

CONTEMPORAR Y ART IN EUROPE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649124060

Contemporary art in Europe by S. G. W. Benjamin

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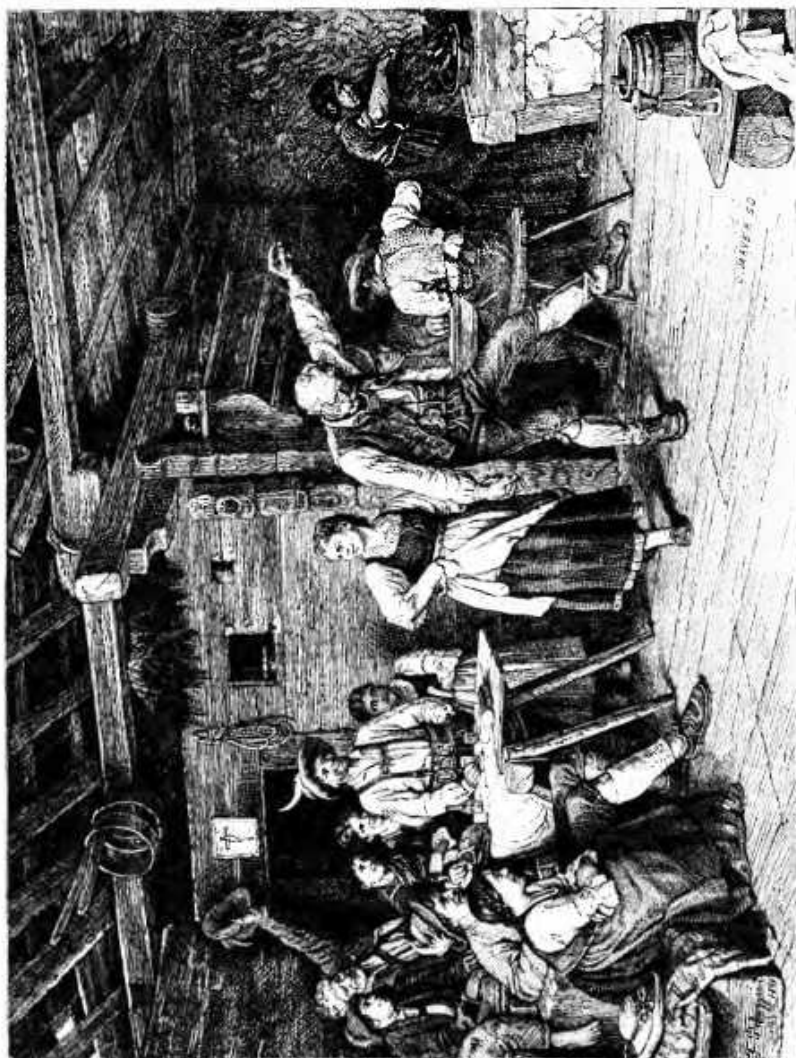
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S. G. W. BENJAMIN

**CONTEMPORAR
Y ART IN EUROPE**



PEASANTS' BALL.—DRESDEN.

CONTEMPORARY ART IN EUROPE

By S. G. W. BENJAMIN

AUTHOR OF "THE TURK AND THE GREEK" "WHAT IS ART" &c.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS
FRANKLIN SQUARE

1877



17215

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TO

THE REV. MARK HOPKINS, D.D., LL.D.,

THE REVERED PRECEPTOR AND GUIDE
OF MY COLLEGE YEARS.

THIS VOLUME IS GRATEFULLY AND RESPECTFULLY

Inscribed.

INTRODUCTION.

THE articles on Contemporary Art in Europe which appeared recently in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* have been received by both the critics and the public with a gratifying degree of favor. This seems, therefore, to be ample justification for republishing these papers in their present form, with the addition of considerable fresh material. The illustrations commend themselves as excellent examples of the fine feeling for the art of engraving already reached by our best engravers.

The subject is one which especially claims the attention of the American public at the present time. At no previous period in our history has so wide and keen an interest been taken in art. We are evidently entering upon a period of art development that shall crystallize the still unformed and unorganized art talent of the community into art schools such as have distinguished the Old World. All the analogy of past history indicates that the energies called forth by a great struggle for national existence find in the following generation a full harvest of intellectual activity. In this way have been born the great schools of art and letters.

We as a nation have just passed through such a crisis, and are now apparently entering upon our era of mental development. It will not come for the seeking alone; nor, on the other hand, will it come if we simply wait for it. Manifest destiny is accomplished by meeting Providence and harmoniously adapting ourselves to its designs.

As one of many means for achieving our art destiny, it behooves us,

therefore, to study the arts of other ages and races, for the better apprehension of the principles which underlie art growth. This is doubtless, to some degree, inseparable from the observation of methods, which is, however, quite a different thing from imitating them: every school of good art employs methods of its own. The art whose methods and ideas are borrowed is at best a very equivocal kind of art. Spontaneity is the soul of art, individuality of expression its end.

The author has endeavored, in the following pages, honestly and earnestly to give his own views upon the present condition of European art, without regard to sex, sect, or race, or the perhaps contrary opinions which may be held by certain distinguished art critics and artists, conscious that criticism swayed by prejudice is no criticism at all. He has heartily tried, with candor and fairness, to be just.

Art has its philosophy of growth; and since it is no more absurd to build the roof of a house before the foundation is laid than to criticise an art without also considering the conditions which underlie its existence, the historic and ethnic principles which have caused the present European schools have necessarily received some attention.