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Society for the Advancement of TRUTH IN ART.

No. 12.] "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things that shall be hereafter." [April, 1864.

ART CRITICISM.

Criticism is something of which we hear so much, and which everybody who sees a picture so naturally indulges in, that it may be well to inquire whether there are any rules that should govern it, and what its foundations and just principles are. Criticism is not only a natural consequence of all art but it is a necessary concomitant to good art. The first picture ever painted must have provoked comparison to nature itself; and the second forced a comparison also with the first, and a judgment as to what art had accomplished and as to what it could yet do. Criticism is thus of importance to the artist as showing him whether he has done rightly, and,—for his shortcomings might make him almost despair,—as showing him whether his later picture is an advance upon his earlier, and what is his comparative rank among his fellow artists. The use of criticism in art, as in everything else, is to advance art. This is to be done by cool, considered, moderate judgments of the worth of works of art as answering the purposes of art, and as compared with the only recognized standard, nature. Faults should be pointed out and reprobated, beauties and excellences praised, without exaggeration and in the spirit of truth.

If criticism influences art, and if art can ever be improved by criticism it is necessary that critics be superior, or at least equal to the artists. The critic should know enough to point out to the artist his errors and mistakes, and should have artist-feeling enough to be able to sympathize with the artist and enter into the spirit of his work. And first of the latter. As art is a representation of the beautiful, the person who undertakes to judge art should have his soul permeated with the spirit of beauty and truth. He must have so much love for nature herself and for humanity and its feelings and sufferings as to advance with the artist himself, perceive his intention, and feel the force of the subject expressed by him.

It is very necessary to justice that the critic should try and put himself in the position of the artist, and endeavor to look at the subject from the same point of view. For a mistaken idea as to the aim and purpose of a picture or statue will cause one to judge it wrongly and untruly.

While no man can rightly judge a work of art, as a whole, without this love of and instinctive feeling for the beautiful, yet it is possible without it to judge and to judge rightly of details. A shoe-maker for example may be able to criticise properly the drawing of a shoe, and be wholly at fault as to the design and object of the picture. And while a person with mere knowledge may be able to decide on the value of

the picture as an expression of truth, unless he has this love and knowledge of the beautiful he can tell us nothing as to whether the picture is *great.*

Yet knowledge is quite as important as love. For a person of strong feelings and vivid imaginings is able to see the beautiful idea, but cannot see the bad expression. An execrable daub may suggest to him what the artist meant to express, and he will have in his mind's eye the scene not as it is on the canvass, but glorified and exalted beyond the representation. He therefore cannot rightly speak as to its excellence as art. He sees the spirit apart from the form, as the man of mere knowledge sees the form but not the spirit.

The knowledge which is so necessary for the true critic is not mere dead knowledge of so-called rules of art, and of formal canons of criticism, but a living acquaintance with facts and principles. He should have above all things a familiar and intimate knowledge of nature, and not only a practical knowledge to be gained by observation and experience but also a scientific knowledge. Geology and Botany will never come amiss when added to experience. Without such an acquaintance with nature how can any one dare to pass judgment on a painting of a landscape as to its truth or fidelity? In addition to this comes the knowledge of the history of art, and an acquaintance with all extant great works, a knowledge of styles and of masters, of schools, and examples. Next to this comes a knowledge of such arts or sciences as underlie the fine arts and upon which they are dependent. Thus for a correct appreciation of sculpture one should know something of anatomy, rightly to judge architecture one should understand physics and the art of building.

A knowledge of materials, of colors and processes, and even a considerable practical experience in their use and in the modes of production is advisable, and often indispensable; for unless we are acquainted thoroughly with the limitations of art, we frequently blame the producer where the material was alone at fault; we ask for impossible effects and do not take into consideration that nature is infinite but art finite. And if we may specially mention one thing more, for everything whether history, poetry, science or philosophy is of use to the critic, we should say that the meaning of the terms of art should be exactly known, and that they should be properly applied. In other words, before exercising the critical function one should learn the critical vocabulary.

But for all this the critic should not be an artist. The character of the artist or producer is entirely distinct from that of the critic or reflector. One uses reason where the other uses instinct. The artist's nature is internal, the critic's external. The artist doing that which he *feels* to be right can say that such and such a thing is good, but not why. He can affirm, but cannot reason. An artist as critic would be too apt to judge of other things by his own peculiar habits and methods and in accordance with his own peculiarities of style. He would be narrow-minded, whereas a real critic must have his mind broadened and enlarged by experience of all art.

But more than this, an artist could not speak with that independence and boldness which is one of the first requisites of a critic. No one could be so pure as to be utterly devoid of professional jealousy, or prejudice, or dislike. And even were he entirely unwarped and unbiased by friendship or prejudice, yet he could never exert an equal influence to an entirely unprofessional man, for suspicion would be sure to attach to all that he said. The critic must not only be, but must seem to be, above all personal influence of whatever sort. He has his duty which he owes to the public. And in its performance he will necessarily say many things which might perhaps offend those of his friends whose pictures came beneath his notice. What he has to say he must say without regard to the feelings of artists. His business is to criticise not men but their work. He is to be plain and sincere, and artists whose feelings are so tender as to be hurt by honest blame are not worth regarding. For, though sensibility is apt to produce sensitiveness, we hold that an artist is but as other men, and that no more allow-

ance is to be made to him for peculiar organization, than to any other author or producer. The critic must remember that what he has to do with is the picture and not the artist. While bestowing all his attention on the beauties and faults of the work he must not animadvert on the failings of its author. The critic is as a botanist with pictures for plants.

But the great mission of the critic is to teach the public to appreciate and regard art properly. The public exercise a great and controlling influence upon artists, and it is through the public that the critic has most influence upon art-work. The artists are a part of the public and to a certain extent share their feelings; and the law of demand and supply applies also to works of art. If the public art sentiment is debased, the art-productions will be destitute of merit. If the public appreciate what is true and good, artists will always appear who will endeavor to be truthful and faithful. The instruction of the public is then the great duty of the true critic, and by devoting himself to improving the public taste and knowledge, he in this way advances the cause of the beautiful and the true. In the performance of his duties it will be necessary for the critic to say many very disagreable things. He must regard truth above all other considerations, and must say what he knows and feels to be true, even though he be charged with arrogance and self-conceit. It is only those that know the right and dare maintain it who bear influence for good in the world.

We are all willing to admit an ignorance of science, and ready to be guided by those who have studied and thought on scientific subjects. But in art, most persons think that they have eyes of their own, and judgment of their own, and are willing to recognize no authority and even no superior intelligence. We do not believe in following strictly authority in matters of art or anything else, but all men should be willing to respect the knowledge which comes by study and experience, enough to think and look closely for themselves. To those who either have followed blindly the teachings of ordinary art-writers and adopted without question the conventional rules of art, or who insist exclusively on their own judgment and knowledge, what is said by him who is studious only for truth will without doubt be unpleasant. They will be obliged to begin again at the elements of their art-knowledge and learn all over.

The critic must disregard great names, judging solely of the works of artists by those laws which are founded only in nature. He must not recognize any fictitious reputation even though strengthened by the respect and admiration of centuries. For while in literature works overpraised by contemporaries are usually rated at their true worth by posterity, it is not so in art. Pictures which in some way have gained a great reputation, being still exposed in the galleries of princes, are so bepraised by their imitators and the crowd of shallow admirers, that it is considered a mark of ignorance and of want of taste to dare question their beauty. It is the fashion to admire certain painters who are called the old masters. Let him beware who offends the reigning taste. It is a duty of the critic to pull down such false reputations, provided they can be proved to rest on no basis. And in doing so not even the dead should be spared. As false glory dazzles, it should be put out. As false reputation misleads, it should be destroyed.

But while the critic is severe and earnest about what is wrong, he should praise and revere what is good. It is his privilege to add what he can to names already lustrous, if rightly so. If he discovers worth and greatness, whether known or unknown, he must praise and encourage it till others see and believe also. If he must pull down what is false, he must build up for others a reputation and a name which is true.

But criticism must not be made in a spirit of fault finding and disparagement. Let the critic blame where he must but praise where he can. Approbation ought to be more congenial to him than censure. Let him be charitable and not unkindly even when he disapproves. He may be severe, but he should not be petulant nor malicious. He must always remember that it is the advance of art which is his object, and his criticism must only

have that end. And that style of judgment which reasons and explains is more convincing and authoritative than that which only asserts, whatever may be the influence and power of its author.

It will probably be admitted by nearly every one that there are few critics who come up to the standard which we have set up. No one can on reflection be thoroughly satisfied with the prevalent style of judging and speaking of works of art. Artists themselves cannot, unless their food is flattery and they are become unwilling to hear candid judgments. The more intelligent of the public should not be contented with that from which they learn nothing, and from which they gain scarcely any intelligible ideas. Almost without exception the criticism which is published in our newspapers and journals is shallow, ignorant and partial. We know of but one paper where the notices of pictures are usually worth the paper they are printed on. The proprietors of journals are careful in the selection of their contributors who write on finance or military affairs or literature; but they receive and publish the productions of any one who can write pleasantly on art and who has some familiar acquaintance with artists and their studios—it matters not if he has a total ignorance of all that concerns the work spoken of, and is able to give no other opinions than those suggested by the artist himself. We have in mind one paper in this city, professing a great interest in literature and art, whose regular art-critic was a picture-broker. As might be expected, he praised up those pictures and those artists that he had an interest in to the exclusion and detriment of others. We hope, however, that the proprietors were not then aware that he was making their journal the medium of advertising his wares.

It is perhaps difficult, and certainly unpleasant for criticism to be impartial here. The contributors to the press are well known, and as art and literature are intimately connected, they have many associations with artists. Writers would perhaps refrain from speaking in terms of censure of the works of their acquaintances; and artists are often so unreasonable as to suppose that every one who condemns their work is actuated by malice or ill-feeling. A threatened loss of friendship prevents, and to our knowledge has prevented a just and fair criticism, and the critic is either silent about a picture which he disapproves of, or even speaks well of it.

We do not wish to make mere assertions. Let any one who reads an article on art or on a picture think and investigate, and he will soon find whether much knowledge of the subject is shown. We remember seeing in an evening paper, in an article written by one who is considered by some the best of our art-critics to prove that great poets always preceded great painters, the statements that Dante preceded Giotto—that Goldsmith preceded Gainsborough, that Wordsworth and Shelley both anticipated Turner. It is surprising that any one should make such statements, for every one knows that Dante and Giotto were bosom friends—that Goldsmith's poems were published when Gainsborough was reaching the zenith of his reputation. The growth of Wordsworth's and Turner's powers was almost simultaneous and some of Turner's greatest pictures were painted at about the same time that Shelley wrote his finest poems.

Another journal gravely advised its readers to buy engravings of the pictures of Theo. Hook, who was no artist but a humorous writer, and also of several *artists*, but from whose pictures unfortunately no engravings have ever been made. If critics considered good, make mistakes such as these, what must the inferior ones do? And if they thus err in matter of fact so easily ascertainable, what confidence can be placed in what else they say?

The notices of pictures which are published during the Exhibition of the Academy of Design, or after an Artist's Reception, are excellent examples of the prevailing style of criticism. There what seems especially desired is variety, and he who can discuss the greatest number of pictures with the most various epithets is the best critic. He will say that No. 1 is vigorous and effective; No. 2 is forcibly drawn; No. 3 is fresh and suggestive; No. 4 is marked

by great breadth of detail; the tone of No. 5 is very subdued; in No. 6 the artist has painted well the outside of the trunk but he has not given us the soul of the tree; and so on through the catalogue. There is not the slightest attempt to tell us what all this means or to give any reasons for such vague statements.

Technical terms of art are constantly abused and misused; none more frequently than *breadth* and *tone.* Breadth is sometimes made to mean distinctness of form, at others indistinctness and suggestiveness. Tone is properly the gradation of the tints in the picture; and a picture is in tone or rightly toned when it has the same gradation of lights and darks as is observed in nature. Tone is the relation of the parts of the picture, and is the same thing as the relation of one note to another in music. But as used by ordinary writers tone seems to have some relation to color, while in many instances it is impossible to tell what is meant by its use. If nothing else can be said about a picture, one can say its tone is disagreeable.

Greater knowledge and better application of terms is needed for good criticism, and also greater preliminary knowledge of facts. We once heard a critic of a daily paper say: "There is something wrong about that picture. Those cows are either badly drawn or badly painted, I can't tell which." If this person had looked a little at cows in the living state before attempting to decide, his judgment would probably have been sounder.

Another great fault in criticism is to judge of a picture by the emotions and thoughts which it excites. The feelings which a work of art produces may serve to illustrate and explain some particular statement with regard to it, but ought never to be considered a sufficient test of its merit. The association of ideas is dependent on the slightest circumstances; and if there be one well drawn or well colored object in a picture which suggests a train of thought and fancy in harmony with the subject, is the whole picture therefore good?

It is a very false and wrong method of criticism to blame one thing for not being another. But it is a common thing to find fault with a work of art because it is not of a kind or style which it was never intended to be. It is a last resource to say, "Yes it is all very well, but what would Turner have done," or "how very differently would Mr. Church have painted this."

And the most contemptible mode of criticism is the invention and use of ludicrous epithets and comparisons, as to say that A.'s picture is like a piece of calico, or B.'s church is like a piece of beefsteak. To sacrifice truth to an epigram is always an act of injustice. Anything which is ridiculous is always remembered, and will cause persons to discover faults when they saw none before. This is a misuse of criticism.

Literary ability is not a mark of critical ability. Fluency of language and ease of recording opinion does not add to their worth. Better a just criticism in crude English, than a hasty or ill found judgment expressed in an elegant style.

Having set thus high the standard of a true critic, we may be accused of arrogance if we ourselves undertake to pass judgment on the works of artists. We can only say that whenever we criticise we shall endeavor to be strictly impartial and have in view only the truth. Our knowledge may be limited and our judgment feeble, but we shall try to speak plainly of what we do know, and to investigate what we do not. The common sense of the reader is what we appeal to for the correctness of our decisions. The higher we aim, the nearer we shall probably come to the mark.

Eugene Benson

THE LIMITS OF MEDIÆVAL GUIDANCE.

> "We do not serve the dead—the past is past!
> God lives, and lifts His glorious mornings up
> Before the eyes of men, awake at last.
>
> *Casa Guidi Windows, Mrs. Browning.*

THE reform movements of the modern Pre-Raphaelites has been mistaken for an attempted revival of mediæval Art. The mistake is made by persons wholly ignorant of the spirit, both of mediæval and of modern Pre-Raphaelite Art. To thoughtless minds the term "Pre-Raphaelite" might, at first, appear to indicate a retrograde movement; but we find men who are not considered thoughtless or unintelligent in these matters falling into the same error, whether from honest shallowness of perception, or from wilful obstinacy, I do not attempt to determine.

Prof. Hart, of the Royal Academy of England, closes a lecture before the students of that Institution, by referring "to an eccentric art-course, which has been the subject of some conflicting opinions of late." He goes on to say, "There have been periods in the History of Art, as in Letters, when certain minds, as if wearied, under some morbid influence, with the contemplation of high models, have chosen to fall back on some earlier condition of progress, and perversely taken up a backward starting-point, from whence a portion of the road to excellence was needlessly to be traveled over again. Of all the forms of eccentricity into which the love of paradox and the passion for novelty are apt to seduce mankind, this is surely one of the most illogical and uneconomical. If the servile imitation of even perfect models be, as I have said, a thing to be shunned, what shall we say to an imitation which deliberately selects for its models comparative imperfection? The disciples of this school of artists flourish on contradictions. They seek to become conspicuous by a dip among the shadows of the earlier centuries. Their attempt at novelty is made by a return to what is ancient. The bad thus made new they exalt above the beauty that has grown old; and they challenge the logic of the schools in the name of an anachronism."

It is an old maxim that men should speak of that only concerning which they are informed; yet, alas! how little is this regarded by a teacher or required by his hearers. It seems almost absurd to suppose that a professor of the Royal Academy should be ignorant of early Italian art; much more of the modern Pre-Raphaelite work immediately around him. Yet, if we are to judge from his own words, he is totally ignorant of both.

Modern Pre-Raphaelite art is as far from being an imitation of early Italian art, as light is from darkness. Mr. Ruskin, in a note to his Pamphlet on Pre-Raphaelitism, says: "The current fallacy of society, as well as of the press, was, that the Pre-Raphaelites imitated the *errors* of early painters. A falsehood of this kind could not have obtained credence anywhere but in England, few English people, comparatively, having ever seen a picture of early Italian masters. If they had, they would have known that the Pre-Raphaelite pictures are just as superior to the early Italian in skill of manipulation, power of drawing and knowledge of effect, as inferior to them in grace of design; and that, in a word, there is not a shadow of resemblance between the two styles. The Pre-Raphaelites imitate no pictures: they paint from nature only."

The young men of England who started this movement called themselves "Pre-Raphaelite" because they saw that the painters of that period were actuated by worthiness of aim and put their whole strength into their work. It was the *spirit* of the early workmen that they resolved should actuate them, (i. e. the spirit of truth.) The *manifestation* of that spirit they knew of course would be as different in the nineteenth century from what it was in the fourteenth, as the institutions and requirements of the respective ages differ. The new movement is directed against conventional shallowness and imbecile affectation,—it is a

stern appeal to truth. Whatever a man does with his whole strength, provided his motive be worthy, will be good and useful. If a man have high artistic talent or genius, his work will be valuable in the degree in which he worthily applies his whole strength. First the earnest purpose, then the calm, deliberate, persevering effort.

It seems plain enough that upon these principles alone, can any noble art exist, yet it is just as true that during the last three centuries the arts have been governed by principles directly opposite to these.

From the time of Giotto in the early part of the fourteenth century, to the time of Raphael at the close of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, art was the true expression of the delight of sincere minds in God's truth. Awkward in expression as their works were at first, yet the intense purpose and graceful conception could never be mistaken by a mind capable of receiving noble emotion. By degrees they became more skilful in the science of art and it is interesting to note the progress of the technical part so long as it was kept rightly subordinate to the proper motive. But finally pride came in the way and soon destroyed the purity of art and reduced it to a minister to low passions. As greater mechanical skill was acquired the artist began to exult in his achievements, and thus what before was noble as a means became contemptible as an end; moreover, these technical acquirements, instead of being rightly employed upon noble religious subjects, were brought into the service of profane themes, a love of which had been inspired by unintelligent study of classical art.

It is important to understand that the degradation of art began when the artist began to glory *in himself*,—when he began to feel pride in his own skill and used every means to display it above all else.

It is a great mistake to suppose, as many do, that it was the increasing knowledge and love for nature that caused the decline of early art. It was the intense feeling for nature and truth of fact which the early painters displayed under all their awkwardness, that constituted their greatness. Their expression of certain *external* truths were less skillful than in more modern times, yet the grace and truth of the spirit of their work has not been equaled except perhaps in one or two instances of the modern Pre-Raphaelite work. Giotto was a naturalist, Leonardo Da Vinci was a naturalist, Paul Veronese was a naturalist. No mistake can therefore be greater than to suppose that natural truth degraded the school. Rio, in his "Poetry of Christian Art" says "Naturalism was the cause of the degradation of early Italian Art:" but the truth is that it was *pride* of naturalism together with sensualism.

Now if we study early Italian Art carefully we shall find that it is remarkable above all else for *truth*. And if we study modern Pre-Raphaelite or Naturalistic Art carefully we shall find it chiefly remarkable for truth. So that in this the schools are alike, though the difference between the two in manifestation of truth could not be conceived except it were seen.

In writing of "Giotto and his works in Padua" Mr. Ruskin says,—"The Giottesque movement in the fourteenth, and the Pre-Raphailite movement in the nineteenth centuries, are precisely similar in bearing and meaning, both being the protests of vitality against mortality, of spirit against letter, and of truth against tradition: and both, which is the more singular, literally links in one unbroken chain of feeling, for exactly as Nicola Pisano and Giotto were helped by the classical sculptures discovered in their time, the P. R.'s have been helped by the works of Nicola and Giotto at Pisa and Florence: and thus the fiery cross of truth has been delivered from spirit to spirit over the dust of intervening generations."

Pre-Raphaelite art stands preeminent for truth of conception; it remains for modern art to unite singleness of aim and purity of earnest purpose with the acquirements of modern science.*

Modern P. R. art is not an attempted revival of mediæval art; there is a vast difference between servilely imitating and wisely profiting by the spirit of its teachings. We want the mediæ-

* I use the word science only as concerned with art,—The science of aspects and the mere technical part.

val spirit of fervor—that pure faith in divine things, in place of our shallow hypocrisy and infidelity. In the old time the painter considered his office to be that of a spiritual teacher, hence the words of Buffalmacco, a pupil of Giotto:—"We painters occupy ourselves entirely in tracing saints on the walls and on the altars in order that by this means men, to the great despite of the demons, may be more drawn to virtue and piety." At the same time the painters established a confraternity and held meetings "to offer up thanks and praises to God."

Since these early times art has improved in outward show, but has grown hollow within. As the apparel of the body became more gorgeous the ornaments of the soul were suffered to tarnish and grow dim. We have the lamps most beautifully polished, but they contain no oil. And religious art has become like a "whited sepulchre."

The great lesson that we moderns learn from the early men is truth of aim. Beyond this we may not safely go with them. If we attempt to follow further we become false to the first principle. It does not follow that because we love their work we must follow their modes of expression. As soon as we do this we become slaves to error,—our aim is no longer for truth, and we shall be following in the path of those who cannot see or feel for themselves.

Our work ought not to look anything like early art. We do not live under the same circumstances as those early men. We cannot honestly paint the kind of subjects that they did; for we have no belief in the superstitions which actuated them. Of all varieties of affectation, this is the most easily seen through by any one who thinks at all in the matter, and for this reason the works of Overbeck and Ary Sheffer and a host of other misguided enthusiasts of later times will stand to the world as long as they last monuments of hypocrisy. "Every painter ought to paint what he himself loves, not what others have loved; if his mind be pure and sweetly toned, what he loves will be lovely; if otherwise, no example can guide his selection no precept govern his hand." Let each one use his own faculties and

> "Through the blue Immense,
> Strike out, all swimmers! Cling not in the way
> Of one another, so to sink; but learn
> The strong man's impulse, catch the fresh'ning
> spray."

NOTICES OF RECENT PICTURES.

Bierstadt's "Rocky Mountains."

Mr. Bierstadt's much talked-of picture of Rocky Mountain Scenery, after having been shown for one evening to a few invited guests, and, then, snatched away to Boston where it was the object during several weeks of an almost unprecedented *furore*, has at last been unveiled to the long expecting New York public. It is at present going through the ceremonies of exhibition and puffery preparatory to being engraved, which have now become settled by prescription, and with which all New Yorkers are thoroughly familiar; the upholsterer has done his work, the tin lorgnettes and the magnifying glass have been duly provided, the puff-disinterested has been written, printed on the sheet of letter-paper that etiquette prescribes, and distributed, and the gentleman-in-waiting stands ready, at all hours, to enter in his subscription-book the names of those who desire to add this combined result of Mr. Bierstadt's genius and Mr. Smillie's talent, to their plethoric portfolios.

We have no desire to satirize what, no doubt, has been found, by experience, to be the best way of managing the business of selling pictures. But, still, when we see this vast machinery of advertisement and puffery put in motion, and on an equally ponderous scale for all sorts of pictures, good, bad and indifferent, we cannot help contrasting the new way with the old, and wishing that we had a man strong enough to draw the world to him and make it seek him out, instead of there being need of all this apparatus to force the world to look at what it would often never seek of its own will. When the

people of Florence poured out of their houses with joyous cries—so joyous indeed, that, ever since that day, the street is called the Joyful Quarter—to see Cimabaie's Madonna, then for the first time uncovered, the *furore* was occasioned, not by an elaborate series of preliminary puffs but, by the picture itself, which, to the Florentines of that age, appeared little less than divine. Our artists are unwilling to trust their works to the popular verdict. They have no faith in the judgments of the masses, but, they have a most unbounded faith in its gullibility. They have learned that by the assistauce of well-adjusted draperies, innumerable tin tubes, nicely printed critical-descriptive sheets of letter-paper—the public can be made to see no difference between "Final Harvests," "Rocky Mountains," "Niagaras," and "Marie Antoinettes Leaving Judgment-halls." That is, they think they have learned it; but, we advise them, in a spirit of the sincerest friendship, to trust less and less to the ignorance of the public, to put as little faith as possible in machinery, and to bend all their energies to painting good pictures that people must admire, whether they will or no.

In justice to Mr. Bierstadt, we must say, that we do not intend these remarks to apply to the exhibition of his pictures more than to any other. There has been puffery, there has been management, there have been devices to rouse and stimulate public curiosity in his case but, although great praise would be due to the artist who should refuse to have his name associated with such proceedings—yet, as things are arranged just now, there is no more blame attaches to Mr. Bierstadt for his connivance in this system—if connivance there were—than to Mr. Church, Mr. Palmer, Mr. Lang or Mr. Oertel who, with as many others as were able, have done the same thing. Our remarks are aimed at the system itself, which we think has reached the *rank* of an organized nuisance, and we call upon all artists who wish to elevate their profession above that of the showman, to help us abate it.

Without any puffery, and with only the advertisement in the public journals absolutely necessary to inform people where they could see the picture, this work of Mr. Bierstadt's would undoubtedly have attracted a good deal of attention. It professes to give a faithful report of the scenery of a part of our country about which we know little or nothing. It transports us from the tamer scenery of our hills and meadows to a land of gigantic mountains, glacier fields, cascades and virgin forests. On entering this region, we leave behind us all that we know of civilization, and set foot on those enchanted plains where the Indian yet lives in pristine simplicity, hunting, fishing and worshipping in the narrow verge to which the cruel rigor of the whites has pushed him. So great a charm have mere grandeur of landscape, apart from all human associations, and the word "the West"—to the mass of our people, especially to the young, that this picture must inevitably have been run after and praised, even if, instead of being a reasonably good piece of work, as it is, it had been as bad as one of Cole's or Durand's masterpieces.

Mr. Bierstadt has shown a greater power of filling a large canvas with interesting matter than any man we have yet had. In this respect, he is very far superior to Mr. Church, who never knows what to do with his foreground, and, so, generally contrives not to have any. But, as far as the mere mechanical art of laying on color is concerned, Mr. Church is far more dexterous. He could not, perhaps, have made his mountains look as high as Bierstadt's, but, they would not have showed the marks of the brush so unpleasantly. It would have been all well enough, if the marks of the brush had, by dexterous handling, been made to stand for scarp and fissure, crag and cranny, but, as it is, we have only too little geology and too much bristle. Still, there is no doubt that we do get an impression of very high mountains from this picture, and, if the detail is far less satisfactory than might be wished, we will hope that study and labor will add this excellence in time to works of this artist yet to be painted. We would rather, as a promise, have his ability to represent mountain hight, and wait for the details which time and work and knowledge can add

to that, than to have another man's elaborate detail and more dexterous work, without the sense of hight, which no labor nor skill can ever help a man to attain, if he have it not by nature.

But, when the best has been said, we must still regard this work as immature, and on too pretentious a scale. The ambition of our young artists is leading them to attempt impossibilities. They attack in holiday mood, what should only be approached as serious and weighty enterprises. What a giant like Turner only undertook after years of toil that seems to us almost superhuman, these young men paint with a want of preparation, of study, of experience, and an easy nonchalance, the result of which, if it satisfies them shows a shallowness very bad to contemplate, and if it should satisfy us would show that we have studied nature to very little purpose, and art to as little.

Twenty times the study that the artist has given to this picture,—study represented by actual sketches, built upon a previous ten years, at least, of absorbing toil given to various branches of his art, would not have justified him in attempting to fill so large a canvas in such a way that the poet, the naturalist and the geologist might have taken large pleasure from it. And, even if he knew all that Turner knew, he could have put upon a canvas one sixth as large, enough to have brought the world to his doors. We have one man in this country,—John Henry Hill,—who can paint a mountain as we believe no other man living can paint one; but, he can do it as well on a hand-breadth of paper, as on a canvas the size of a house. The Creator of the mountain can paint it on the disk of the retina, and the artist to whom He communicates a portion of His creative, poetic power, knows small and great only as relative terms. We wish, heartily, that our young men would not be so greedy for money or as eager for notice as to make them exhibit the immature work of their hands with the facility which is getting to be so common; and we wish, moreover, that they would believe that the maturity of their power can be as well proved by a small work as by a large one.

The best part of this picture is the episode of Indian Life in the foreground. It is very interesting and very valuable. It is a subject not beyond the artist's powers, carefully and faithfully painted from actual sketches, or, directly from the objects themselves.

CROPSEY'S "CORFE CASTLE."

Corfe Castle is a village in Dorsetshire, England, of no interest or importance to anybody in the world but to its own inhabitants and the tax-gatherer. A little, dull English hamlet with two streets and not quite two thousand inhabitants; houses built of stone and covered with tiles; a church with a good tower; a parish school, where the children learn their catechisms, and as little else as possible; no newspaper, no library,—nothing? Yes; the castle, from which the village takes its name; a picturesque ruin, which, we suppose, drew the artist off the beaten track to fix it on his canvas, or in his sketch-book. The castle has played its part in English history, and seen notable events. It was in the forest-park that surrounded it, that in the year 979, or thereabouts, young Edward of England, called, from his innocence and tragic death, the Martyr, was hunting, when he left his companions to ride to the castle, and visit his little half-brother Ethelred, who, with his mother—Edward's cruel and ambitious step-mother—lived there, nursing, in her dark heart, plans to get the throne for her son. Every child remembers, how she came forth smiling, to meet her royal child-guest, and how her attendants, doing her wicked will, stabbed him in the back even while he was drinking from the cup which he had taken from her hands; and how, faint from loss of blood, he was dragged at the heels of his frightened horse, across the bridge that spans the moat, and found by his companions in the tangled thicket where he had crawled and died. There stands the bridge in Mr. Cropsey's picture, as it is to-day, and the same, doubtless that more than eight centuries ago, witnessed the bloodiest deed that had been done among the English people since first they came into the land of Britain.

And, later, this same castle witnessed other memorable scenes; for Lady Bankes stoutly defended it for six weeks against Charles I; and in 1645 Fairfax dismantled it, and left it in the state in which we see it now.

To a student of English history, then, this landscape must possess considerable interest, and we are glad to see so faithful a picture of a place of which we have often read. But, we wish it could have fallen into other hands than those of Mr. Cropsey, because his sense of color is so defective or,—for there is nothing negative about it—so positively bad, that we look at his pictures with great unwillingness. There are few of our artists who could compose a better landscape than this one, or treat it with more truth to the facts of the situation; the drawing of the castle and houses, and the general perspective is excellent, but, the execution of the whole is so coarse and daubed, and the want of feeling for all that is delicate and tender so grievously prominent, that these merits pass for much less than they really are. And, to crown all, we have to bear, if we will insist on studying the picture, the infliction of a chord of color—if color it can be called—which is utterly shocking. We are sometimes tempted to doubt, when we see such a performance, whether the artist ever painted a stroke out of doors; whether the blue of the sky, the beryl of the water, the dolphin tints of the sunset, the pearly iridescence of sunrise—whether flowers and gems, and birds and shells, and all the sweet and noble colors of nature, must not give actual physical pain to one who can, wilfully, sit down before a scene like this, and see the face of nature so daubed with clay and brick-dust as he has shown it, here. Is this all that he has brought us from England? Can her landscapes, which yielded such wealth of subject to the mind of Turner, do no more for him? If so, better not to paint at all?

For, even if the color could be forgiven, which *we* cannot do though others may—there is the same insensibility to the beauties of form;—as there is no gradation of tints, but only the raw, earth-born hues, in as violent contrast as clod can bear to clod, so there is no thoughtful or instinctive arrangement of lines or curves; no truth of detail, anywhere, from the huge blackberry leaves in the foreground, out of all proportion, to the trees, that never grew, nor could have grown; nothing, in short, but the clumsiest daubing in of conventional forms that have done duty in the old school so long they have earned a right, the artist seems to think, to do him duty to the end.

We protest against such pictures as this. We heartily wish the day were come—but, will it ever come?—when people would refuse to look at them, much less consent to buy them; when the press would have the grace to be silent, if it could not speak the honest truth about them; and the artist, discouraged, would turn to some employment that would earn him bread without the necessity of inflicting unmerited pain on his fellow creatures.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUDIES FROM NATURE.

We announced, in the numbers for February and March, that we should publish a series of photographs from studies by men of the Realist School, as soon as enough subscriptions should be received to warrant the undertaking.

The price at which this journal is published does not enable us to give illustrations, though we constantly feel the need of them. On this account we proposed to issue these photographs, at an extra charge, believing them to be the only reliable means of illustrating the processes of study which we advocate.

It gives us great pleasure to announce that the photographs, ten in number, are now being prepared by Maurice Stadtfeldt, photographer, and that they will be ready by the twentieth of the present month.

The following are the titles of some of the series:

"Spring Weeds," from a pencil drawing by T. C. Farrer.
"Ferns," from a pencil drawing by H. R. Newman.
"Study of Dog's Head," from a painting by R. T. Pattison.
"Cedar Tree," from a pen drawing by C. H. Moore.
"Mandrakes," from a pencil drawing by C. H. Moore.
"Gone! Gone!" from a painting by T. C. Farrer.
"Yellow Water Lily," from a sepia drawing by T. C. Farrer.
"Mulleins," from a pen drawing by J. Henry Hill.
——— from a painting by W. T. Richards.
——— from a painting by W. T. Richards.

These photographs will be mounted on card-board, of uniform size, fourteen by twenty-two inches. The price of the set is six dollars; of single copies, seventy-five cents. Specimens can be seen at the store of A. Brentano, 708 Broadway, where sets and single copies can be procured. Orders from out of town should be sent to the Editor of the *New Path*.

The photographs will be furnished to subscribers in the order of their subscriptions. To subscribers out of the city, they will be sent by express. No photographs will be sent until the money shall have been received.

TO SUBSCRIBERS.

As the May number will commence the second volume, subscribers are notified that a new subscription book will be made up and no names will be entered until the price of subscription for the ensuing year shall have been received. Any omission to remit the same will be considered a notice to cease sending THE NEW PATH, after April, 1864.

THE NEW PATH has been enlarged, during the present year, from 12 to 16 pages, and will continue to be of that size. Additional improvements will be made to the second volume.

The first Volume, bound in cloth, will soon be ready. Copies will be sent by mail, post-paid, on the receipt of one dollar and forty cents.

THE NEW PATH is issued monthly. Subscription price one dollar a year. Single copies ten cents. Subscriptions and communications should always be addressed to THE NEW PATH, Box 4740 New York. The agent for the sale of single copies at retail is *August Brentano*, 708 Broadway, New York, who always has back numbers.

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