

MEISSONIER

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Meissonier by John W. Mollett

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JOHN W. MOLLETT

MEISSONIER

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MEISSONIER

"The whole world without Art would be one great wilderness."



MEISSONIER

BY

William
JOHN W. MOLLETT, B.A.

OFFICIER DE L'INSTRUCTION PUBLIQUE, FRANCE

AUTHOR OF 'LIFE OF SIR DAVID WILKIE'

ETC



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PREFACE.

IN all matters of disputation I think that the biographer and the critic should be two persons: the witness should not assume the function of the advocate.

There is no greater temptation than hero-worship to the student of the life of a man of genius and industry and worth, and it is impossible to study the history of such a life as the following without becoming filled with sympathy for its subject.

I should, therefore, had I attempted criticisms of my own, have been a partial and worthless judge. The question of M. Meissonier's merit in the great arena in which his temporary, or permanent, victory has been won will not be decided in our day. He represents a method of dealing with art which is, and will always be, detestable to one school of thought, and admirable to its opposite. He is essentially, if I may use the expression, a *party painter*, and, as the permanent victory of his school would represent the overthrow of the whole system of theories and principles which the lovers of the "IDEAL" call the Renaissance of Art, so the history of his success, in the judgment of the academic writers of his own country, offers only a new application of Voltaire's celebrated *mot*, "Demandez au crapaud ce que c'est que la beauté," &c.

For the conflict which will rage over his memory, as it

does to this day over that of many an ancient master, I contribute a few tumbrils of ammunition to either side, and have found the impartial setting down in order of a selection of conflicting criticisms the most convenient form of doing so. The work, as happily the life, is far from complete. Unlike the work of the Master himself, the details are only indicated, but they refer the student who cares to go deeper into the subject, to sources which will lead him further; and, I hope, supply the less careful reader with a general idea of the significance, for good or for evil as he may have been led to regard it, of Meissonier's mission in art.

J. W. M.

BLACKHEATH,
October, 1881.



LE DON CHUIN.

From the "Contes Mérois."