

THE ROYAL ACADEMY HONORS.

Sargent, the American Portrait Painter,
Made an Associate.

Mr. Smalley, in his London letter to the New York Tribune, says:

"The election of Mr. John S. Sargent, the American painter, to be an associate of the Royal Academy, long predicted, was accomplished on Tuesday of this week. Public opinion in the end forced the hand of the academicians, or perhaps it should be said the public opinion of the art world outside the academy, and of one section inside. Popular, in one sense, Mr. Sargent is not. Acceptable to the average academician he certainly is not. But he has finally come to be known as a man who can paint, as a master of technique, and as one of the most brilliant artists of his day, with no equal among the men of his generation. He has never cared for mere story-telling on canvas. What interested him were the secrets of line, of color, of manipulation, and of effect. He is one of that small band of picture-makers who have set themselves, not to evade, but to confront and to overcome the difficulties of painting. He has shown the most extraordinary power, and a courage and confidence in himself which nothing but success could have justified.

When such ideas of art as have long held sway in Burlington House, Mr. Sargent has absolutely nothing in common. Every picture he has sent there has been a challenge, a defiance, perhaps a menace. That is just as true of pictures which gained a large degree of general admiration, like the "Carmencita," and the Mrs. Hamersley at the new Gallery, as of pictures which, to the average British beholder, were mere perplexities or astonishments, like the carnation and lily canvas of some years ago, or the portraits of the three Misses V. of about the same period. The English, while doing justice, some of them to Mr. Sargent's gifts, remark a little reproachfully that he is doubly a foreigner, being American by birth and French by education, with M. Carolus Duran for a master.

But this is far from being the first time that the academy has looked abroad for members. Their most accomplished painter at this moment is a Dutchman, Mr. Alma-Tadema, and one of their popular successes, Professor Herkomer, is a Bavarian. Copley was an American. I am not sure whether between Copley and Mr. Sargent any other American has intervened. Mr. Whistler was never even a candidate. As for Mr. Sargent's education, no doubt he learned to paint in M. Carolus Duran's studio, but of the direct influence of the great French portrait painter there is very little visible trace in the American's work. Perhaps as a rule he models rather less solidly, and he still lacks thirty years or so of M. Duran's experience. If he is not exactly a recluse, like Mr. Burne-Jones, it nevertheless remains to be seen whether he will fit in and get on at the academy. Mr. Burne-Jones resigned his associateship last year, thinking, no doubt, that he had dwelt long enough in that probationary or purgatorial stage. Mr. Sargent may have to wait longer than he likes for full academical honors, though I presume he will not, as did Mr. Burne-Jones, withhold his pictures from the academy exhibitions. The profane are never supposed to know what passes within the precincts of that solemn and rather heavy building which frowns on Piccadilly between Kond street and Sackville street. And all outsiders are profane. A leading daily paper of London, commenting on Mr. Sargent's election, says that two years ago it would have been a graceful act, whereas now it had become inevitable. Nothing in the academy is inevitable except death and the commonplace. Another observes, forgetting for a moment the austere decorum which forbids personalities (except political personalities and sundry others) in its editorial columns, informs the world that, personally, Mr. Sargent is a good fellow. That is no news, either. But taking the two together, and bearing in mind that the Royal Academy is a club, we may look to a happy and not too distant future when Mr. Sargent, A. R. A., will be permitted to drop the first of these letters, and shine forth as Royal Academician full-grown and full-winged. He will illuminate the place when he does. He illuminates the Luxembourg in Paris at this moment where "La Carmencita" hangs, with Mr. Whistler's portrait of his mother opposite—two American pictures in one room of the finest modern gallery of living and recent painters in all Europe. Not an Englishman is there.