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James Aumonier And His Work. By Mrs. Arthur Bell (N. D'Anvers).

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James Aumonier

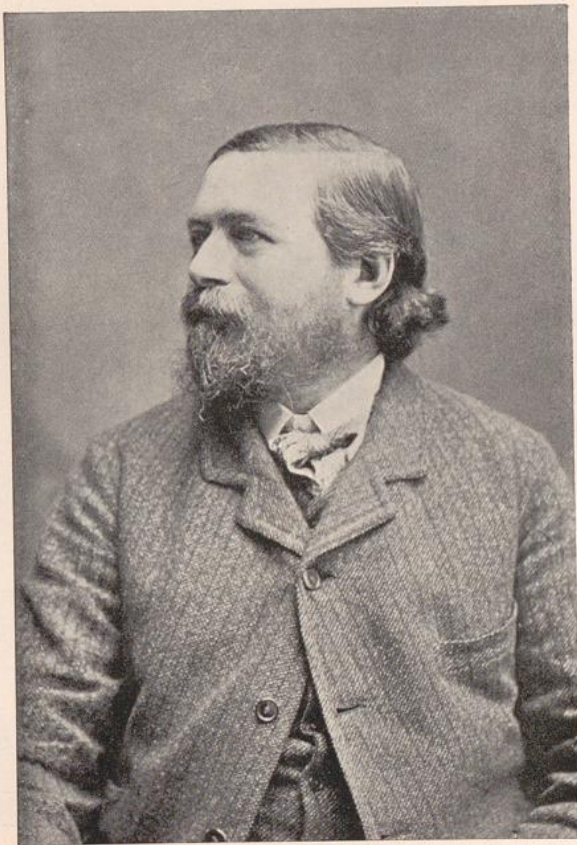
JAMES AUMONIER AND HIS WORK. BY MRS. ARTHUR BELL (N. D'ANVERS).

JAMES AUMONIER, whose poetic and faithful landscape work has only of late years been appreciated at its true value, is of English parentage, though his name is French. He was born in London, and spent his childhood at Highgate and High Barnet. At the early age of fourteen he began to earn his own living in a business house, where the work he had to do was thoroughly distasteful to him. He devoted every spare moment to learning to draw, attending evening classes at the Birkbeck Institution, then known as the Mechanics' Institute, where the conditions of work were very different from what they are now, when everything is made so much easier for the student. The Art Class was held in the old lecture room. There was but one gas jet over the master's desk, and though candlesticks and snuffers were supplied gratis, each student had to bring his own candle. By the uncertain flickering light of some dozen candles placed at wide intervals, the young student worked steadily on; and having learnt all he could in the Institute he managed to obtain admission to the Art School at South Kensington, where he attended the evening classes for some years. He now, to quote his own account of the matter, "found that he could draw a bit," and to his delight, the knowledge he had so painfully acquired enabled him to get a berth in a London house as a designer for printed calicoes. "This," he adds, "was the beginning of my art-work;" and having at last got some congenial employment, he seized every chance "he could get or make of going out of doors and painting landscapes from nature." His earliest independent work was a series of drawings of the Cloisters of Westminster Abbey, and of studies in Kensington Gardens, done when the fashionable London world was still asleep, between six and eight o'clock in the morning, before the regular work at the calico factory began. Later

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the energetic young student was able to take short railway journeys to such outlying districts as Croydon and Epping Forest, where he spent many happy hours of quiet work, with no teacher or inspirer but Nature herself, from whom, however, he won secrets that she reveals to none but her true worshippers.

In a letter received from Mr. Aumonier in reply to an enquiry as to his methods he says, "the strength of my water-colour at the beginning of my art career consisted of a lump of gamboge, a cake of Prussian blue, and one of crimson lake. I may," he adds, "have had a few odd bits of cakes as well, but those were my strength and my pride. I used to go into the garden when a mere child, and try to copy flowers. I had very great delight in producing what my father called a 'good fat green' by mixing the gamboge and Prussian blue together—that was my only green.



JAMES AUMONIER

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

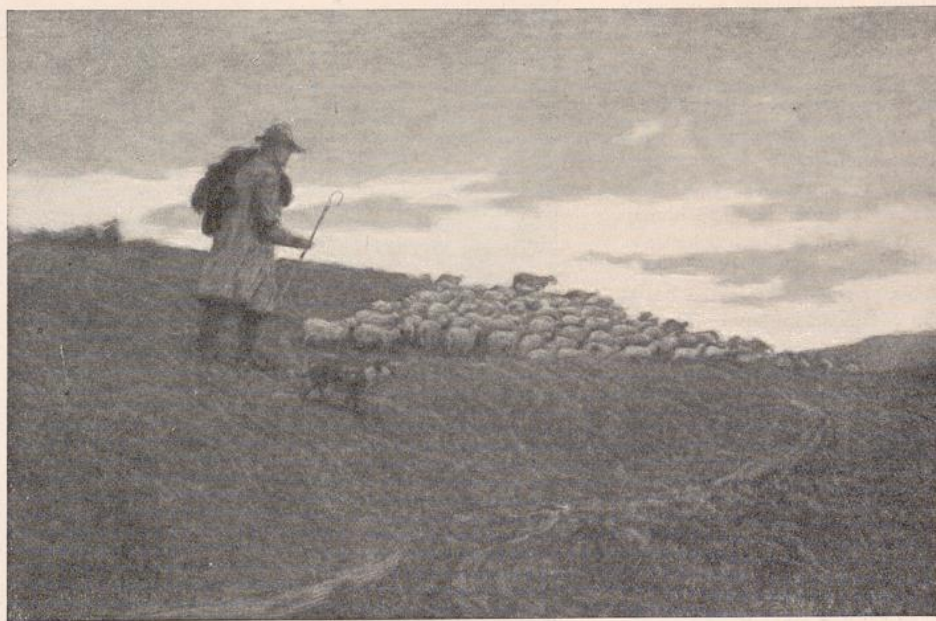
James Aumonier

As to the oil colours, to make my first trial at a picture, I went over to a neighbour, a coach painter, and begged a bit of white lead, black, blue, red, and chrome, and upon a bit of an old shelf that had been pulled down in making some alterations in the house I produced a picture of Barking Church after an engraving. For this 'work of art' I used a penny camel's-hair brush."

Mr. Aumonier, who, like most true artists, is extremely diffident as to his own powers, says, *apropos* of his decorative work, that it is "not worth noticing." On this point his own opinion, except as an index of character, is not worth quoting, for many of his designs are extremely beautiful. They have all been done for one firm, and consist of groups of flowers for reproduction in the old-fashioned glazed chintz. "Though of no value as art-work," says Mr. Aumonier, "making these designs gave me a certain amount of skill in arranging forms over a surface, which has no doubt helped me in my landscape work. Each tint in the designs which were for block printing had to be drawn with a definite edge, and not softened one into the other, as in many of the modern chintzes and cretonnes, which are printed from engraved copper rollers." Necessarily, therefore, the work had to be done

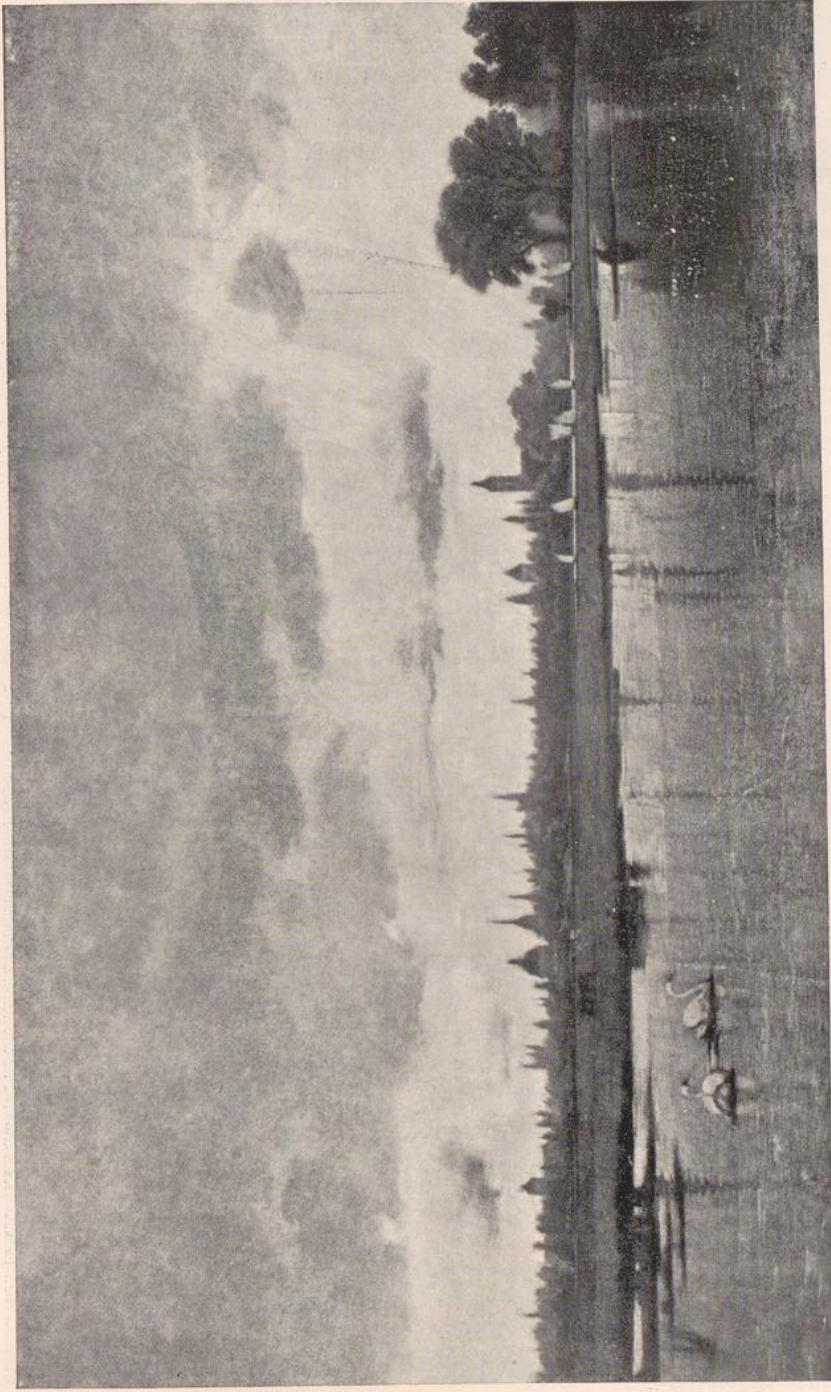
according to very rigid rules, each tint being exactly defined.

It must, indeed, have been a relief to an artist who worked all day at this kind of mechanical toil to get away into the open air, where one line melts imperceptibly into another, and there is nothing hard or monotonous. As early as 1871 Mr. Aumonier sent his first picture to the Royal Academy, where, to his delight and surprise, it was accepted and hung. It attracted, however, as was but natural, little notice, for thirty years ago such quiet unobtrusive work as that of the young exhibitor had far less chance than it would have now of being picked out, even by the most discerning critic. The same year brought the young Aumonier, for the first time, in contact with Mr. W. M. Wyllie and with Mr. Lionel Smythe, of whose kindness and encouragement he speaks in the most grateful terms. Mr. Wyllie, especially, gave him much useful advice, and, to quote again the artist's own words, "He was great with a bit of chalk and a bit of charcoal. He would say 'May I?' and then begin and chalk my picture all over. I was always grateful," adds Mr. Aumonier, "and always found my pictures improved by following his advice; and though by degrees my art-feeling has changed and I have got into a broader



"EVENING ON THE SOUTHDOWNS"

FROM A MEZZOTINT BY JAMES AUMONIER



"OXFORD." FROM AN UNFINISHED
MEZZOTINT. BY J. AUMONIER.

James Aumonier

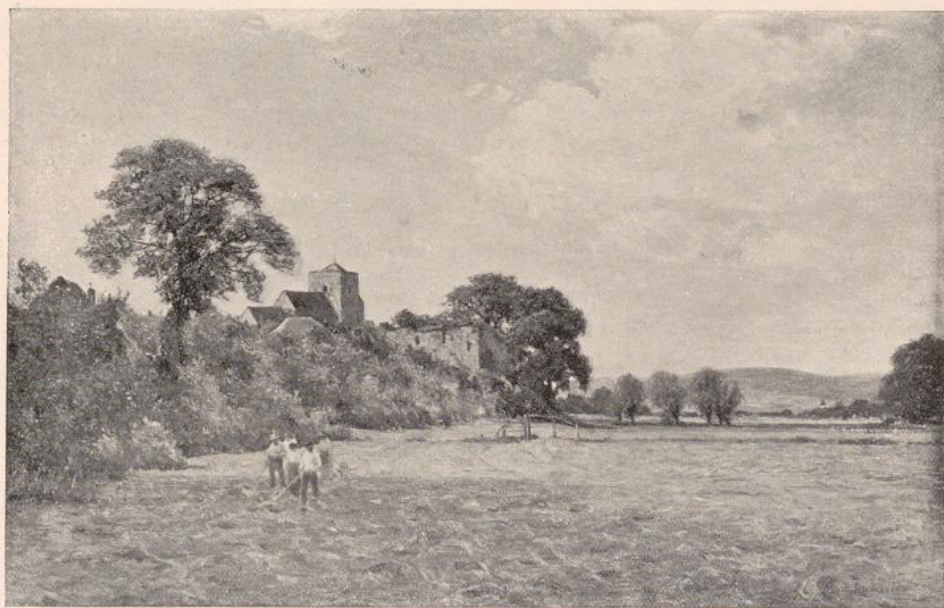
style of work, I have always felt grateful for the kindly help I received from Mr. Wyllie."

In 1873, when Mr. Aumonier was still working as a designer for calicos, his beautiful landscape, *An English Cottage Home*, was hung on the line at the Academy, and purchased by Sir Newton Mappin for his collection at Sheffield. The position of the persevering and hard-working student was now, to a great extent, made, though it took many years for his peculiar style of painting to be fairly appreciated by the general public. In France the faithful, fresh and original treatment of landscape would probably at once have met with full recognition, but in England such delicate work is apt to escape notice; why, it is difficult to explain, unless it be the result of the unfortunate eagerness of critics to group all art workers in schools, and to leave out those whose very genius sets them apart from all other interpreters of Nature. It was well said by the author of an able monograph on the art of England, written in 1890: "Like all the really great artists in the world, Mr. Aumonier retires into the background and causes his pictures to talk for him. We do not say 'This is a landscape according to Aumonier' as we do say 'This is a landscape according to Vicat Cole or Leader.' We simply consider the scene, its beauty or interest,

and forget in the pleasure we gain from its contemplation the method by which it has been produced; and those of us who have painted sufficiently from Nature, or who have studied Nature sufficiently without painting to know the aspect she assumes in this English land, must recognise the sincerity and adequacy of this art. Even Cox himself does not give us a fresher, more thoroughly English rendering of English scenery, nor is De Wint more unpretending and more sincere."

Mr. Aumonier has never studied abroad, and he never left England until 1891, when he spent part of the year in Italy, chiefly in Venice and in the mountains of Venetia. "I have never," he says, "copied a picture for study. I have never made photographs instead of sketches, or worked from them. I don't believe in it. I care very little for clever technique—the individual art feeling in work is the quality that appeals most to me."

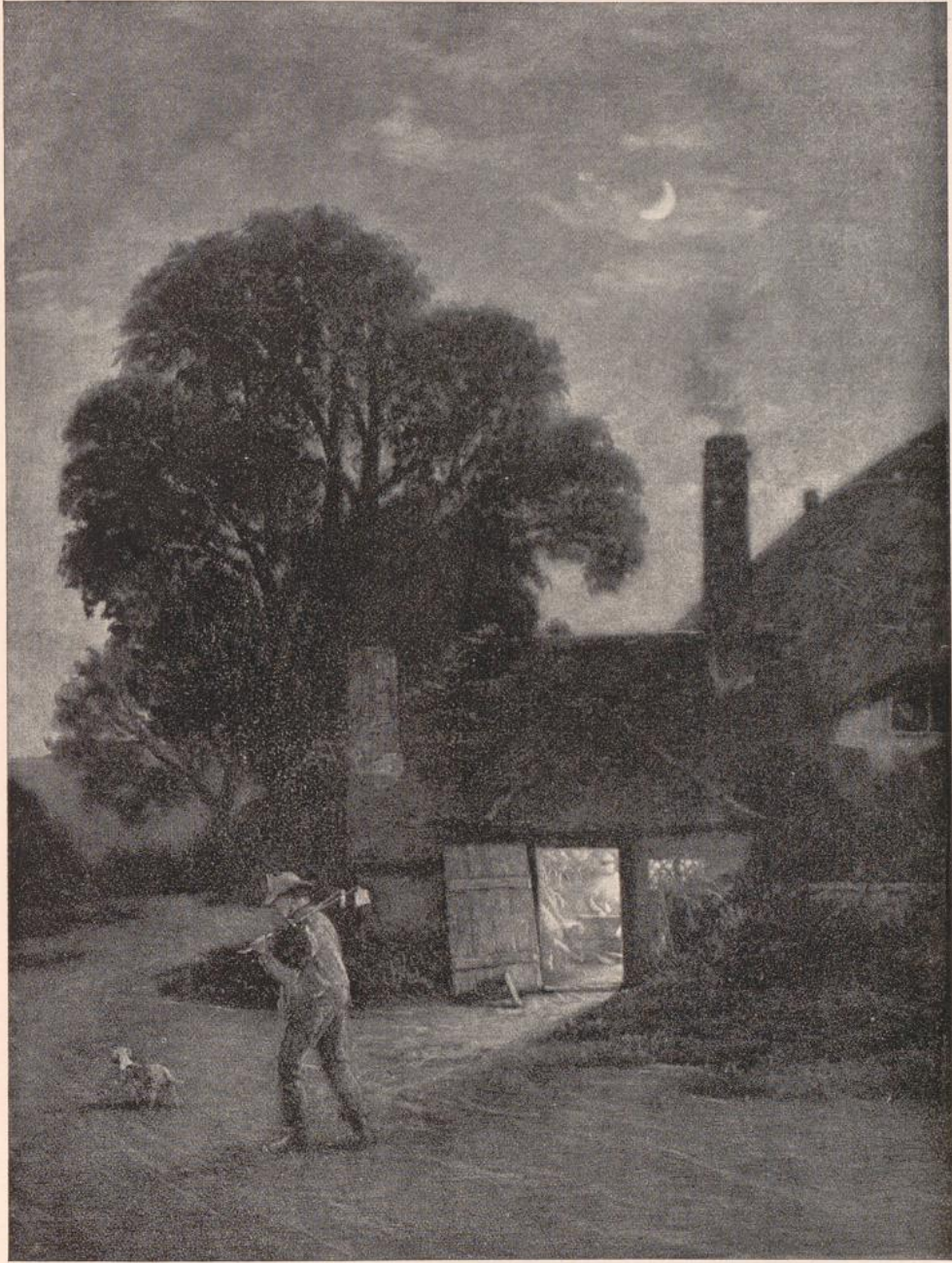
It is, indeed, just this "individual art feeling" in James Aumonier's own work which appeals so very forcibly to all who are able to appreciate his true observation and close interpretation of the quiet homely English scenes he especially delights to render. Take, for instance, his *When the Tide is out*, and the *Silver Lining of the Cloud*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1895, the *Old Sussex*.



"A SUSSEX HAYFIELD"

(By permission of Robert Dalby, Esq.)

FROM A PAINTING BY JAMES AUMONIER



"THE VILLAGE SMITHY." FROM
A MEZZOTINT BY J. AUMONIER.

James Aumonier

Farmstead, shown at the Royal Institute in 1895; the *Old Chalk Pit*, exhibited at the same gallery in 1896; and *In the Fen Country*, at the Academy of 1898, and it will be recognised readily that few modern landscapists have excelled the delicate realism of these works, or their truth, alike in feeling, in colour, and in atmospheric effect. James Aumonier's landscapes are seen to the best advantage not so much in mixed collections, where their quiet harmony of tone is too often nullified by the works in proximity to them, as in private houses, especially when their owners have the good taste to hang them in fitting surroundings. Then they can, unhindered, speak for Nature herself to those cut off from direct communion with her, for so skilful an interpreter is their author that no trace of the translator's own personality destroys the unity and harmony of their effect.

Mr. Aumonier paints with equal skill in oil or in water-colour, and he has also achieved considerable success in pastel. He was elected in 1876 an Associate of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colours; he was also one of the original members of the Institute of Painters in Oil-Colours, and was a member of the British Society of Pastellists for the three years of its existence. He received in 1889 the Gold Medal for Water-Colour and the Bronze Medal for Oil-Painting in

Paris; and he has also been the receiver of awards at Berlin, Melbourne, Manchester, and Cardiff. He has pictures in the permanent galleries of the Chantrey Bequest Collection, the Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, and Oldham Municipal Galleries; and even the newly-formed Perth Collection of Western Australia owns a fine landscape by him.

Unfortunately much of the ethereal and delicate charm of Mr. Aumonier's landscapes evaporates during the process of reproduction, but the various renderings of his pictures given here may serve to show how free from mannerism is his work, how varied is his skill, and how needless to the true artist is any dragging in of extraneous elements to give interest and pathos to scenes instinct with the very spirit of Nature. A painting entitled *The Old Chalk Pit* is one of the artist's happiest renderings of the tender tones and shadows of a summer's evening, when the setting sun mingles its light with that of the moon, each giving to the other something of its own peculiar charm. There is no monotony in this delicate rendering of a poetic scene, the keynote of which is intense peacefulness. Though in itself not exactly an interesting subject according to the ordinary observer's classification, it is relieved from the commonplace by the wonderful skill with which



"ON THE SOUTHDOWNS"

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FROM A PAINTING BY JAMES AUMONIER

James Aumonier



"SUNDAY EVENING"

FROM A PAINTING BY JAMES AUMONIER

the effects of light are translated, and appeals to the spectator in much the same way as would the actual scene. Looking through the many criticisms of the work of Mr. Aumonier in the contemporary press it is difficult not to smile at

the efforts made by the writers to say something original on the subject. All agree in remarking that this or that landscape is charming, but few are able to explain why. Perhaps the most discerning of all the art critics is the writer of the article

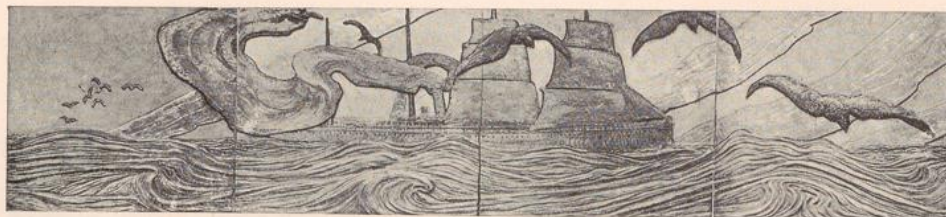


"SHEEP-WASHING"

(In the Chantrey Collection.)

FROM A PAINTING BY JAMES AUMONIER

James Aumonier



COLOURED RELIEF

BY G. E. MOIRA AND F. L. JENKINS

(See article on "The Decorations of the Peninsular and Oriental Pavilion")

on the "Art of England" in the *Universal Review*, who says: "Mr. Aumonier is a painter who more worthily carries on the traditions of English landscape than perhaps any other now living, though possibly he may be said to be rivalled in this respect by Mr. Thomas Collier, Mr. Hine the elder and Mr. George Fripp. He should be ranked above all these in the respect of originality, and especially in the great merit of belonging to his time, for Mr. Aumonier's work, though it possesses much of the freshness and apparent ease which were such distinguishing characteristics of old English land-

scape painters, and combines with them an almost equal care for and efficiency of composition, is nevertheless very marked by later nineteenth-century feeling, and is in no sense an echo of the motive, though it repeats the quality, of a former time." It is, perhaps, with the satisfying effects of full summer that Mr. Aumonier is most truly in touch, but he is no less successful in dealing with the quieter aspects of autumn and of winter, for like all true lovers he can suit his own mood at any time to meet the varying needs of the many-sided object of his devotion. NANCY BELL.



PENINSULAR AND ORIENTAL PAVILION (ENTRANCE FRONT)

T. E. COLLICUTT, ARCHITECT; G. E. MOIRA AND F. L. JENKINS, DECORATORS

(See article on "The Decorations of the Peninsular and Oriental Pavilion")