were loth to claim the heavens. In their clumsy boats the fishermen cook their evening meal, while around the smoke rises slow and straight, unruffled by the faintest breeze; and the waters melt away yonder into the horizon, showing soft and silver-white.

I could have much to say, too, of this *Rivière en Décembre*, so delicately "felt" and expressed, with the trees on the banks floating away in the mist; or of *La Grande Rue, Nieuport*, so original in its composition and so happy in its perspective—a work in which the artist has contrived to invest with interest all sorts of commonplace details; or, again, of this series of snow effects, exhibited at the Salon of 1895—*Matin de Neige en Flandre, cordiers sur les remparts; Bateau bleu, neige; Aux fortifications, neige; and Neige, le matin*; or, yet again, of



"VIEUX CANAL"

FROM AN ETCHING BY ALBERT BAERTSOEN

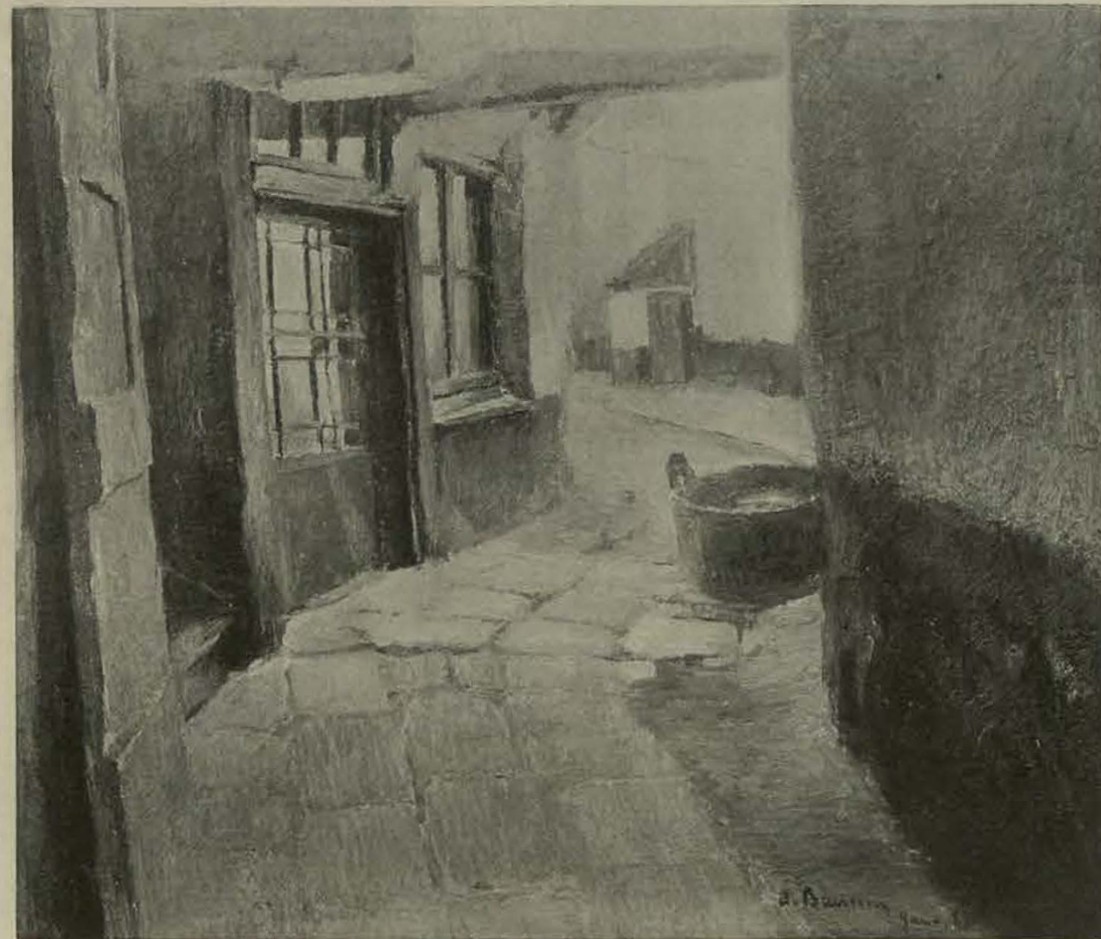


# Albert Baertsoen

this *Rue ensoleillée, à Bruges*; *En Ville Morte, le soir*, and the *Vieux quai en Novembre*, which figured in this year's Salon, and is marvellously characteristic of M. Baertsoen's grey manner, just as the *Petite place, le soir*, is a perfect example of his lighter key. The *Vieux quai* is an exquisite harmony of dead colour, dull tone, and dim tint, realising all the sad intensity of dying autumn. An air of deep gloom hangs over the damp landscape, illuminated by a grey sky with the sinking sun beyond. The only touch of animation in the desolate scene is afforded by the shadows thrown upon the greenish waters of the canal.

M. Baertsoen obtains effects of this sort with rare perfection, and one scarcely knows whether to admire more the painter's art or the exquisitely refined and poetic sentiment dominating it. One must needs delight in them both equally, for they are inseparable, and never degenerate into a mere "manner." While on this point I am anxious to

make it clear that M. Baertsoen has always kept clear of all slavish adherence to any particular style; for he is too impressionable to allow himself to be ruled by any sort of conventionality. He might very well, seeing the success achieved by any one of his methods, have been content to devote himself to some special type of production, to the exclusion of all others, as so many of his fellow-artists have done, for fear of losing public favour. He must therefore be heartily commended for having avoided so obvious and so tempting a snare. M. Baertsoen is ever striving to correct and to develop his powers, to enlarge and simplify his vision, by ridding himself more and more of all that might lead him into any fixed groove. Those who have studied his work during the last seven or eight years are fully aware of this fact. And now they have the satisfaction of seeing in full expansion a true artistic personality, a fine virile sensibility, under complete



"PETITE COUR, FLANDRE"

FROM A PAINTING BY ALBERT BAERTSOEN

# Albert Baertsoen



"LA GRANDE RUE, FLANDRE"

FROM AN ETCHING BY ALBERT BAERTSOEN



"LA ROUTE ZÉLANDAISE"

FROM AN ETCHING BY ALBERT BAERTSOEN





"VIEILLES MAISONS, NUAGE BLANC"

FROM A PAINTING BY ALBERT BAERTSOEN

control, taking its proper place with nobility and dignity.

M. Albert Baertsoen's canvases are not designed to captivate the attention of the holiday public, for they are lacking in all the essentials required to attract the crowd. But I do not suppose he is likely to deplore this fact. He has won the enthusiastic admiration of his fellow-artists, and of all those who are capable of delicate appreciation, and despise the loud, artificial methods adopted by too many artists nowadays. This is proved by the hearty welcome he has received wherever his works have been displayed, whether at the Champ de Mars, at the Libre Esthétique, at the annual International Exhibition in Paris, at the "Secession" of Munich—of which he is one of the founders—at Venice last year, at Budapest at the present moment, at Dresden, where his *Soir à l'Asile* won a gold medal in

1897, or at Munich, where a similar honour was conferred upon him in 1890. The Luxembourg Gallery has been adorned since 1895 with one of his pictures—*Vieux Canal flumand*, which occupies a foremost place in the Salle des Ecoles Etrangères; while the museum of his native town, Ghent, contains his *Cordiers sur les Remparts*, to which I referred just now.

I must not close these notes without a passing mention of M. Baertsoen's skill as an aquafortist. Long ago he was drawn towards this powerful process, and has engraved more than a hundred plates, some of remarkable merit. He brings to bear on the *eau forte* the independence and the freedom of touch which distinguish his paintings. His etchings are true painters' etchings, bold, vigorous, and full of colour. Especially worthy of mention are those entitled *La Route Zélandaise*; *Le Vieux port, Veere*; *Vieux quai, Flandre*; *Vieux*

## A Mortuary Chapel

*murs, Zélande*; *La Grande Rue*, and *Veere, le soir*. Their chief value lies in their bold and skilfully handled contrasts of black and white, which have a very personal touch about them.

Such is the work, such the ability, of M. Albert Baertsoen—delightful, forceful work, charming eye and mind alike by its intense and uncommon sentiment for the beauties of nature; honest, conscientious ability, self-born, owing nothing to others, ever seeking still higher things, ever full of elasticity and variety. Let me add, before I close, that M. Baertsoen has scarcely passed his thirtieth year. Considering the rich promise he has shown, no one who knows and appreciates his work can doubt that he has within him that

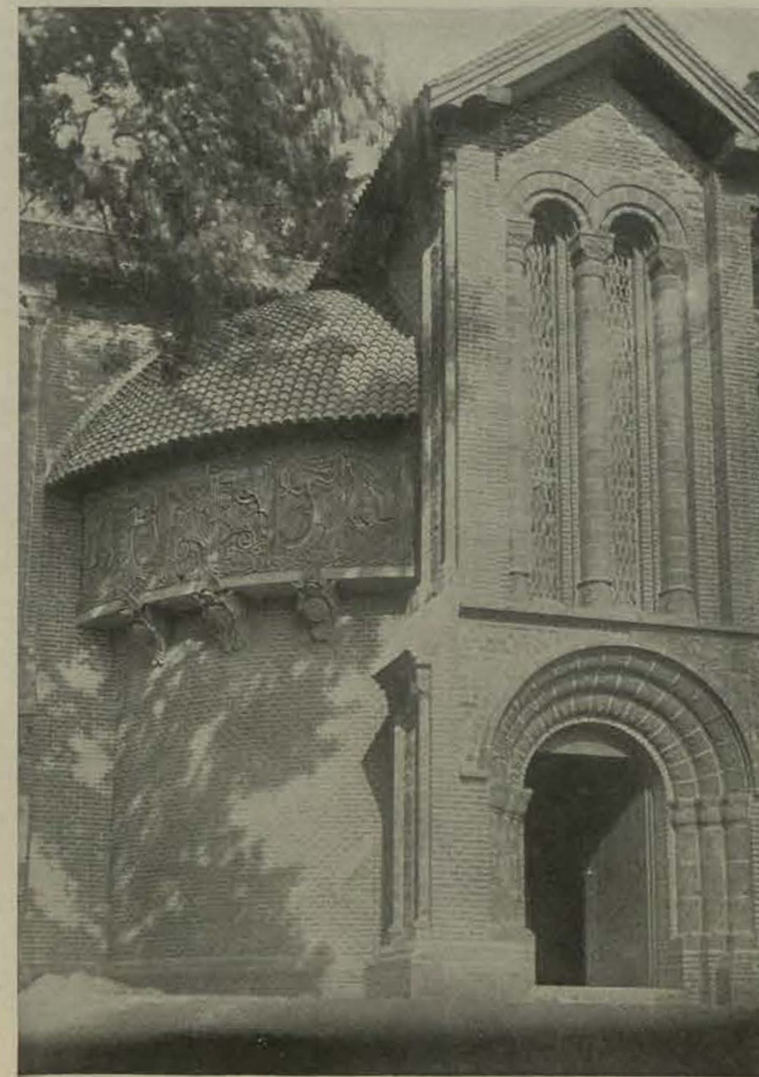
which may in the future result in the highest achievements.

GABRIEL MOUREY.

**A** MORTUARY CHAPEL. DESIGNED BY MRS. G. F. WATTS.

It is possible that the really beautiful mortuary chapel which is the subject of this article would lose some of its charm in less exquisite surroundings; but we must not forget that the environment was there first, and that the building, which is so full of thought and art, might never have been evolved as it now stands had the situation not inspired the treatment.

The road from Guildford to Limnerslease, Mr. G. F. Watts' country house, is notably picturesque. Leaving the crown of the hill and turning to the left by an ancient brick "turnpike-house," the far-famed Weald of Surrey opens out, with the great buildings of Charterhouse school in the far distance; a narrow lane with "rose-hung hedges on either hand," winding down until the gates of Limnerslease appear on the right, and the beautiful half-timbered house, one of Mr. Ernest George's most perfect re-creations, reveals itself. Thence across the lawn, through the woods and a rustic gate, and along a shaded road, you reach the mound sloping down to the road which is the village cemetery. Among trees at the top is a red building—all red walls and roof—looking unlike any other in the British Isles. To say that part of its charm is due to the presence of the trees around it in no way detracts from its own beauty. But one learns with surprise that certain



MORTUARY CHAPEL

DESIGNED BY MRS. G. F. WATTS

