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THE NEW PATH.

VOL. II.]

APRIL, 1865.

[No. 4.

MISS HOSMER'S STATUE OF ZENOBIA.

IN the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, held at London in 1862, the United States, singularly enough, contributed, not, as might have been expected, the most remarkable specimens of mechanical ingenuity, but three or four works of Art which, even in that splendid collection of pictures and statues—unprecedented both for its extent and its completeness—attracted a very large share of public attention.

Nothing could possibly have been more bleak, uninviting or cheerless than the look of the American Department. And yet there was, even in that very Department, dreary and barn-like as it seemed—and elsewhere in the great building—work that showed to those who could discern, that, even in the field where we were thought hopelessly barbarian, there was promise of our producing good fruit. Not that the work was the best, not that it was satisfactory; but it showed independence and freshness, although produced under unfavorable circumstances, in the very hot-bed of dilettanteism and convention—produced in Rome, in the studios of Americans. These works were, Mr. Story's statues of "Cleopatra," and the "Lybian Sybil," Mr. Page's portraits of himself and his wife, and Miss Hosmer's "Zenobia."

A singular and inexplicable reticence on Mr. Story's part has seemed to keep studiously out of the reach of Americans at home all means of judging of the real merit of those remarkable statues which, we may safely say, attracted—with, perhaps, the exception of Gibson's tinted

"Venus," and Magni's "Reading-Girl"—more interest, and excited more enthusiasm, than all the rest of the sculpture in the Exhibition put together. Placed so disadvantageously that no good light could reach them, and it being, besides, impossible to examine them from more than one point, and from that only with discomfort, they yet arrested the stream of apathetic, satiated people who passed languidly through the Roman Court, with its Nymphs and Ganymedes, and Christs and Fauns, and St. Peters and Venuses, and greeted their unexpectant eyes with the sight of work which really seemed to have some purpose and sincerity behind it. Here, at last, where there was so much that was wholly conventional, academic, insipid or affected, were two statues which—though they fell short of the achievement of genius, and had not wholly escaped, in minor points, the contagion of the schools, the almost fatal influence of classical models—yet showed that the sculptor had a clear and definite aim, and that he had given to the task set before him the conscientious devotion of an intellect, penetrating, schooled and cultured, if not creative nor profound.

The pictures of Mr. Page—an original but erratic genius, led away from the noble work he might do, by the idolatry of a great school, and the vain attempt to rival it—were, to our thinking, the best he has ever painted; indeed, we trust that when the foundations of our National Gallery of Art are firmly laid

—built up solidly from the past on the good beginning of the Jarves and Bryan Collections—the American Department will be enriched with these two portraits, as solid, worthy works as have ever been painted on this side the Atlantic. They were treated, in the Great Exhibition, with the same studious disrespect which everything American instinctively received in England at that time, and were left to shiver by themselves in the gloomy American Department, shut out from the light and space and ample justice of the magnificent upper galleries—in a place where probably not a hundred people out of the thousands who thronged the building ever saw them; and yet, had they been hung in the Great Picture Gallery, among the splendid achievements of English, French, and Flemish Art, these portraits could not have failed to hold their own and to command respect. We should be glad to know the name of a single painter in England to-day—Hunt and Millais excepted—who, if we may judge by what the walls of the Royal Academy, in the Exhibition of 1862, had to show, could paint a portrait to which even this apparently moderate praise might justly be awarded.

Miss Hosmer's statue of Zenobia was treated with the slight additional modicum of respect which an Englishman feels bound to pay to a woman, and was, therefore, honored with a place at the back of the small Greek temple designed and decorated by Mr. Owen Jones to serve as a setting for the celebrated tinted Venus of Gibson. This statue, of which the untravelled public has heard so much of late from travelled people, was thought interesting enough and precious enough to command a place and setting such as was awarded to no other work of art in the whole rich collection. And yet it is safe to say that, so far as its intrinsic merits were concerned, there was no

marble in the Exhibition, of any pretension, that less deserved such distinction. Her heavy English limbs, stained, as was currently reported,—whether in jest or not, we cannot say,—with tobacco-juice, to suggest the rosy-tinted Aphrodite; her hair, a pale straw-color; the pupils of her eyes, a light blue; golden ear-rings in her ears, and a golden collar about her neck; with a face of a commonplace, house-keeping type, and an attitude devoid of character or intention—it was, to us, a work of unmitigated vulgarity. It is but fair to say that it seemed to meet with very little approval; the verdict appeared to be that it was a piece of spoiled marble; and that, after all, so timidly and weakly were the tints laid on, that the much-disputed question, as to polychrome or no polychrome, was still left open—Gibson's statue being only a feeble compromise offered to the disputants; an abandonment of the cause of pure marble, and a failure to come up to the true standard of the wax-doll school.

At the back door of this temple, then, stood the master-work of Gibson's pupil, Harriet Hosmer's "Zenobia," fortunate in having secured even so much light and space as that somewhat ignominious position gave. We trembled a little for our countrywoman—for any woman, standing to receive the award of such a multitudinous throng as surged past that temple, day after day. Gladly, we thought, had we been the sculptor, would we have crept into Story's dusky corner, and pushed his Sybil or his "Great Fairy" of Egypt out into the light which he could stand, but which she, alas to say it! could not. And yet it was brave in her to dare the trial; brave, not to shrink from the stern ordeal, but walk boldly out from her studio, to seek as the great, stern Florentine advised, the light of the public square. "There," she may have

said, and she deserves well of women and of men for her courage, "let me stand, among men; first, by my master's side, and under the same roof with his darling work—let us both be judged together; then, among the works of men from many lands, and here in this England, cruelly unjust to my native land, scorning, and mocking, and taunting her in this hour of her deadly peril, let me stand up, an American woman, and ask for judgment, sure that, if I am allowed a single leaf or berry of the crown I crave, it will be awarded by no friendly nor partial hand, but will be indisputably mine."

Well, the statue stood there and waited for the crown; waited patiently for leaf or berry of it; waited all those long Summer weeks for the first murmur of praise from judge or people, and waited in vain. And now it has been brought to us, and we are called on for our verdict; and how can we refuse, with fairness or honesty, to acknowledge that the praise was rightly withheld?

The art of sculpture has in these days come to be so almost hopelessly degraded—utterly at a loss for subjects, and incapable of treating those it chooses, with truth or dignity—that whoever can interest the world in a statue to-day must have more than ordinary gifts. We speak within bounds—do we not?—when we say that there are not three men living in England, France, Italy, or America, who can produce a great or greatly noble statue, whether a portrait or a work of invention. There are great painters in our time, men whose works are as sure of fame and memory as any of the great Italians; and great writers, whose names are already touched with the morning light of immortality—but the great sculptors are dead; there is no Orpheus in these days to make the stones of the quarry

stir as if the life were in them. And if men fail before the task, and give us, with their strength and culture and opportunity, nothing worthy, nor smacking of the time, what should a woman do with her feeble hands, her powers unfledged, which, if they seek to try new paths and find out a field for their free play, run counter to so many prejudices, and meet so many faithless, sneering, hostile eyes, that, ten to one, if they develop at all, they develop in a grievously one-sided, awkward, defiant way, and use up half their strength in fighting for the right to use the other half.

Miss Hosmer, then, is to be judged leniently, not because she is a woman, but because, being a woman, she has failed only where all, or very nearly all, the men who have tried the same experiment before her for the last three hundred years or so, have failed almost as decidedly. The only good things that have come from under the chisels of the sculptors in all that time are a few clever busts; not a statue that the museum of the thirtieth century will give standing-room to; and we are, therefore, of opinion that Miss Hosmer has made a mistake in her choice of a profession, unless there is some department of it which does not call for great inventive power, for imagination—for genius, in short—in which she may still prove her ability to excel.

The "Zenobia" is a colossal statue, and professes to represent the Queen of Palmyra, walking in the procession of her conqueror, the Emperor Aurelian. In our judgment, the subject is a poor one. Zenobia was, it is true, a remarkable woman, but she never filled a large space in the world's eye; she is a mere episode in history, and her name recalls nothing worthy of lasting remembrance, or gratitude, or large respect. It is true that she held her throne in defiance of the Roman, and that she piqued

Aurelian by her prolonged resistance to his hitherto victorious arms; but her submission at last, though politic, was base, and her sacrifice of Longinus an act of detestable selfishness. Her empire, while she ruled it, did nothing for mankind, and her life left no permanent results upon the good or ill fortunes of the race. However this may be, certainly it is asking too much of this busy nineteenth century, which has its own conquests, defeats, and successes to interest it, to trouble itself about a fine woman who lived some fifteen hundred years ago, and did nothing more worthy of remembrance than to govern her kingdom with absolute sway, and get into trouble as life wore away; ending her days, too, in the tamest and most ignominious fashion, eating and drinking and sleeping like ordinary mortals, in her stylish villa on the Tiber. Plainly, it is not the real flesh-and-blood Zenobia whom Miss Hosmer's admiration has led her to put into marble, but some fancy picture—Mr. Ware's, for example, which is just as little like flesh and blood, we opine, as could be imagined. But, neither the real Zenobia nor the Unitarian one is worthy of being "set in Parian statue-stone" in this pains-taking fashion. Pray, was there no other woman worthier to be remembered—drawn out of cloud-land and given an enduring shape to? No Judith, no Miriam, no Joan of Arc, no Countess Marguerite,

"— that arm'd

Her own fair head; and sallying thro' the gate,
Beat back her foes with slaughter from her
walls"—

no Jane Grey, no Elizabeth of England?

But, granted the subject—and if it had been plain Mrs. Jones the poet-artist would have made us all worship her—once having chosen it, or been drawn to it, the mere fact of the historical name should have held the sculptor to the truth of history. Miss Hosmer was

bound to conceive Zenobia according to the recorded facts, and not to make a fancy piece, nor to accept, in lieu of the plain history, Mr. Ware's somewhat diluted statement of it. Of course, nothing would have been lost by this, for the more facts the artist could have got hold of, the clearer would have been the picture in her mind, and the freer her imagination would have been to act. Zenobia, we are told, walked in the procession weighed down almost to fainting with jewels and chains of gold. Bracelets of gold held the fetters which bound her arms, and a slave supported the heavy collar of gold and jewels that encircled her neck. The daughter, according to some accounts, of an Arab chieftain, accustomed to fatigue, delighting in the chase, often killing antelopes, bears, or wolves with her own weapon, a fearless and splendid horsewoman, but often walking miles on foot at the head of her armies; an Eastern woman, and yet chaste and frugal, but sometimes, in her manly fashion, carousing with her officers, we ask, with all respect, whether it is this woman whom Miss Hosmer's marble brings before our eyes? Her face is without expression of any kind, a classic mask, "with chiseled features, clear and sleek." She is neither weary, nor despondent, nor despairing. Her face is bent down, it is true, but, what for, no one can possibly imagine who has not learned her name, or who does not see the chain that hints, of course, at some misfortune. The picture drawn by the Roman annalist might have been turned to sumptuous use in skillful hands, and by an artist brought up under freer influences than those that rule the coldly-classical and artificial studio of Mr. Gibson; and the wealth of antique ornament that has descended to our times from the jewel-boxes of Rome, Egypt, Etruria, and Pompeii, might have been drawn upon to bring more vividly to our eyes the Zenobia of

History, fainting under her costly splendor—than has been accomplished by this extremely attenuated chain which confines her wrists, or the clumsy tiara which crowns her brow.

But, as Miss Hosmer has not chosen to put the facts of her history into marble, and to weigh Zenobia down with chains and jewels, how are we to account for the heavy figure, the plodding gait, if, indeed, she moves at all, or can move; the arm that hangs and does not hang; the foot that drags along the ground and refuses to be lifted? Plainly, this is physical ponderousness, not the weight of grief or sorrow; it is a block of marble that stands before us, not a woman, who walks a queen.

The truth is, that Miss Hosmer has undertaken a task far beyond her powers; and he only is her friend who tells her so, plainly and frankly. Nothing is gained, for her, for art, or for the cause of woman's work, by shirking the matter, or mincing it; still less for any cause, woman's or man's, by flattery, or commendation however feeble. Hers is essentially an imitative talent, without originality, without invention. Her "Puck" was Sir Joshua Reynolds' picture, cut in marble, and with much of the spirit lost in the translation; and her "Zenobia," while it is perhaps no imitation of any other statue, is without any special individual character. It is no excuse, that we have admitted that few men could have accomplished what she has failed to do; she had no right, no beginner has a right, to take a subject demanding so much knowledge, skill, and clearness of imagination as this, without long training, and arduous labor, and ample preparation. What has Miss Hosmer done to prove her right to attack such a subject as this? Surely, nothing.

As human nature happens to be constituted, no advice is commonly more resented than that which recommends

a person to try his hand at something less imposing than the work he has selected, and for which he has perhaps been flattered to the top of his bent by ignorant or interested people. But, the question of final success or failure may often depend upon the acceptance or rejection of such advice, which, if given in a good spirit, and founded upon arguments that address themselves to the reason rather than to the feelings, ought not to be lightly treated. It would have given us great pleasure to have been able to acknowledge in Miss Hosmer's statue a tenth part of the excellence which her enthusiastic friends in Boston find in it—granting that such persons as the author of the absurdly extravagant article in the "Atlantic" are friends, and not most hurtful enemies—but, we believe we pronounce the verdict of the world of disinterested people; we know that we speak our own impartial conviction, when we say that Miss Hosmer has shown in what she has done, but little taste, or sentiment, or fancy, to say nothing of imagination or the creative faculty, to the possession of which she has not, of course, the least claim.*

Is there, then, no field in which Miss Hosmer, or any other woman who feels drawn to modelling—and, judging by Miss Hosmer's own account of the processes of herself and her brother artists, there is no longer any "art" of sculp-

* The reader will find an opinion confirmatory of our own from a source which challenges respect wherever the author's name is known, in the "Descriptive Handbook to the Fine Art Collections in the International Exhibition of 1862, by Francis Turner Palgrave. Second Edition, revised and completed." . . . "We must point out," he says, "that where the artist aims at individuality, and fails, this failure is fatal to high rank in art. * * * Take Hosmer's 'Zenobia,' where beside the conventional treatment of drapery, so little like nature, and the display of polished ornament in the tasteless modern Italian style—neither attitude nor expression appear expressive of more than a proud, indolent woman, where we are led to expect a likeness of the gallant Queen of Palmyra."

ture—can worthily employ her time, and use her talent? We should be sorry to think it, and, so far from there being no field, there happens just now to be one which calls for all the taste and skill that can be supplied either by men or women; we mean the decoration of buildings with sculptured flower-and-leaf ornament. The Oxford Museum has set the example, drawn of course from the best period of Gothic architecture, of using leaves and flowers, and even animals, modelled as closely after nature as the laws of decoration will admit, to make beautiful the capitals of pillars, the spandrils and mouldings of doors and windows, and all other parts where such ornament would be suitable. And in this country, in our own city, the architect of the new building for the "Academy of Design" has used this mode of decorating freely and with excellent result; and other architects, since Mr. Wight led the way, have shown a disposition to discard the old, conventional, thousand-times-copied, and worn-out inventions of a tasteless period, and replace them with the fresh, living, and ever-varied designs supplied in profusion by the woods and fields to any lover of nature who will seek for them.

The difficulty in the way of the architect who wishes to wreath his capitals and windows, and fill his panels with natural ornament, lies in the scarcity of workmen able to execute the work without the necessity of previous modelling, or even to model gracefully and truly from nature. For one peculiarity of this ornament is, that it cannot be measured and "drawn out" in an architect's office, as most so-called Gothic, Moorish, Renaissance or other ornament is, but to secure individuality, freedom, freshness, and truth, must be struck out as directly as possible from the living flower, the just-plucked leaf.

Now, if some of the young girls and boys who are dabbling in clay and

chipping away at marble in the hope that they may one day take their place among the sculptors, would modestly consent to help the architects by cutting in stone the flowers whose habits of growth and characteristic beauty they had carefully studied, they would not only find abundant and rewarding work, but they would be doing some real substantial good in the world, more than they will ever be able to accomplish by adding to the number of such statues as come out of most studios now-a-days. Not only would they increase their own knowledge of nature, and deepen their love for her still and serious beauty, but they would interest the world of men and women in their work, and lead the way to fit statues of men and women in the future.

We do not know why this advice should be considered belittling to those to whom it is offered. Suppose Miss Hosmer, or Mr. Palmer, had carved the capitals in the lower story of the Academy of Design with ivy, and fern, and blood-root, and pitcher-plant and gentian; suppose they had brought their intelligence, their education, their skill to bear on the work; should we not have had something more productive of lasting gratitude than the "Zenobia" and the "White Captive?" It would have been a public possession, shared and enjoyed by every man, woman, and child that passed it in his daily walk; keeping fresh in their minds the memory of their summer strolls by field, and wood, and brook, and smiling away the sternness of winter with glad anticipations of the spring.

For it is a question we have asked and answered before in the pages of the "New Path"—"what is the use of modern sculpture?" The greater part of it—and the exceptions are so few that we might almost say the whole of it—is utterly useless. It is expensive lumber, little else; and puts us almost out of

patience to think of the time that is wasted in the long, tedious process of modelling and carving it—to say nothing of the time wasted in looking at it when done. Isaac Newton, who perhaps was a poor judge of such matters, called the Earl of Peterboro's statues "stone dolls;" it would be hard to tell what he would have thought if he could have seen in vision such a collection as that in the Roman Court of the Exhibition of 1862. The truth is, that modern sculptors must find something to say that the world wants and needs to hear; and must be able to say that something in a way to make the world listen to them, if they do not wish to see their art come to be looked upon as hardly worthy of the name of art at all.

One word more and we have finished. There is a work which needs to be done, and which it surely cannot be considered derogatory to the claims of any living sculptor to propose that he or she should undertake; we mean the full-length, faithful portraiture of the great men and women of our time, in their habits as they live and move among us. Perhaps, in the case of many of the men who will make the century memorable, this duty has been done, although, even with them, the bust is nearly all that we have by which to remember them. Let Miss Hosmer, or any sculptor who will do the world service, make a marble statue of the woman who, more than any other single person, has helped to rid this land of the curse of Slavery—Harriet Beecher Stowe; let her seat her, pen in hand, and her great book in manuscript on her lap, and give her to us and the next ages; first, an exact portrait of head and face—most pre-

cious; then, from collar to shoe, hand, foot, and every fold in her dress, just as they are; nobly subdued, if you will, to the marble's law, but losing no truth thereby—and we will thank her more warmly and cordially than if she had made Zenobia perfect from top to toe, and all Aurelian's triumph from end to end. Then, let her, humbly but proudly, write "Hosmer fecit" on the hem of the garment, and be thankful that she has accomplished a task for which the faithful doing might alone be fit reward.

This, then—without feeling that we are proposing anything in the least derogatory to Miss Hosmer's talent, or that we are deserving less than the thanks which are due to the giver of well-meant, honest, and, we believe, good advice—is what we recommend to her and to other women who feel the desire for work stirring within them; work other than house-keeping, sewing, cooking, and mending, which are no more the only tasks for women than farming, wood-chopping, eating, and drinking are for men. Women have genius—their own characteristic gift, and as precious as that of men; women have talent, as varied and as fine as men have, and the same rule is set for the obedience of both—that they should serve that genius and use that talent. Also, the same inexorable law—inexorable, but full of grace—sits guardian over the work of man and woman, that they should not mistake their powers, nor misuse them; and it is in the belief that our country-woman, in whose fame we feel a respectful interest, has mistaken her powers and is misdirecting them, that we have written these very frank, but very, friendly, words.

OUR FURNITURE; WHAT IT IS, AND WHAT IT SHOULD BE.

YEARS ago Edgar Poe published an essay entitled "Philosophy of Furniture,"*

* Collected Works, New York, 1861, Vol. II. pp. 299 et seq.

in which he asserted and undertook to show that the Americans did not understand furnishing their houses. He began by assuming that the English

are supreme in the matter of interior decoration, all other nations being inferior from various causes, but none so far inferior as the Yankees. He found the explanation of this last assumed fact in the money-test by which things American are tried; a test not applied to the same extent in England, where something besides money is needed to give high position, where the cost of an article would not be the usual criterion of its merit, and where the people follow the lead of the nobility in small matters as well as in great. He then goes on to treat of the *rationale* of furniture and decoration, details and general effect, harmony and "keeping," carpets and curtains; protests against glare and glitter, gas, cut-glass and mirrors, and finally describes, as if from reality, a "small and not ostentatious chamber, with whose decorations no fault can be found."

The essay is good reading. It was Poe's error and his misfortune that he undertook the discussion of many subjects of which he knew too little to think rightly; he was led into this rashness by his impatience of the childish criticism and hasty generalizations of that popular periodical literature in the atmosphere of which he lived, and his reputation suffers to this day from his own as hasty discussion of matters not wholly within his ken.

But his essays have always the value of the first impressions of an able man, which may often be of use even to the expert, whose thoughts always tend to run in grooves of conviction. Not in any sense of the word a *great* thinker, he was yet a thinker of original-enough thoughts, an observer of facts not patent to the crowd, and an ingenious speculator upon them. In matters of art he was less likely to be right than in any other department of human knowledge and thought, since of all possible subjects there could be none other so

poorly understood and so little regarded in America, during his life, as this one. He was able to apply to painting some of his matured convictions in regard to poetry, but had no other grounds for thought on the subject. In most "matters of taste" he had only his own eye and his sense of propriety to guide him; he often trusted them too far, and spoke too boldly upon their testimony; but they often guided him aright.

In discussing furniture and decoration he had this great disadvantage, that he knew almost nothing of the resources of art. He saw much that was bad, but could only complain of it, and suggest modifications which would improve but not radically alter the originally defective plan. He could analyze the positive faults in a given *ensemble* of furniture, and could imagine a room so fitted up as to be free from such faults; but could no more imagine thoroughly good furniture and artistic decoration, than he could create in his mind better pictures than those he criticised. He had no knowledge of what there was in the world already thoroughly good and beautiful. In like manner his strictures on existing things, though right in principle, are frequently wrong in the particular application. It may be questioned, for instance, whether the undeniable fact of the existence, in England, of a highly educated and supremely refined hereditary aristocracy, has caused any notable superiority in the artistic effect of English interiors. It may be asserted, with some show of reason, that the critic has here confused comfort with beauty. No one will be apt to deny to wealthy English people the name of the most agreeably situated and daintily cared-for denizens of the planet. An English interior is indeed perfect in respect to comfort, convenience, luxury; whether the interior be that of a London drawing-room, or a manor-house library, or an undergraduate's lodgings

at Oxford. But every such interior, if at all "in good taste,"—if wearing any unusual air of refined feeling,—is sure to be quiet and plain in the extreme, while ornamental fittings of any kind in any English house, were, when Poe wrote, and to a great extent still are, of a curious and inimitable ugliness. The rooms of a wealthy baronet, or private gentleman, on the walls of which hang carefully chosen and most valuable pictures, ancient and contemporary, a collection of national importance, will not have a piece of furniture well designed, graceful in form, richly decorated, valuable in any way except for the most utilitarian purposes,—will not have a carpet or a curtain which would please Mr. Poe, except by its negative merit of avoiding the eye, and allowing the visitor to leave the room unaware of its existence, except as it was soft to the foot, or so darkened the window that he had to pull it aside. Doubts, then, may well arise as to the nature or the very existence of "the *ormolu'd* cabinets of our friends across the water." Such there may be here and there among the great country-houses; but it is safe to say that they would be found to have little even of that "negative merit" which Mr. Poe attributed to them, and that any one of them would have so shocked his naturally correct feeling for form and color and propriety as to have driven him quickly out. And there will be found many persons to dispute the truth of the following passage: "the true nobility of blood, confining itself within the strict limits of legitimate taste, rather avoids than affects that mere costliness in which a *parvenu* rivalry may at any time be successfully attempted. The people will imitate the nobles, and the result is a thorough diffusion of the proper feeling."

One writer is at hand, ready and anxious to assert the very contrary to these conclusions; an Englishman, and one

who understands very thoroughly the subject he is discussing. A recent number of the *Cornhill Magazine* contained his essay* on furniture as they have it nowadays in London. He may be a devout believer in aristocracies, but does not find a prevailing good taste in decoration among the advantages resulting therefrom. Hear him:

"It is not too much to say that there is hardly an article to be found for sale in a modern upholsterer's shop which will bear evidence of even the commonest principles of good design. The individual merits of Gothic or classic art are not here questioned. Our furniture has no style at all. The wonder is, who supplies the patterns for this endless variety of absurdities; who is responsible for the 'shaped' backs of sideboards and washing-tables, and the bandy-legged seats which we occupy. No doubt there are many 'leading firms' who flatter themselves that the contents of their warehouses are exceptions to the general rule; and, indeed, if high prices and sound workmanship insured good taste, there would be no lack of the latter. But, unfortunately, of furniture which is—to use a trade-expression—"kept on stock," the more expensive it is the uglier it is sure to be."

Remember that the article from which we quote is not the editorial utterance of a periodical devoted to art, but one of the seven short articles in a number of a popular magazine. Read this article, and you will find that it is not at all radical in tone. It would seem that the abuses of which he speaks are so certain and so easily visible that the casual reader of a shilling monthly are expected to understand and enjoy the discussion of them. Observe, moreover, what the careful reader of the article in question will not fail to observe, that the author finds as badly-designed dec-

* "The Fashion of Furniture." *Cornhill Magazine* for March, 1864. Vol. ix. pp. 337 et seq.

orations and furniture for the cabinets and drawing-rooms of the nobility as for the "parlors" of their humbler fellow-citizens; no difference so important as difference in cost, no difference in favor of the wealthy except better workmanship, which follows naturally from greatly higher cost.

In the NEW PATH for July we printed a few sentences translated from the "Conclusion" of Violet-le Duc's work on the furniture of the middle ages.* If the reader will refer to these extracts, or, still better, to the work itself, he will see that the learned, laborious, and experienced author looks upon the furniture of the people in France with great dislike and dissatisfaction; moreover, that he lays the blame principally to the disposition of the less wealthy classes to follow the lead, as far as they can, of the wealthier—their disposition to try to imitate, with inferior material and hasty workmanship, the look of costly, rich, and durable ware.

It is true that there is some good work done in England and in France; that the Gothic Revival has, during the past ten years, influenced more than the outsides of buildings; that within that period, as the *Cornhill* writer says, "textile, fictile, and metallic designs have made rapid strides." It will be our duty in the course of this essay to speak of the good example which some of the art-workmen of Europe have set us. For the present we speak of those matters in which New York is as well off as London or Paris; and concerning which we echo the sentence following the one last quoted: "Upholstery seems in a state of stagnation. Its design appears to have deteriorated rather than advanced. There is not a single establishment in London which produces

what any competent judge would describe as artistic furniture for ordinary sale." New York is as well off as London, without doubt, perhaps as well off as Paris, though the only advantage our work has over the English work is in that very grace of design which is generally considered peculiarly French, and which we get principally from French workmen. The question of superiority is, however, of no importance whatever. These are undeniable facts: that much of our furniture is painfully ugly, and that all, or very nearly all, is utterly uninteresting and unnoticeable.

It is our object, in this article, to consider what we can do, in or near an American city, to surround ourselves with furniture and fittings which shall be in a true sense artistic, and a pleasure to the owner as well as to the casual visitor; to inquire into the possibility of securing the enjoyment of all the ease and comfort which we have learned to think necessary, while having every form and color about us gratifying to the eye of a true lover of beauty.

The more expensive the uglier, thinks the essayist of the *Cornhill*. This would not generally be found true with us, but the fact holds, as always and everywhere in our days, that the ugliness of fashion and expense is the model for all would-be-fine imitations of elegance. Perhaps the derived ugliness is worse than the original, because flimsier, and less delicate in polish and finish. Perhaps the original ugliness is more harmful than the derived, because original, and because having influence. The bad effects of both are seen in this, that they have long ago dulled the minds and the vision of most people, until they are unconscious of the wretched things they have around them. Look, reader, at your drawing-room chairs. Long use has made their appearance of no moment to you, and you are probably resigned to the belief that comfort is not to be

* Dictionnaire Raisonné du Mobilier Français, de l'Époque Carlovingienne à la Renaissance. Première Partie, Meubles. Paris, Bance, Éditeur, 1858.

expected from them, and that elegance alone is to be looked for. But this very resignation, this very indifference, is the harm done you already by the vile traditions which perpetuate such ugliness and discomfort. The chairs which help furnish the most expensively fitted room in your house, and that in which visitors are most often received, should surely be agreeable to the sitter, and ought to be rather decorative in appearance. Are those, then, strong, well adapted to the occupant, and pretty, those shapes into which the backs and legs are bent or cut? Do you think it was labor well spent, that which steamed the thin bars of wood until soft, and then forced them into inharmonious, unmeaning, broken curves? Do you think the weakness of the wood sawed into patterns without regard to its grain is good, or necessary, or that the resulting forms are so fine as to be cheaply purchased at the price of this weakness? Notice the inevitable ugliness of the so-considered ornament which is added to these articles of furniture. Notice the wretched little knobs and scrolls into which all such ornament resolves itself. Notice the evident conviction of the designer that all his chairs ought to look as if modelled in clay, and ready to bend further and roll up and sink entirely out of shape, if put to use and subjected to weight. Or consider the heavier chairs designed for hall and dining-room; notice in these the regard for some fancied requirement of design, which leads the manufacturer's foreman to glue little mouldings of architectural appearance along the tops of the chair-backs, disagreeable to the sitter and quite out of place, until they are knocked off and the chair is left more nearly what it should be. Consider the elegant drawing-room tables, their legs studied from the hinder-legs of dogs, and bound together, near the swollen and shapeless feet, by a sort of Saint Andrew's Cross,

apparently studied from knotted ends of old rope, which, in spite of its loose and yielding appearance, is made to support in the middle a vase without any inside, covered by an immovable cover. Contemplate and account for the fact that the few gentlemen among us of practised eye and knowledge of the arts of the past, when buying furniture, buy always the simplest and least ornamental. You cannot imagine an artist of merit and worth allowing a fashionable centre-table to stand in his room; he will have an old, heavy, carved, four-legged table of walnut, if he can get it, and if not will have an "office-table" or a kitchen-table, or anything merely utilitarian. The foolish structure of rosewood topped with marble, in the design of which the one thing sought was an avoidance of straight lines, whose merit is that you wonder how such shapes were cut out of wood, and how they hold together under the weight of the marble top and the superincumbent books, he will not have about him, or will banish to his bedroom, and there cover with an immense cloth which hides it from his eyes.

Consider the fashionable bureau. Utilitarian things like this are always better designed among us than mere knick-knacks like the drawing-room tables. The bureaus made at heavy cost by our leading furniture-dealers are certainly as well adapted to their purpose and as well made as anything made to sell to the first comer can be, and if left plain would be effective enough, low and broad, and topped with pure white statuary marble, and supporting their immense dressing-glasses. But notice the attempts to ornament them; a front of one of these bureaus is made up of the fronts of the four drawers, the framework showing only in narrow strips, one vertical at each side and the rest horizontal above, below, and between the drawers. Now the front of a

drawer is only one end of a box, with a keyhole in it and two handles projecting. Here was a difficulty for the designer, how to decorate this unreceptive front. The older fashion was to make the bureau into an architectural composition, by arranging the lowest drawer to look like the base, and the top drawer to look like the cap-mouldings. That device has passed away for a while. Nowadays the drawers are acknowledged, and the designer, reasoning that each box-end is too small to need constructing as a panel, has boldly added to the flat board of which it is made the reverse (in appearance) of a panel—a raised flat surface, a sort of table-land, a bit of board of any shape that unchecked fancy may devise, and veneered, inlaid, and coved at edge to suit, as no other consideration than whim has to do with it at all. Of course it is without appropriateness or beauty; but, how else ornament the front of a chest of drawers? how else make a bureau at an hundred and fifty dollars more ornamental than a bureau at twenty-five? Other devices there were, nevertheless, more used in former times than now; see how many bureaus there are with rounded corners, or columns with bases and capitals, or huge and heavy scrolls on each side of the drawers, increasing the length of the whole by six or seven unnecessary inches, and perhaps doubling the weight. Notice how the large and costly mirror is supported; it was formerly slung on a pivot, now it is more sensibly fixed immovably, when quite large. In either case its supporters on each side are of the most meaningless, graceless, poorly designed form, often as much like moulded putty or clay as the chair-legs, uncombined snaky meanderings, cut out of a plank, not handsome, and certainly not strong and lasting. Buttressed by these where it needs the least support (for it cannot fall over sideways), and with nothing visi-

ble to keep it from falling forward upon the marble or back against the wall; the mirror in its narrow frame stands on one edge, really tottering and apparently about to fall, held up for a moment by a strip of wood behind it, screwed to the back of the bureau. Or, consider the fashionable bedsteads of the furniture shops. As we said of the bureaus, so we say of these, nothing could be better arranged for comfort, and for the reception of the spring-bottoms and mattresses which go to make up such a perfection of comfort that feather-beds are no longer of use in the world. The side rails are low—eighteen inches from the floor to their upper edges. The bottom rail is crowned by a foot-board rising perhaps a foot above it; so far good, except for the ugly mouldings which are glued on to make false panels, and the pie-crust ornaments which are often superadded; but why the enormous head-board, certainly five feet higher than the rails? Is it a reminiscence of splendid canopied bedsteads of days gone by? Is it to dwarf the room and all in it? Whatever the reason for it, it towers in ticklish height above the pillows, five feet wide and about as high, nowhere more than an inch and a quarter thick, formed of planks resting edgewise one upon another, secured by grooves and glue, loaded at top by heavy projecting mouldings forming a sort of coping, and finding no help in its difficult balancing except from two strips of two-inch plank four inches wide, which represent, at the two head corners of the bed, the time-honored bed-post. If there is anything in our ugly interiors more ugly than these monstrous bed-heads, we cannot recall it now.

We have not spoken of those cabinets and tables of theatrical gorgeousness with which the *nouveaux-riches* like to disfigure their drawing-rooms, all veneered with stained woods of every

flaming color. We have not spoken of buhl and ormolu, nor of table-tops of Florentine mosaic; of these extravagances we have no time now to speak; they are not furniture, but display—furniture is to them as the horses we keep are to an occasional tame zebra; moreover, they are generally ugly and tasteless, and have nothing to recommend them but their extravagant cost.

We do not ask now for ornament of any sort. We are not urging you to have all your furniture designed for you by men of refined taste and great imaginative power, by great artists, in other words, and beautified by carving and painting. All we ask now is that monstrosities be recognized as such and abandoned; that inappropriate and exaggerated designs be recognized as bad, and no longer endured; that costly ugliness be declared too costly for use—in other words, an extravagance.

If you think it a matter of small moment how your household furniture looks, do you also think it a small matter that Boston should have gotten a splendid organ, within the year, with a case of such bad design? And yet it is the universal badness of our household furniture, of our tables, and cabinets, and chairs, that made this case so ugly and absurd. Made of the same materials as furniture, and designed by a New York furniture-maker, it may certainly be classed with furniture, large as it is. Let those of our readers who cannot see the original, take a little pains to see the photograph of it, copies of which are to be seen in the music-stores. It would be difficult to find, even in America, a more elaborate specimen of inappropriate and incongruous design, of debased imagination, of misapplied symbolism, of false ornamentation. Every law of constructive beauty, every principle of truth in art, seem to be violated in it. It is worthy of a place in a Jesuit church.

That work which is done with lavish cost, abundant thought and care, and much pretension to artistic design, being so bad, the less elaborate and less costly work is bad in proportion. A light table made of selected pieces of solid rosewood, made by a good mechanic, under the supervision of a dealer whose fortune and position depend upon the enduring excellence of the workmanship of all that he sells, may have a certain seemliness. It will, for instance, be made to look as if really cut out of one piece of solid wood, and will be accurate in uniformity of parts, and sharp-edged, and will stand steady, and last a few years if not used except to support half a dozen books and a flower-vase. And the keeping, for the few years of its deceptive appearance, perfect finish and high polish, may be allowed it as a sort of merit. But the cheap, light table, the centre-table of some farmer's or mechanic's parlor, bought at a village store; where there were two to choose from, made in some immense factory, with the hundred and forty-nine others, which, with it, composed the batch,—there is nothing for which you can praise it except the damning faint praise that it "looks very well for the money!" The Broadway shop's drawing-room chair is an ugly thing enough, we found, but at least it is well made, is light, and yet will last until the fashion changes; but the Chatham Square parlor-chair has no such merits, except that it, also, is light.

There is one principle which governs all the designs of these cheap articles of furniture—saving of wood. To make the crookedest table-leg you can out of a bit of plank four inches wide—that is the problem proposed by manufacturer to designer. The leg must of course curve twice, that is, must be of the general shape of a letter S; but, perhaps, it might be made to look well if

shaped out of a plank half an inch narrower than those last, say a piece four and a half inches wide;—try. And, indeed, the reader will be surprised to see, if he will take the trouble to observe, how ingeniously an elaborate look is given to that which is really an almost straight bar of wood. The legs of chairs, made by the thousand, all alike, are so devised as to leave no waste pieces of wood between them, the front of one fitting the back of another, till the plank is all used in finished legs except the chips which come of shaping the first and the last. One man or set of men works constantly at the front legs, making so many hundred in a month, while another man or set of men is making back legs, another rungs, another seats, and another backs. Then, in a large room to which all the pieces are sent, the parts are put together, and the finished chairs piled up or hung from the ceiling. And the purchaser may

choose among three patterns, say, of nearly equal cost, of each of which patterns there are about a hundred dozen chairs in stock. The larger pieces of furniture of this class are still more characteristic and peculiar. The bureaus are never known to stand firm, even when they are first sent home; their drawers go in and out by jerks, first one side and then the other, and fit so loosely in front, that the locks never catch after the first month; the sides, made of one wide board or of two, each, invariably split or separate the whole height up and down; the top, also of one or of two thin boards, curls up at front and back, separating from the frame in doing so. In the degraded and ruinous state it soon reaches, it may last some years, the annoyance of the user, who, however, would replace it, if destroyed, by another of similar construction and material.

(To be Continued.)

NOTICES OF LATE EXHIBITIONS.

SINCE the publication of the last number of the *NEW PATH*, there have been several pictures exhibited in New York which it does not seem proper to pass over without remark, especially as some of them deserve respectful consideration for the evident sincerity of their intention, even if they have fallen short of the highest excellence.

“PRESIDENT LINCOLN READING THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION TO THE CABINET.”—BY F. B. CARPENTER.

Mr. Carpenter deserves great praise for the straightforward, manly way in which he has set before us the birth, as it were, of one of the most important events in our recent history. A vulgar painter would either have found nothing in the subject worth painting, or would have endeavored, by upholstery and furniture of his own contriving, to

throw over the awkwardness of a group of men in modern costume the charm which he had been taught by academic rules and a conventional art to supply. We should have had, if not the inevitable marble column and voluminous crimson curtain of the days of Copley and Stuart, something as unlike the real room in which the Cabinet met, as the room in which the incongruous assembly of American authors is gathered in Schussele and Darley's picture of “Irving and his Friends,” is to the plain little study at Sunnyside. Mr. Carpenter has painted the Cabinet chamber in all its republican simplicity, and has also given us a collection of portraits which have been generally recognized as faithful and expressive.

We consider that when we have said thus much we have given the picture

very high praise. The subject seems to us to offer a narrow field for artistic treatment. Its great value is simply as record, and perhaps Titian's art would not have made it more valuable in this respect. Is it not, by-the-way, an interesting problem to guess what Titian would have done with such a subject, supposing him to have been hampered by the actual conditions? Three things we may take for granted. He would have ennobled all the heads, and with his penetrative glance into character would have idealized them, perhaps beyond popular recognition. Then, he would have contrived to secure in some way a noble scale of color, and very possibly might have done so without violating the facts of wall-paper, carpet, or table-cover. But, if he held fast to these, he would, at least, by the perfection of his flesh-painting, and the truth with which he would interpret individual character, have made us forget the absence of decoration and material splendor. And, lastly, the drawing of the master would have been felt through the whole picture in the roundness of all the heads and limbs and the sense of life in the attitudes.

On the whole, we suppose Titian would never have chosen such a subject: its baldness would have repelled him. And he could only have painted it with pleasure by denying or decorating the facts, which would have made the work more valuable as a picture, and less valuable historically. Mr. Carpenter's picture is raw and rude in color, the flesh-painting is poor, and the heads are little more than daguerreotypes, while the attitudes are wanting in freedom, although they are intended to be natural and characteristic, and are in no case arranged for theatrical effect. But, with all these defects—many of which we have no doubt so faithful and studious an artist will outgrow—we hold that he has produced a picture which

better deserves a place in the National Capitol than any work that is there, with the single exception of Trumbull's much ridiculed, but valuable, "Signing of the Declaration."

"THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC AT CUMBERLAND LANDING, ON THE PAMUNKEY."—PAINTED BY J. HOPE, LATE CAPTAIN U. S. VOLUNTEERS, FROM A SKETCH TAKEN BY HIM ON THE SPOT.

Mr. Hope's picture is characterized by the same merits as Mr. Carpenter's, and has similar defects. Both artists have evidently been moved by the same desire to make a truthful statement of certain facts, and have alike rejected all temptation to increase the attractiveness of their pictures by the addition of imaginary accessories. Neither of them has much sense of color, and there is but little evidence in either work of that refinement of culture which adds so great a charm to the best modern European pictures. But, in the present condition of art in this country, we hold that the spirit in which these pictures have been painted is so highly to be prized that it cannot be enough encouraged, and that while we ought not to make light of real defects, and ought frankly to acknowledge all the drawbacks; yet all quiet, modest protests, such as these against the false and theatrical styles which have been and are still in vogue, especially in the treatment of historical subjects, ought to be cordially welcomed and hospitably entertained. The spirit we recommend is the spirit of sincerity and truth, whatever may be its present material mask, however ungraceful, perhaps uncouth, its expression. It is the only spirit from which any good in art or literature has ever flowed, and if we can once sternly demand it and heartily cherish it, refuse to tolerate anything that is not born of it, we may be sure that all increase of real refinement in manners and social customs; all political and

moral growth; all enlargement of ideas of whatever kind, will find in the art which, in its beginning, we shall have based on sincerity and a frank acceptance of the truth, a rich and flexible medium for their fullest expression.

We are told that "this was the only occasion on which any one of our large armies was ever encamped on a single field. On this field, two by three miles, the whole Army of the Potomac, consisting of eighty thousand men, was encamped for a single night only." It was no easy task to represent such a scene; and considering all the difficulties, and remembering, also, the short space of time allowed for taking the sketch—the artist being an officer on duty, too—we must admit that his success has been great. Leaving out of view all minor deficiencies, the general result is clear, vigorous, and impressive.

A more inventive artist would no doubt have given to the scene the element it chiefly lacks—the confusion and bustle which must certainly have been itself evident enough at such a time. It is true that the foreground represents a rising ground at some distance necessarily from the camp, but even at that distance we should imagine that the general aspect of things could hardly have been so neat and orderly. Still, as the worst part of the picture is the painting of the few figures of men and horses in the foreground, the artist, perhaps, did well to make them few. He has evidently felt at home in the landscape, which is painted with considerable skill, and in color shows a decided improvement upon Mr. Hope's earlier works, many specimens of which may now be seen upon the walls of the Mutual Art Association gallery, and which, remarkable as they are for the excellence of much of their drawing, are very untrue in color. Considerable cleverness is shown in the treatment of the multitudinous tents, and in the skill with which the method of breaking up a camp is shown without giving anything of a map-like or scientific look to the picture, without, in short, making it less a picture; and indeed, so much cleverness and perception are exhibited all through the picture, that we are inclined to make rigorous demands upon Mr. Hope for far more finished and careful work in the next that he undertakes.

FRENCH AND FLEMISH PICTURES AT GOUPIL'S.

In February, Mr. Knoedler once more put the lovers of pictures under obligation to him for his liberality in giving them the opportunity to study works by Luys and Gallait of Belgium, Frère, Willems, Plassan, Gérôme, De Jonghe and other less known Frenchmen. Of these, the most remarkable were "the Minstrel" by Baron Luys, "the Prisoner's Voice" by Gallait, "the Turkish Butcher Boy" by Gérôme, "Lady and Pet Dog" by Willems, and "At Prayers" by De Jonghe. We very much regret that the high price which the cost of gold made it necessary to demand for Baron Luys' picture prevented its being purchased here. It was marked by all his peculiarities of thought and treatment, and increased our already high estimate of his ability. We regret that want of space forbids our writing of the whole collection at length.

MR. POWELL'S COMMISSION.

We share in the indignation and mortification which have found expression among intelligent people everywhere through the country, at the commission given to Mr. Powell by the late Congress to paint a picture "on some national subject," for which very indefinite performance he is to receive the snug little sum of twenty-five thousand dollars. A more palpable "job" was never pushed through Congress, and all the well-meant, zealous efforts of Mr. Sumner could not avail to avert the disaster of another picture in the Capitol by the painter of "De Soto discovering the Mississippi." That work is so discreditable to the man who could paint it, and to the people who could allow it to be bought, that we hoped, even to the last, that we might be saved from a repetition of the experiment. Mr. Powell, however, seems to be in favor at Washington, and we must, for the present, submit. The "De Soto" defaces the backs of a portion of our national notes; we wish that the canvas the new picture is to be painted on were as easily destroyed as they. Meanwhile, the people learn; and before many years all such painters as Mr. Powell will be driven to seek a living in some pursuit more respectable and more honestly remunerative than the practice of their so-called art.