

IS THE MODERN WOMAN MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN THE GIRL OF AGES AGO?

TWO or three weeks ago, at the time of the opening of the Paris Salon, the *Matin* sent a well-known art critic to interview Auguste Rodin on the ever-fascinating subject of woman's beauty.

Rodin has a studio in a building formerly used as a convent school for young girls, and the interviewer of the *Matin* found it eminently poetic that the worshipper of beauty should in this manner have succeeded to the home of beauty itself. Surely, says the French interviewer, the purity of soul with which the great artist seeks the true and the lovely is not less than the purity with which the charming young girls of years ago—And so on in a very poetic manner.

M. Rodin began by saying that beauty changes quickly.

"I would not say that woman is like a landscape that the sun's inclination changes ceaselessly; but the comparison is correct. Real youth with our models lasts scarcely more than six months. When the girl becomes a woman it is another sort of beauty, still admirable but nevertheless less pure."

"Do you think that ancient beauty much surpassed that of our own time, and that modern women are far from equaling those who posed to Phidias?"

"By no means."

"Nevertheless, the beauty of the Greek Venus—"

"Artists then had eyes to see it, while to-day they are blind; that is all the difference. Greek women were beautiful, but beauty resided in the

minds of the sculptors who presented them. Women of to-day are their equals, especially Southern Europeans. Modern Italians, for example, belong to the same Mediterranean type as the models of Phidias. The type is chiefly characterized by the equality of width of the shoulders with the lower part of the trunk."

"Did not the Barbarian invasion alter by intermarriage antique beauty?"

"No. It is impossible to suppose that the Barbarian races were less fine and less well balanced than Mediterranean races, but time removed the stains of a mixture of blood and allowed the harmony of the old type to reappear. In the union of the beautiful with the ugly it is always the beautiful which finally triumphs. Nature, by a divine law, constantly tends toward the best—tends, without ceasing, toward perfection."

"By the side of the Mediterranean type exists a northern type, to which belong many Frenchwomen, as well as the women of Germanic and Slav races. In this type the lower trunk is strongly developed and the shoulders are narrower. It is the structure, you observe, in the nymphs of Jean Goujon, in the Venus of the 'Judgment of Paris,' painted by Watteau, and in the 'Diana' of Houdon. In fact, beauty is everywhere. Beauty is character and expression."

The great sculptor went on to say that among other differences the torso of the French and Slavic type inclined forward, while with the Mediterranean

type it rather went backward. He dwelt especially, however, on the fact that beauty is everywhere. This is his great theory and the foundation of all his work; so it is natural to find him emphasizing it. Beauty varies with different races, but exists in a high degree in all.

"When the King of Cambodia was in Paris," said M. Rodin, "I drew with delight the little dancers who accompanied him. Their slender grace was charming. I also made studies of Mme. Hanako, the Japanese actress. She has not an atom of superfluous flesh, and is all muscle. For instance, she can stand on one leg with the other extended as long as she chooses, rooted to the ground like a tree. This is not a European type of beauty, but it was lovely in its extraordinary development."

Thus M. Rodin. It seemed on reading these remarks that it would be interesting to have the opinion of a great American sculptor on this all-important question. Mr. Gutzon Borglum, in his charming Thirty-eighth Street studio, was interested in what Rodin had to say and was prepared to comment thereon.

First of all, Mr. Borglum expressed himself as loath to differ with Rodin in any detail. "The two greatest artists in the world to-day," he said, "are Rodin in sculpture and Frank Brangwyn, the Welshman, in painting." Having thus declared his allegiance, Mr. Borglum was prepared to take exception to at least one expression in the Rodin interview.

"I do not see exactly what Rodin means," he said, "when he talks about the beauty of the woman being less pure than that of the girl. Of course he cannot mean that a mother is any less pure than a young girl, and if he is talking about it from an aesthetic point of view the question arises, 'What is beauty, anyway?'"

"Nobody can pass on that. It is exactly as he says—in the eyes of the beholder. You see a landscape. I ask if you like it. You say 'Not much, it is too dull and gray.' Then I paint it and you rave over it. The beauty was always there, but it needed my interpretation to make you see it. That is what being an artist means, seeing things that the general run of people cannot see, and interpreting for them. So it is out of the question for any of us to say that a woman is more beautiful at one time than at another. It all depends on the interpretation."

"I don't know why Rodin should talk about beauty anyway. To him beauty lies in the natural expression of natural human beings. He is just as simple and natural and direct as an animal."

"Do you think, Mr. Borglum, that people have changed in type from century to century, or only that at different times artists have emphasized different qualities?"

"Personal appearance has not changed the least bit," said Mr. Borglum. "We can be sure of this because we have types of beauty portrayed by great artists for a stretch of

more than two thousand years, specimens uninjured by the elements, untouched by Christians or any other vandals. These are exact records of how people looked, and it is evident as we study them that types have not changed."

"You must, of course, make allowances for the conditions under which these people lived and under which the artist worked. Modern life has changed expression to some extent, but if you study carefully some of the best portraits by Rembrandt and Holbein you will find that the men they picture might be paying out money from a cashier's cage in any bank in New York to-day. I remember especially the portrait in Boston of a Roman Senator, a remarkable bit of work, a record of fact with very little of the artist's mind coloring it. You knew, in looking at him, that that was exactly the man. So little has type changed that that man might be pleading in the Sugar Trust case to-day."

"But if face has not changed, surely figure has?"

"A little," said Mr. Borglum. "Shoulders are slightly narrower, perhaps. That is natural. If you take away from a woman all work except the work of maternity her shoulders will gradually grow slightly narrower than the hips. But in antique statues the shoulders are very slightly narrower, though not quite as much so as to-day. They should be so. With the athletic craze they will begin to get

broad again; at least, they seem to be getting rather broader, but how much is actual development and how much is due to these abominable fashions I can not tell."

"What race do you think have the most beautifully formed women, Mr. Borglum? The Italians? Rodin seems rather inclined to that view."

Mr. Borglum hesitated a moment. "No," he said finally, "I don't think so; but I have not lived enough in Italy to speak very positively about that. I have not studied the types of different nations enough to talk on that phase of the subject. I realize, of course, that every race has its peculiar beauty, and what Rodin says about Madame Hanako is extremely interesting. I myself find great beauty in the women of the North."

"But, Mr. Borglum," it was objected, "think of the grace of the women of the South. Take the Italians, for instance, simple and unstudied in all they do and unfailingly graceful. And the negro women of the West Indies are wonders of statuesque beauty of figure—only they won't pose for artists, having reached that stage of morality when they insist on being clothed."

"That is a stage of immorality," remarked Mr. Borglum, smiling. "I am willing to concede that they are beautiful, though I have not studied them."

"Grace of motion does not go with breakfasting in Newport, lunching in Washington, and sleeping in New York. It is easy to acquire an air of boredom

by this process—a vast number of Americans have done so—but that is a different thing from graceful languor. However, so far as the American woman goes I haven't much to say that is not to her credit."

"The French," it was suggested, "make a few polite criticisms of the American woman, and one among them is that she is apt to look 'dry.'"

"'Dry,'" said Mr. Borglum, "is a good word; but in general I have nothing but praise for the American woman. My only criticism is that she has not yet found herself, but that is true not only of the American woman but of the entire Nation. We are still in a sort of nomadic state."

"Do you agree with M. Rodin, that in the union of the beautiful with the ugly it is the beautiful which finally triumphs?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Borglum, "the natural, which is the beautiful, is the easiest to produce, so nature tends toward that. But here let me say that nature is apt to mix her types. She will make a woman with some of the characteristics of a man and a man who in some respects approximates the feminine type. The purely masculine and the purely feminine are far from being the rule."

"Beauty," says Rodin, "is in character and expression. That is just the point. The first requisite for beauty in a woman is that she should be above all things feminine. If she is that, whatever her type, she cannot fail to be in some way beautiful."