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IRON LION HEAD

CHINESE. T'ANG DYNASTY

PURCHASED FROM THE EDSEL B. FORD FUND

A CHINESE IRON LION HEAD

Originally a Buddhistic immigrant during the early centuries of the Christian era, the symbolic lion has become thoroughly naturalized in China. As most commonly seen, they occur in pairs, usually made of stone, or sometimes of bronze, sitting as guardians before the outer gates of temples, of palaces, or even of private homes. The gates of palaces and temples invariably face toward the south, and the male lion, who holds an embroidered ball under his foot, sits to the east of the doorway, that is, on the left. The female, who is attended by her young and who usually suckles a cub through the holes which long tradition has it are in her claws for the purpose, sits on the west on the right side. Pairs of lions are made of porcelain in various sizes, are carved on the tops of seals, are common motives in embroidery, so that the lion often appears as a familiar ornament quite without reference to his Buddhistic antecedents. However, he also has his place within the temple, where the Bodhisattva Manjusri, who is worshipped in China as a god of wisdom under the name Wen-shu P'u-sa, usually rides or sits upon his back.

The lion is not native to China, and although a few have been imported at one time or another as gifts or tribute for the emperor, it seems unlikely that actual beasts have greatly influenced the traditional representation of the lion in art. So conventional are most of these representations, with curly manes and tripartite tails, that their leonine character is not always apparent, and many foreigners in China refer to them as "Dogs of Fo." During the T'ang dynasty, however, freedom and inventiveness were particularly noticeable in the realm of animal sculpture. The splendid pottery horses excavated from T'ang tombs reveal the quality of T'ang plastic creation. There are a few miniature stone lions in the Metropolitan Museum, the Pennsylvania Museum and the Louvre which are naturalistic and secular in their handling; and even in the more circumscribed field of Buddhistic lion modelling individuality found expression.

The T'ang period was not only one of exceptional creativeness in the arts, but also one of definite and far-reaching ascendancy for Buddhism. The empire was at peace and the frontiers of both the country and the imagination had been enlarged. Grandeur, vigorous power, natural dignity, a kind of monumental feeling in even small figures, a sense of poise and assurance are characteristic of T'ang art, and are exemplified in the large iron head purchased in China this summer from the Edsel B. Ford Fund for the permanent collection of the Institute.

This colossal head measures 28¼ inches in height, and while it was certainly part of a complete figure it is not a fragment in the ordinary sense, for it is evident that it was cast independently and then placed upon the shoulders of the separate body. The curls of the mane are complete all around, and the bottom edge is a cast

edge and not a broken one. Further, the neck is finished at the bottom in front with a raised border resembling a collar of loosely coiled rope, which perfectly completes the piece as an independent unit of a huge figure. Technically the head is very well cast. It is apparent from the seams that the exterior mould consisted of at least seventeen parts, and the roof of the mouth, which is at present tongueless, extends well back into the head, and the upper jaw was made with a core so that it is hollow. The average thickness of the casting is about three-eights of an inch, although it is thinner in some places and there are two or three small holes. In the upper part of the head four holes, possibly where the core was supported, are patched with bronze. The ridges of the seams where parts of the mould were joined are, as is typical in Chinese iron sculpture, not dressed down, but they are exceptionally fine and indicate that the mould was well made and well fitted. There is no doubt that the lion was originally painted, probably over a thin layer of gesso. The details of the casting are still crisp in spite of the oxidation of the surface of the iron, which has taken the color of one of those leaves of a white oak tree that is seen in the spring still clinging to the branch that gave it life the previous summer and to which it has remained faithful through the winter. It is a brown, ranging from a light orange-tan on the cheeks to a very dark coffee color, and the oxidation is that which seems to be typical of T'ang iron.

In design and modelling the head is an extraordinary combination of naturalistic force and artistic stylization. There is probably no detail of the entire head which might truthfully be said to have been copied from life, and yet the total effect is terrifically life-like, embodying all the fierceness, courage, power and majesty which we are wont to attribute to the king of beasts. The brow is high, and actually overhangs the nose, forming a deep shelter for the large protruding eyes. The eyebrows are drawn up from the eyes and the muscular convolutions between them suggest a frown of disapproval and accentuate the piercing stare of the eyes themselves. The eyelids are drawn high and taut. The ears lie flat back on the head. The mouth is open wide and is squarely bordered inside with a set of very competent teeth. The upper jaw is given a very massive appearance by the curling back of the lips on each side of the nose. The tip of the nose itself is formed with the nostrils into a pattern resembling the fleur-de-lis, which is very common in old Chinese carved lacquers. The chin is square and a small spiral of beard adorns each side of it. Especially spectacular are the curls of the mane. Starting behind the ears the hair descends in symmetrical ridges to the back of the neck, where the first large spiral curls are formed, three on the right side and two on the left. On each side of the face three other spirals spring from the cheek and jaw. While there are only eleven of these spiral arrangements altogether, they are modelled with such full sweeping curves and composed with

such regular irregularity that they give the effect of a wild tumbled mass of untamed mane. The sculptor who modelled our head was a thorough artist, capable of creating an individual stylization of his subject, and he had a lion heart.

The fact that there are only five curls in the mane on the left side while there are six on the right coupled with the fact that the parting of the hair in the back is not in the center but well over to the left indicates that the head when in position on the body was turned well to the left. But on the other hand the eyes turn sharply toward the right, so that they must have looked straight ahead in the direction in which the body was disposed. Now this turning of the eyes is quite extraordinary, for in all the other lions examined to check this point the eyes definitely followed the nose. It seems reasonable, therefore, to doubt that this head was one of a pair. The heads of the lions in pairs are often turned, but as the eyes follow the nose in such ones the gaze is directed toward the road approaching the gate which they or their prototypes guard. In our lion, however, the head turning is balanced by the contrary eye direction so that the general effect is quite straightforward, as one would expect of a colossal lion if it stood alone.

As it happens, there is in existence one example of a huge iron lion standing alone and originally made so, in front of K'ai-yuan Ssu in Tsanghsien, somewhat over a hundred miles south of Peiping on the old Grand Canal in the eastern part of Hopei Province. This is a standing figure reported to be 17 feet high and 16 feet long, and it carries on its back a large bowl in which incense was burned. The figure appears in the published photograph[1] to be still complete, although its belly is now supported by a structure of bricks. According to the local history, which may be reliable in this particular if not in the story as to the reason for its making, this Tsanghsien lion was made in the Posterior Chou dynasty, 951-959 C. E., shortly after the end of the T'ang dynasty. In the style of modelling the two iron lions are quite dissimilar. This is not to be wondered at since they were made at some distance from each other in both miles and years. While it was impossible even in Peiping to get exact information as to the site from which the Detroit lion was excavated, it was reported to come from southern Shansi and there seems no reason to doubt that it did. Then, it can be assigned with considerable assurance to the most vital period of T'ang artistic creation, which was undoubtedly the eighth century. But while the two may not be directly related in style and period, the existence in Tsanghsien of the complete and documented lion as a single monument gives us reason to believe that ours may have been similar in function, and helps us to imagine the entire figure of which we have so fine a part.

BENJAMIN MARCH.

[1]See *I-lin Hsün-k'an*, Peiping, No. 8, 11 March, 1928.

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A NOTE ON BRONZE MIRRORS

One of the most widely distributed objects of Mohammedan metal work is the small round mirror, cast in bronze. These mirrors are always without a handle, are decorated in relief, and in form derive from the Chinese prototype. Mesopotamia and the neighboring west Persian province are named as the locality in which the mirrors originated. This designation finds its authorization in a very important historical statement of the famous Arabian geographer, Ibn Fakih, who in the beginning of the eleventh century reports that "the artisans of the city of Hamadan are very skilled in the execution of mirrors, of spoons, incense burners and gilded kettledrums." (*Biblioteca Geographorum Arabicarum,* Vol. V, p. 253, edited by de Goeje). Therefore, while we are quite correct in placing the origin of the work in this locality, the dating of all of the mirrors as twelfth and thirteenth century products is not always accurate. Many of the mirrors are indeed of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but according to the above-mentioned historical statement, it is possible that some of them are of an earlier period, and since they have been found in all Asiatic Mohammedan countries (except India), we must accept

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

the fact that they were made not only in Mesopotamia and west Persia, but also in Turkestan, Caucasia and Anatolia.

Three such mirrors of the thirteenth century, which are not without interest, are in the Mohammedan collection of the Institute. The mirror reproduced in Fig. 1 is the largest, measuring 5½ inches in diameter. Around the button in the center are two friezes, decorated in relief, the first with a design of running animals surrounded by an arabesque scroll, and the second with a Kufic inscription of a general beneficent content. A mirror, similar in every detail, is in the Louvre (G. Migeon, *Musée du Louvre, L'Orient Musulman,* p. 15, No. 44, Pl. 16). Of the second mirror (Fig. 2) there are many known examples. The decoration of this object consists of two symmetrically arranged sphinxes with female heads, encircled by a border of Kufic character. This piece was found in the Anatolian city of Tokat and is probably of Mesopotamian origin. Similar mirrors are to be seen in every Mohammedan collection in European and American museums, and as an example we might mention that in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

FIG. 3

(Dimand, *Handbook of Mohammedan Decorative Arts,* Fig. 49). The third mirror in the group is without doubt of Anatolian origin. It has an unusual decoration, a siren with two confronted bodies. This motif in its stylistic form is Seljukian, and we find single, rather than double, sirens on many architectural monuments, as well as on many other art objects of the Seljuk period (F. Sarre, *Seldschukische Kleinkunst,* p. 15, Figs. 18 and 19).

MEHMET AGA OGLU.

A BRONZE BY DESPIAU

An important addition to the collection of contemporary art has been received by the Art Institute as the gift of Mrs. Lillian Henkel Haass and Miss Constance Haass. It is a bronze by Despiau, representing a standing female figure leaning against a rock. The figure is 18½ inches high and is signed on the back, C. Despiau, 1912.

The museum has thus acquired a fine example of a distinguished living sculptor and member of the important generation in France which followed Rodin. Despiau was born in 1874, thirty-seven years after Rodin. From 1907 until the outbreak of the war, he assisted Rodin, executing a number of the latter's works in marble. But although Despiau was thus brought into close touch with Rodin and had a profound respect for him, this small figure done during the years of their relationship shows none of the vehement qualities of the older sculptor. Rodin burst the bounds of nineteenth century sculpture with his tempestuous, dramatic and passionate style. The generation which came after him returned to an ideal of calm and repose, solidity and monumental dignity. The museum already has a representative work of this tendency in Maillol's *Flora* and in the same gallery is now added this charming *Nude.*

Despiau was a fully developed artist before he met Rodin. He was born at Mont-de-Marsian in Landes, in the southwest corner of France, the son and grandson of master plasterers. At seventeen he went to Paris to study; in 1898 he exhibited for the first time. By 1907, when Rodin noticed his work and invited him to his studio, Despiau had already formed his own lucid, quiet and tender style, so that it is not surprising to find no trace of Rodin's drama in this little *Nude.*

Full length figures are rather rare in Despiau's work. He is most widely known for his heads and, among contemporary sculptors, has been chief in rescuing the art of portraiture from the state of empty facility to which it had been reduced. His heads are remarkable—very simply treated, without any decorative details, yet done with such a sensitive touch and such penetrating apprehension as to make them distinguished both for their plastic beauty and their subtle inner glow of life.

These qualities Despiau carries over into his figures. He was sufficiently a successor to Rodin to appreciate the

value of broken surfaces. Rodin first broke up the mechanically polished surfaces which the perfection of nineteenth century technical processes had imposed upon sculpture. Despiau in this figure left the surfaces of the clay unsmoothed, not in a state of indecision, but so that his actual touch and purpose is revealed by each morsel of the clay. The result, cast into bronze, is that no particle of the surface is inert and there is a charming play of light and shade over all the minute modulations of surface.

In spite of this, the appearance of the figure does not let one think of it as sketchily or hastily done. There is a gravity and tenderness in the modelling which means long, thoughtful study. Despiau is, in fact, a very slow and self-critical worker, taking months and sometimes years to complete a piece. He has the unusual faculty of being able to form an idea and hold it fresh for a long period of time while, with endless care, he perfects the form which gives it life.

The freshness and life in his works is one of their most remarkable features.

NUDE
CHARLES DESPIAU
FRENCH, 1874-
GIFT OF MRS. LILLIAN HENKEL HAASS AND MISS CONSTANCE HAASS

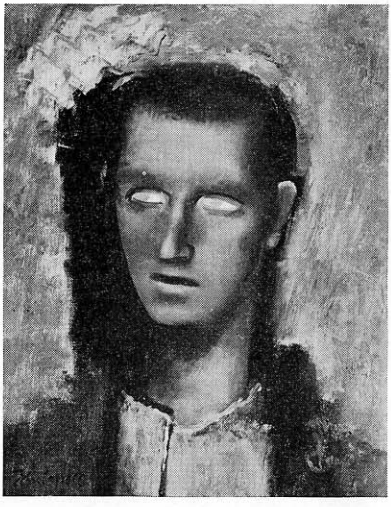
It gives to his portraits a psychological perfection, as if the living nature of the sitter shone through the clay. In such work as this, where his theme is the harmony of the human figure, there is more than a graceful arrangement of forms. There is an inner life which gives the simple figure leaning against a rock a serene and charming quality which grows more appealing the longer one looks at it.

Naturalness, simplicity of effect, avoidance of ornamental conventions, are characteristic of Despiau's work. Yet it is significant that although this figure is small, it seems large, for his style is a combination of sensitiveness to nature and a classic dignity and calm.

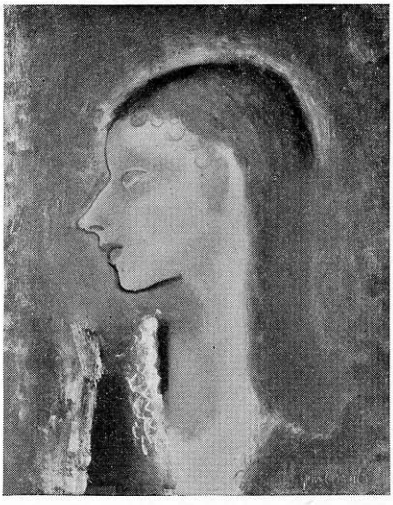
E. P. Richardson.

TWO PAINTINGS BY JOHN CARROLL

At a meeting of the Friends of Modern Art on October 8, a portrait called *Girl's Head* by John Carroll was purchased for presentation to the Art Institute. The canvas has been on loan in the first American gallery, so that its merit is already well known. It represents a girl's head in profile, treated with the power to catch subtleties of character which marks Carroll's work and makes him one of the most penetrating, though not the most literal, of American painters today. The canvas is a fine example of the decorative beauty of his painting, low-keyed, delicate, restrained, yet forceful. It gives representation in the Art Institute to one of the best-known of contemporary American artists and a man now living and working in Detroit, with a fine and characteristic picture. The Art Institute is fortunate to have so discriminating a gift from this group of friends.



The Art Institute has also received as a permanent loan from Mr. Robert H. Tannahill a portrait, *The Sailor,* also by John Carroll. This also is a distinguished example of the artist, a very striking and searching study of a young man's head, handsome in color and very powerful as an analysis of character. It will form an excellent companion piece to the *Girl's Head* given by the Friends of Modern Art. Both are pictures painted since the artist came to Detroit and both show him at his best.



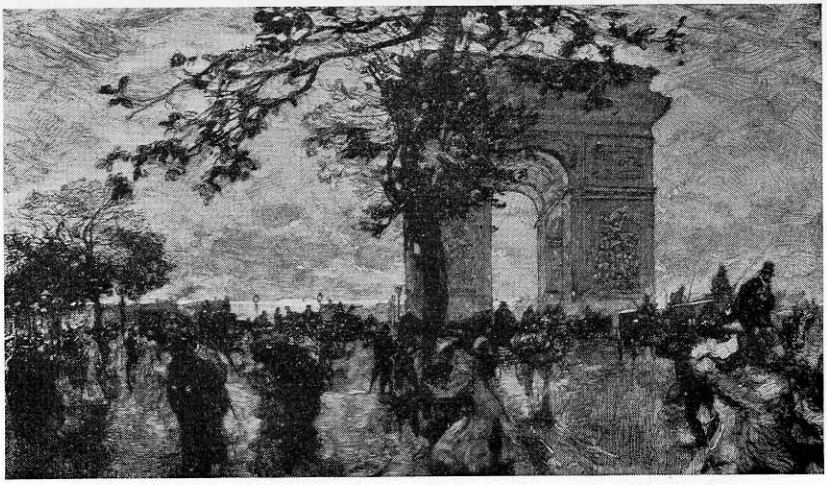
E. P. Richardson.

LITHOGRAPH
GAVARNI
FRENCH, 1801-1869
GIFT OF MR. ANDREW WINEMAN

SOME FRENCH ETCHINGS AND LITHOGRAPHS

The generous gift of Mr. Andrew Wineman has recently added to the Print Department the etched portrait of Thomas Carlyle by Alphonse Legros, three wood engravings by Auguste Lepère, and a lithograph by Gavarni. Mr. Wineman's gift gives the first Gavarni to be included in the collection while Lepere was hitherto represented by but one wood engraving—a medium in which he was an undisputed master.

Gavarni, the eldest of this group of nineteenth century artists, stands with Daumier as one of the greatest lithographers. Born at Paris in 1801, Gavarni, whose real name was Guillaume Sulpice Chevallier, began his career at the age of ten in the office of an architect. Later he worked with a maker of mathematical instruments, and for two years was associated with a surveyor working in the Pyrenees. These early scientific studies doubtless gave Gavarni his precise, well ordered, and methodical mind. He early became interested in lithography and, practically self taught, he began first as an illustrator for the *Journal des Dames et des Modes*. His charming studies of costume won great success, but fame came



WOOD ENGRAVING, RETOUR DE BOIS
AUGUSTE LEPERE
FRENCH, 1849-1918

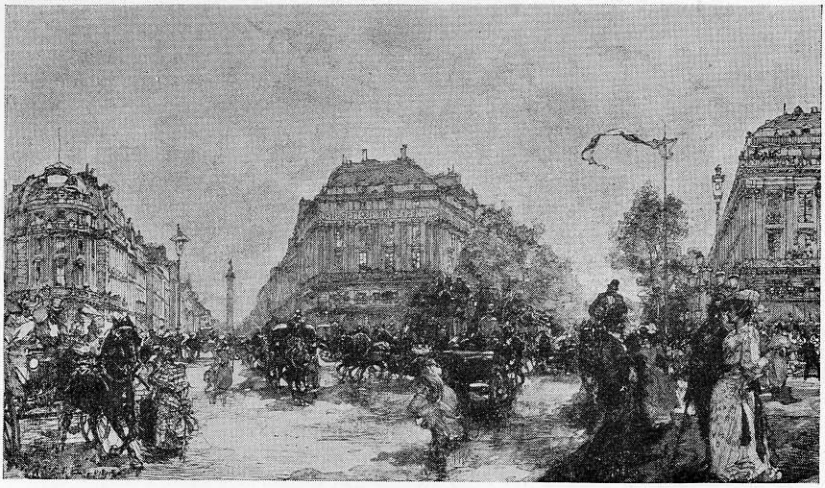
to him as to Daumier, when in the pages of *Caricature and Charivari,* he published the series called the *Trickeries of Women, Matière de Sentiments,* and the *Boite aux Lettres.* While Daumier in these same pages lashed his political enemies or held up to contempt the weaknesses of the bourgeoisie with a bitter, incisive fury, Gavarni portrayed the whole human comedy with a light, subtle touch. He was sardonic, but never bitter in his humor, and he himself tells us that it was not the laugh he loved, but the smile. His draughtsmanship grew steadily in power, his capacity for observation was phenomenal, and working often under the strain of personal anxieties, he made during his life over a thousand lithographs. Many of these appeared in magazines but five proofs are by no means common. He carefully wrote out legends for each drawing and these telling explanations added greatly to their popularity.

The Gavarni acquired by the Institute is first of all of excellent quality, and is a typical study of the contrasting types seen on the streets of Paris. The elegant soldier is thus addressed by the shabby vagrant—"To have a moustache and no regiment! It's all right as long as the old ones can have a drink, eh Colonel?" Gavarni died in 1869, and since his death his fame as a social historian and a great lithographer has steadily grown.

The etched portrait of Thomas Carlyle is a splendid example of the skill of Legros in the field of portraiture. This French artist, born at Dijon in 1837, began his career as a house painter and at the age of fourteen years had shown such promise that he was engaged to help in the painting of a fresco in one of the chapels of the cathedral at Lyons. His first etching was done about 1855, illustrations for Baudelaire's Tales from Poe being among his earliest etchings. His interiors of sombre Spanish churches, and incidents from the lives of the saints show the deep response of Legros to religious themes.

It was Whistler who induced Legros to take up his residence in England, where he trained and inspired a generation of English etchers.

In portraiture, Legros revived something of the grand manner of Van



WOOD ENGRAVING, PLACE DE L'OPERA
AUGUSTE LEPERE
FRENCH, 1849-1918

Dyck. His penetration was remarkable and he records character for the most part with telling simplicity.

The landscape etchings of Legros were numerous and he extolled nature as the great and eternal model. In all of his studies of nature there is the same intensity of feeling, the grave dignity, the quiet restraint. His pity of the oppressed made him depict again and again the life of the poor with the compassionate understanding of a Millet.

The portrait of Carlyle shows not the dour philosopher but a grave, thoughtful scholar gazing out at the spectacle of life without bitterness or contempt. There were but few impressions taken from this plate, which is worked rather more elaborately than was usual with Legros.

The three wood engravings by Lepère, *Retour de Bois, Place de l'Opera,* and *Pont St. Michel,* have all the richness and the delicacy which mark the work of this great engraver on wood.

It was he who gave powerful stimulation to an ancient craft and furthered the making of beautiful books in which text and illustration harmonized. Paris, with its grandeur and its squalor, lives in his beautiful engravings. He delighted in her ancient buildings, her crowds full of movement, and he gave old scenes a new life. He knew the full range of which his craft was capable, and Braquemond, a fellow artist, praised him as "a unique artist of his kind! An engraver dependent on no one for his drawings, a draughtsman who engraves his own work on wood."

ISABEL WEADOCK.

EXHIBITIONS

November 1-14. Fine Prints from Detroit Collections.
November 1-15. Sculpture of Carl Milles.
November 15-29. Dutch Genre and Landscape Painting.

CALENDAR OF LECTURES

LECTURES

Tuesday evenings at 8:30

November 3. "The Art and Customs of the Mayas," by Josephine Walther, Associate Curator of American Art.

November 10. "Animals in Chinese Art," by Benjamin March, Curator of Asiatic Art.

November 17. "Gothic Tapestries," by Adèle Coulin Weibel, Curator of Textiles.

November 24. "Puppet Art of Today," by Paul McPharlin.

December 1. Mythological Creatures in Chinese Art, by Benjamin March, Curator of Asiatic Art.

Sunday afternoons at 3:30

Concerts by the Chamber Music Society of Detroit, followed by lectures by members of the staff.

November 1. "Fine Prints Owned in Detroit," by Isabel Weadock, Curator of Prints.

November 8. "Assyrian Sculpture," by E. P. Richardson, Educational Secretary.

November 15. "The Sculpture of Carl Milles," by Clyde H. Burroughs, Curator of American Art.

November 22. "The Dutch: Painters of Familiar Things," by E. P. Richardson, Educational Secretary.

November 29. "Tapestries in the Art Institute," by Marion Leland, Museum Instructor.

Saturday afternoons at 4:00

"Art and Culture of the Middle Ages," by Adèle Coulin Weibel, Curator of Textiles.

November 7. The Sassanian Empire.

November 14. Mohammed and His Followers.

November 21. The Great Migrations.

November 28. Scandinavia and the British Isles.

GALLERY TALKS

Tuesday afternoons at 2:30 and Friday evenings at 7:30

November 3 and 6. Seventeenth Century Dutch Galleries.

November 10 and 13. Eighteenth Century French and English Galleries.

November 17 and 20. Nineteenth Century Gallery.

November 24 and 27. The American Rooms.

December 1 and 4. American Painting.

Gallery talks on special exhibits, Thursdays at 2:30 p. m.

November 19. The Dutch Exhibit.

November 26. Thanksgiving, gallery talk omitted.

MOTION PICTURES FOR CHILDREN

Yale Historical Series, Saturday mornings at 10:30

November 7. Columbus.

November 14. Jamestown.

November 21. The Pilgrims.

FRIDAY EVENING MUSICALES

Beginning November 6, at 8:30

November 6. The American Little Symphony, Valbert Coffey conducting.

November 13. Organ lecture and music, Francis York and Mildred Green.

November 20. Trio, Emily Gillmore Stevens, pianist; Miss Monahan, violinist; Helen Ward, cellist.

November 27. Concert under the auspices of the Tuesday Musicale.