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THE NEW PATH.

VOL. II.] MAY, 1865. [NO. 5.

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

(*Continued from page* 62.)

IT is generally the purchaser's fault if such furniture as we have been describing fills his house with its wretched *débris*. The dealers can hardly be blamed for supplying the demand. And the demand is for furniture that shall be cheap and shall look elegant and costly. This the dealer supplies. There is no falsehood even in the assurance, as he commonly gives it, that such a piece of furniture is well made. By the cabinet maker's standard, probably it is. And that this standard is so low is, of course, the fault of the careless purchaser, whose blind acceptance of bad material and workmanship and unwillingness to pay for good are helping to prevent us from rediscovering the lost art of decoration.

Observe, that slightness of work is not peculiar to inexpensive furniture. None of the furniture kept for sale is rightly made. Durability, as our ancestors understood it, is not dreamed of. No cabinet-maker proposes to himself any such thoroughness. The art of making furniture to last a generation uninjured does not exist in the trade. The most honorable and ambitious furniture dealer, most desirous to oblige a personal friend and good customer, and promising the best possible materials and workmanship, will fail to make a table or a bureau fit to use. The traditions of the trade prescribe such a method of joining, such a use of wood, such an application of carved ornament; all these empirical rules being as injurious as possible, and completely barring the workshops where our furniture is made against the entrance of any true workmanlike feeling and pride of skilful craftsmanship. Observe, it is not that makers of furniture are ignorant of good construction. Probably foremen of furniture shops can be found who know how to frame wood together in the strongest way. We have seen the ash frame-work for a stuffed lounge rightly made, because this piece of construction was to be covered up and hidden from sight by curled hair, spiral springs and tufted rep, and because instinct and teaching united to show what system would be strongest. But fancied requirements of design—traditions of the trade—prevent the workman from doing anything so natural when the work is in rosewood and to be seen. And, observe, it is not that makers of furniture are unusually dull to understand or slow to act; they have no inducement to raise the standard. Why should a fashionable dealer make furniture to last fifty years, when he knows that all those of his customers who buy the best furniture he makes will require new furniture in fifteen years, because of changes of fashion? We see the same mischievous tendency in other things besides furniture. The merchant who builds himself a city house can hardly expect to die in it, unless he should die soon, for society will require of him a different sort of outside before twenty years pass away. Therefore, city houses of the best class are but weakly built; city houses of a

lower class are worse built; and the country follows the city implicitly in methods of construction and quality of work.

These reasons for the bad construction of expensive furniture apply to cheaper furniture as well, with reasons additional. The general tendency in cheap things to be imitative of costly things is nowhere worse in its effects than in the case before us. It is this imitation which mainly tends to make cheap furniture the worthless thing it is. Costly furniture can at least be used; cheap ware cannot, with any comfort;—cannot long be used, at all. Were there no attempt at such imitation as we have mentioned, though knavish dealers would still try to pass off slight work as thorough, they could not so often succeed. The veneering, and shaping, and varnish, which make up the poor semblance of rich and costly work, so dazzle the careless purchaser that he cannot see the still very visible defects in workmanship. Or, if he sees, he does not perceive. What clearness of bodily sight would enable an ordinary buyer of furniture to see the worthlessness of that with which all his friends are well content? Moreover, the money which is wasted on the adornment of cheap furniture,—for even poor veneering ill applied, and machine-made ornaments attached by glue, cost money,—is needed to pay for durability. In the most elegant furniture there is no such limitation, there is no reason for poor work except the non-demand for good; but, in the stock of the great popular furniture dealers, low cost has been, necessarily, a consideration, and the first consideration, and every dollar wasted on foolish and valueless adornment, if not so appropriated, would be left to pay for good workmanship and well-selected wood.

Poor workmanship makes poor art. Good design will not often be found married to bad manufacture. Charis was wife to Vulcan, king of artificers, not to a worse smith than he. Persistent, uniform bad work would ruin and banish the best art. And this, for two reasons. The artist cannot give his heart and his strength to that which is not to endure. One Angelo may carve a statue of snow, as one Cleopatra may pledge her lover in dissolved pearls, but the artist cannot, as the woman will not, lavish his wealth continually on that which is but momentary and is speedily gone; and, perhaps, it was not his best statue nor her most precious pearls. We hope to see some workman throwing a little thought into his work, and shaping or carving his bit of wood into a form which will have some meaning and appropriateness. The first solidly-made book-case may not show any unusual merit except great care and accurate nicety of finish; but the second one may, very likely, exhibit something more than this, some idea or some fancy. Let us once get that and we shall get the whole. But we shall not get that while the workman thinks that his work will need repair in two years and annually thereafter, and that its whole life will be shorter than what remains of his own.

But there is another reason why bad work makes bad art. All good design is constructive. All good adornment grows naturally out of the structure, or, if it be of such high rank that it comes, like a painting into a chamber, demanding a place for its proper display, at least it does not contradict the structure. But most furniture must always be made beautiful without the aid of art of a high rank, and the design of such furniture must be the suggestion and result of the actual structure. The writer in the *Cornhill*, stating the case with extreme moderation, alludes to "the careful concealment of the structure" of fashionable furniture, which, he truly

says, is "a fatal mistake in the design of all useful objects." Certainly it is; the careful concealment of its structure would spoil the design of anything. It has long been held a positive law of architecture that construction, far from being concealed, should be displayed and decorated. Any school of building which has disregarded this law has been artistically valueless and has come to nought. In like manner the disregard of constructive design so evident in all our furniture, is a sufficient explanation of its general poverty and feebleness.

Some of the really cheap and utterly unpretending furniture which upholsterers ignore is really good. When anything is so humble that no one desires to make it elegant and tasteful, and which, consequently, is left to show just how it is made, we have the best result now possible to any furniture of the shops. Notice the plain white kitchen table, with four square legs slightly tapered, and smooth top, kept bright as a frigate's deck by constant scrubbing; that is a friendly and pleasant piece of furniture, not handsome, but not ugly, easily to be made handsome, and already better worth a place in a palace than the best marble-topped parlor table of rosewood that a fashionable shop can furnish. The plain white ironing table, a box below, a seat upon the box, the table top tipped upright, forming a back to the seat, until it is adjusted on a Tuesday for ironing; this convenience is often good in design, proving that our carpenters have the sense of beauty, and can use it when it is not forbidden by custom and desire of display. The white pine stand of a chestnut seller in Wall street is shapely, and each end is decorated with a good pierced pattern. The Kentucky chair, and its brother in appearance, the Mayflower chair, are admirable; they are made entirely of round sticks, the two which make the hind legs and back slightly curved, but all the others straight and plain and smooth; the seat of rushes, woven strongly, like cloth, and as white as they can be bleached. These chairs really are made in Kentucky and elsewhere in the West; they are of several sizes, and are the best chairs for many domestic purposes which can be procured; but the buyer should, in almost every case, saw off from a quarter to a half of an inch of the length of the hinder legs. The common office chair, of painted wood, with back and arms in one rounding sweep, though not graceful in its forms, is yet an honest and solid chair, not inappropriate in design. The better class of chairs of the same kind, those of walnut or oak, with woven cane seat, are a natural modification, and are good furniture enough, though needing various iron strengtheners to be properly durable. Some of the cane furniture, now so common, is very pleasant, constructed with great ingenuity, and often graceful in form and prettily varied in color. The common camp-chair is excellent, and has a flavor about it of the ancient and most honorable faldstool or *faudesteuil*, descended from the thing, while a word of different significance, *fauteuil*, is descended from the name. This camp chair, when luxuriously ample and provided with back and arms, is a favorite seat with many persons, in spite of its habit of groaning and cracking beneath the weight of the sitter. The new modifications of it;—one very popular in the army, which shuts from front to back instead of sideways, and which folds into smaller compass than any other kind of portable chair; another a much admired and really comfortable seat for sewing and reading at ease, with back a hollow quarter-cylinder;—are all good, because simply made of straight sticks, and can only be made faulty by some gratuitous falsehood added, which we sometimes, though rarely, see.

All these examples are of the cheaper and simpler kinds of furniture. We have seen reason to believe that more elaborate and expensive furniture is always tasteless and objectionable. The habit is so confirmed of utterly disregarding the make of the thing, and conceiving the whole as cut, somehow, out of one homogeneous piece, that it is accident or the direct imitation of some good piece of old work, which alone can give us furniture of good design for the drawing-room. You can often buy a table of sixteenth-century design, the edge decorated with a cable moulding, the four stout legs carved into graceful twisted columns, the whole solid and firm,—though not really well constructed nor likely to last a long time,—of picked walnut, not varnished. The danger is that the carver, who has perfectly well twisted the legs, will try also to carve the sides of the top rail with leaves and flowers; if he do, he will probably spoil all, for his skill will not be sufficient to give such delicacy to this work as it needs, nor his knowledge sufficient to make it otherwise than a caricature of nature.

Fashionable furniture is not always, however, equally bad. The sofas, for instance, of a few years ago, those with a high rounded back at each end and a low back between, were as detestable in design as anything can be; while those now to be bought, with the whole frame of the fabric visible, the cushions subordinate, and those of the back and seat separated by an open space, are so much better, that we hardly dare hope that the intelligent public which approved the others will also receive these.

But, better or worse, pretty in shape or ridiculously deformed, sensibly made or weak and monstrous, none of the furniture that we can buy is designed on the safe principle of exhibiting and making the most of the construction. At present the thought and care of a workman are to conceal, to deceive, to try to mislead the public into some false belief as to the way wooden utensils are made.

When the cabinet makers begin to look with some reverence on their trade, and to design wooden articles as if they were not ashamed of their being wood, they will find themselves capable of doing better work than they have ever done, and, thereafter, they will daily do better. They will then have good precedents to go upon, as well, for they will be surprised to find that they are producing Gothic furniture.

Says our writer in the *Cornhill:*

"The growing taste for mediæval art in England has induced a feeling for what Pugin called the 'true principles' of design. There is no reason why these principles should not be applied to the simplest articles of domestic use. But this idea has never been carried out by any tradesman. The so-called Gothic furniture which is occasionally exposed for sale is at once needlessly elaborate, cumbrous and expensive. What is wanted is a class of goods which shall be designed by those who have really made a study of decorative art, and which, while it meets the requirements of the present age in point of convenience, will also bear competition with ordinary furniture in regard to price."

That which mediæval art has taught the English, it would be well if we also could learn. Since the opportunities afforded us are less ample than those which Europeans enjoy, it becomes us to use them carefully. There is mediæval furniture remaining in Europe, of all ages, from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries; of all qualities, from the humblest kitchen utensil to the lordly dais-settle; of all materials and for all purposes. Illustrated manuscripts also afford abundant examples, adding greatly to our knowledge and resources. And all this great store of old furniture and utensils is most valuable to the modern workman and designer, for therein is a

school of decorative and constructive art nowhere else to be found and which nothing else could replace.

These treasures, very recently unvalued, except by a few antiquaries, and not understood by those few, have now their recognized importance in the kingdom of art, and begin even to be studied. They are scattered throughout Europe; the largest part in museums, either public or belonging to wealthy collectors; many in the sacristies of churches, the treasuries of cathedrals and the refectories of convents; some few in the hands of those who have inherited them with their family estates. It would be a great labor for any one to gain, by his own investigations, anything like a complete knowledge of the possessions of Europe of such mediæval relics. It is evident how valuable would be a collection of accurate representations, with descriptions and measurements, and histories, where possible, of all the important articles. It is evident how valuable must be even a partial collection of such representations and accounts.

This is supplied by the work of M. Viollet-le-Duc, of which the title is given above. It is a guide to those uncollected and uncatalogued treasures. In respect to ordinary furniture, *meubles*, it is the first in the field. The iron-work, *orfévrerie*, jewelry, decorative painting, mosaics, stained glass, book-binding, ivory carving and enamelling in metal of the Middle Ages, have all been illustrated, more or less completely, while the wooden furniture and common utensils have scarcely been noticed. The book before us undertakes to supply this deficiency, and does it admirably well. It covers the whole ground. There is first the Dictionary, beginning with *Armoire* and ending with *Voile*, nearly every article illustrated with woodcuts, and some, as *Armoire*, *Coffret*, *Lit*, *Lutrin*, *Reliquaire* and others, with full-page engravings, etchings or chromo-lithographs. Then follow chapters entitled *Résumé Historique*, *Vie Publique de la Noblesse Féodale*, *Vie Privée de la Noblesse Féodale*, *Vie Privée de la Haute Bourgeoisie*, and *Conclusion*.

The Dictionary of Architecture, by the same author, is much better known in this country than the book of which we are speaking. Those who know the marvellously expressive, intelligible, instructive woodcuts of that noble book can imagine how useful are the pictures in this.

There have been illustrations, before this book, of single pieces of furniture, deemed of sufficient importance to be allowed place in works devoted to mediæval architecture. Many of these have been well represented, on a larger scale, indeed, than the pictures in the *Dictionnaire*, and with equal accuracy. The magnificent Retabulum of Westminster, of which two illustrations are given by M. Viollet-le-Duc, has also been given in the latest edition of G. G. Scott's work on Westminster Abbey; and, where the two renderings differ, as they do in minor points not affecting the design, strict accuracy is with the English version. Of all the wood-carving represented in the book before us, there is nothing that can compare in richness and variety with the magnificent stalls from Erfurt, of which faithful drawings are given in R. Norman Shaw's invaluable book, "Sketches on the Continent." But this *Dictionnaire Raisonné* is the first book in which any system is observed, any satisfactory analysis and history given, any attempt made to do for the furniture what has been done so well for the building of the Middle Ages—to ascertain and declare the principles of its construction and decoration. It is true that a student of mediæval art can collate facts from widely separated and differing sources of information; but this is impossible to

persons whose work is in other departments, and the book before us is principally for them. Consider, for instance, those pictures in this book which are taken from mediæval manuscripts, not in fac simile, but "*rectifié*" in perspective and drawing; the student of art had rather see the original miniature or a faithful copy of its lines, but the conscientious translation of it into good drawing is better for the purpose in view, and these translations are conscientious, so far as we have been able to verify them. Consider, also, those pictures in this book which represent interiors and *entourages* of the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; they are to be found under *lit*, *litière*, *table*, *tapis*, and in the chapter on the private life of the feudal nobility; these are composed as the historian composes his narrative, giving some, but not all his authorities, his integrity and ambition being the reader's assurance. Our author's reputation for profound and accurate knowledge of mediæval art in all its branches is as wide as Europe; all his work, whether in stone or on paper, proves the truth of his reputation and his own great ability as an artist. He is doing a work the greatness of which cannot yet be fully appreciated. Moreover, the compositions of which we are speaking bear internal evidence of their historical and artistic truth.

For these reasons, and because this book is more accessible to Americans than the Musée de Cluny or the South Kensington Museum, being procurable by any one through his bookseller, we shall refer, for a few words upon mediæval furniture, to this portable *Musée Viollet-le-Duc.*

There is no ornamental furniture of importance remaining to us of an earlier period than the twelfth century. It is noticeable in the art of this and preceding centuries that the iron-work is better than the work in wood or stone. The blacksmiths had reached nearer the perfection of their art, in these early times, than the carvers of wood and of stone. The castings in bronze of the same period were of marvellous beauty and delicacy. The stone carving around a church doorway was rude, and the heavy oak door was not carved nor even put together with skill; the iron hinges were wrought with exquisite skill and delicacy into leaf-and-flower work of beautiful outline, and held together in their appointed places the heavy, unjoined planks; and all was bright with rich colors and gold. The stone altar was either uncarved, or decorated with a little archaic sculpture, but it was richly adorned with paintings, and the bronze faudesteuil which formed the bishop's throne was a piece of casting such as no modern brass foundry has yet produced. In the furniture of this time there is to be seen little attempt at carving in the wood even the simplest forms. The coffers and cabinets were made of solid oak planks, not panelled, not always united even by the tongue-and-groove joint of the peculiar form then in use, not often even dove-tailed together at the corners, as all modern boxes and drawers are. On the iron fastenings all the strength of this early work depends. Straps of iron bind together sides and bottom, corner plates of iron connect sides and ends, long hinges hold the top. All these fastenings are wrought with the hammer into tendrils and leaves; the plain box seems clasped by vines and twining plants which have suddenly stiffened into strength and symmetry. The richest adornment is generally clustered around the lock. The piece itself being so plain, relieved only by its rich fastenings of iron, painting was the natural resource of people who cared for beauty, and was used, except in those cases, comparatively few in Western Europe, where mosaic could

be obtained. A few beautiful mosaics have come down to us, but they are either of Eastern make or directly imitated from the East. In France it seems that the painters and gilders were the artists usually called upon to complete the work of the carpenter and blacksmith, and cover the rudely-made *bahut* or *armoire* with figures of saints or incidents of war and hunting.

Sculpture begins with the beginning of the thirteenth century to make oak furniture as rich as it was making cathedral porches. Painting becomes subordinate and accessory. Wrought iron lends its aid only where hinges and locks must be, and then is rich as before and more delicate in workmanship. Mosaic is nearly abandoned.

The art of the thirteenth century is representative of the art we call mediæval. Its great merits are then the greatest, its defects its own; no weakness remaining from the past, no vice nor excellence having crept in from new modes of thought. In describing, then, the characteristics of thirteenth-century furniture we shall be describing the furniture of the Middle Ages.

The love of the direct representation of natural forms, visible in the mediæval mind from the first, had grown and strengthened until it overmastered all feelings save the kindred one of love of beauty. The forms of plants and animals were represented as the principal and most valued decoration. The top of a bedpost was not shaped into a knob, even a bud or conventional flower would not satisfy; the wood was cut into a perched bird or a crouched leopard or a monk with open book on knee. A pierced panel was not cut into flourishes or strange leaf-shaped scrolls, as Moorish work was and Chinese is, but animals chased each other through twining leafy branches, and little figures of men and women and angels sat with harps and lutes within wreaths of tendrils and leaves.

Beauty of material was little regarded. Oak, even if richly grained, was painted with bright colors, and,—where large, undecorated surfaces were to be found, as, for instance, panels,—with the stirring incidents the people loved, or the divine or human objects of their worship.

Strength and permanence was always sought. The wood was framed together in the best and most solid way. The weak and disfiguring mitre-joint was unknown or unused, woodwork was always put together as the frames of our panelled doors, by the mortice-and-tenon joint. Although greater size was given the pieces of wood than strength demanded, and although the work of the time was surpassed in skilfulness of construction by work of the following century, yet this additional thickness gave more opportunity for deep and rich carving, and was welcome on that account.

The most important characteristic follows from this; that great secret of all the splendor and perfection of the art of the time, of which this journal has so often spoken. The ornament all grows out of and exhibits the construction.

"That which characterizes the furniture of the middle age"—we translate from page 360—"is not so much its richness as the taste and reason shown in the adoption of forms, the frank acknowledgment of destination, the infinite variety, the appearance of solidity, the true employment of material according to its nature. Wood, copper and iron preserve the forms which are suitable to them; the construction is always apparent, whatever may be the abundance of ornamentation. In fact, articles made of wood have always the original appearance of the framing; it is not until the fifteenth century that this construction is concealed by confused decoration. Up to that time textile fabrics were particularly intended

to clothe the simple forms of the furniture itself; for this reason they were employed in great profusion by the rich nobles; a search among inventories or an examination of the vignettes of manuscripts will enable us to judge of this."

This spirit of constructiveness is never so active as in the best time, the central time, the great thirteenth century. There was no attempt then to disguise the construction of anything; the real shape of every part and the putting together of the parts, were not only visible but displayed, insisted on. In the century before, it was often—not intentionally, but in the course of the enriching by paint, gold, enamel or inlaid work—concealed. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the desire to show the structure was less strong, the fancy for tracery, thin bars, the look of metal work, and cutting away and cutting thin grew daily stronger, and the notion that the lines of mouldings should be continuous and not bounded by the extent of each part, had birth and grew popular. But in the thirteenth century the necessary framing together of the wood directed and limited the design. Every one could see that here was a joint, where one carved stick was framed into another; —that here was a panel made of a stout board covered deep with carved foliage or tracery, and its edges let into the four pieces of the framework, which, richly sculptured on their faces and daintily chamfered at their edges, formed the square opening, filled by the panel in question. It is impossible, without some sort of illustration, to explain more in detail the manner in which this principle is applied to all kinds of work. We can only allude to it, suggest to our readers that they will enjoy tracing for themselves the evidences and instances of it, and pass on to the last point now claiming our attention.

The adaptation of the ornamentation to the nature of the material is as universal and as beautiful as the adaptation of the ornament to the structure. It is not well to cut small chains or lace-work patterns out of marble, though it is often done in modern times. It is not well to take granite as a medium for sculptured thought when marble is to be had. It is not well to imitate the look of cut stone with thin sheets of iron stamped into shape. It is not well to cut wood into the complicated forms which are good in wrought iron. All these laws and all such laws are now persistently, constantly violated. But, in the thirteenth century, they were all observed and always observed. On page 368 of the *Dictionnaire* is shown a *banc-a-barre*, or large settle, the back and arms of which are framed into four stout uprights. Each one of these is topped by a figure. One of these figures is of a large bird, apparently a pelican, so disposed that no piece of wood can be split away by accident or shrinkage of the wood; the long neck and bill, though difficult things surely to manage in such a piece of carving, naturally and safely brought in upon the body, out of harm's way. Such a precaution as that would naturally be observed in any piece of wood carving, in the design of which common sense and good taste have had any share. It is to be remembered that wood separates easily in one direction, even without violence, by the action of heat and moisture, while it has great strength to resist transverse breakage, and yet greater to resist tension. Stone is in every way different, and metals different again, in their nature. Designs, therefore, are to be very different in principle, of these different materials. What would be good in one would be weak, ugly and false in another.

LETTER FROM J. H. H.

We have been kindly permitted to print the following extracts from the private letters of a gentleman whose initials will be recognized as those of one of our very best painters, one whose unwearied and affectionate—unwearied because affectionate—study of nature, and knowledge of his art, make his opinion very valuable:

"London, *Nov.* 13, 1864.

"The most of my time I have spent at South Kensington; three days out of a week, from ten till four, I have been at work there. The drawings and sketches of Turner that were exhibited at Marlborough House are allotted a room with facilities for students to copy. On one side of the room hang the drawings for the Liber Studiorum, a goodly number, all in sepia. Two or three of them I want very much to copy, but they hang up high; still, I may be able to do them. I have copied a beautiful pencil sketch (No. 101), 'View of Rome,' a sketch of some buildings, in body color, both perfectly natural, and other smaller ones, about a dozen in all. I am going to commence on the Venice scene that Stillman copied, same size, in oil (20x32 in.); the other 'Venice' and the 'Golden Bough' I hope to copy; I like them almost better than any in the National Gallery. Those pictures of Turner's that are the most natural, and have least of his eccentricities, I like best—'The Old Temeraire' seems to me complete in every respect. They cleaned all the pictures in the Vernon Gallery one day when I was there; I watched with interest the Turners brighten; the sky in the 'Golden Bough' being nearly pure white, you can imagine how much a thick coat of dust would spoil the effect; dust, over all alike, seemed to neutralize their effect. When cleaned, the black pictures around looked blacker, and the Turners brightened into almost dazzling brilliancy. I hardly know how to write about them. What Ruskin has written I have read so often that it is quite beaten into me, and now that I see the pictures, I realize the truth of it, although I differ from him in preference for some of the paintings. His elucidations and criticisms, I think, are generally correct. For instance, he says of the Childe Harold—'The right hand portion of the picture is very true and lovely; but the left hand is confused and unsatisfactory, and the pine tree is not free from conventionalism.'* I find it exactly so. This is a lovely picture; I think of copying it, about three feet long, in oil (the original is four feet eight inches by eight feet), but I am afraid to go and work much there, it seems so unhealthy. Kensington is a far better place; there were but three or four students copying Turner there. Most of them work in the Vernon Gallery, on the 'Lees,' 'Linnells,' 'Landseers,' &c. They are quite surprised at the readiness with which I copy them. They asked if I sketched from nature? 'Yes.' 'Well, that accounts for it.'

"There are many landscapes about, in the shop-windows, but I have not seen one good bit, yet. There are, also, many engravings, but seldom a bit of Turner's do you see. There are several drawings of W. Hunt's at South Kensington; one, of 'Plums,' is exquisite. There is also a drawing of John Lewis'—'Halt in the Desert'—a marvel of elaboration.

"I passed around St. Paul's. You can see nothing of it until you get right close to it. Little, narrow streets; a dingy, dark, fearful place to put a beautiful building in; but St. Paul's is not

* Quoted from memory.

beautiful, so, I suppose, it matters little if it is covered with soot.

"*Nov.* 14, 1864.

"It is bright and clear to-day, with quite a wind, which blows off the smoke. I have just returned from the National Gallery; had a good look at the Turners there. The early pictures are very black. 'Calais Pier' and the 'Shipwreck' look like night. 'Crossing the Brook' is a grand composition, with much delicate painting, especially in the distance, but is very dark in the foreground, and is painted throughout in a dark brown, varied with a greenish blue. Two of his large pictures—'Sun Rising in a Mist' and 'Dido Building Carthage'—hang in another room, between the Claudes. I do not think much of them or the other black pictures; they show power of composition, certainly, but, when you see and understand his transcripts of natural fact during his color period, you can get but little pleasure from them. Many of his drawings must have been better; the Yorkshire series was made about the same time, I think, 1815. In those large compositions he has exerted himself to surpass Claude, and, I suppose, he has succeeded, but the result is not satisfactory.

"One of the Yorkshire drawings exhibited at Kensington is very beautiful. I wish you were here to see them. You can tell F——, if you see him, that I am not disappointed in Turner; for, though he glares out in many wild color-vagaries that are to be regretted, those who insist upon them, I think, generally do not appreciate his consummate work. 'The Old Temeraire' would, probably, be classed with the most wild ones. Yet, nobody, I am sure, could imagine anything finer than this picture. The sun sinking down below the night mist, with his shafts of dying light gleaming along the upper clouds as they float with infinitely varied forms; then, far above, is the pale, watery blue, with the silvery moon shining out so brightly; and, beneath, the ship floating quietly along the placid water to its final dissolution. The color is all I could wish; it is perfectly natural. I do not, as yet, appreciate his studious avoidance of green in the landscapes, considering it is the most prevalent color in nature. I think, from Turner's vast variety of subject and treatment, he might have painted us a green picture or two, but it seems not.

"Much can be learned from Turner, I think, but not for the sake of imitating him. He will teach me, I hope, to watch nature with greater care, and to strive with more earnestness to reach her infinitude of beauty. It is an argument in favor of nature that the most natural works are the best."

J. H. H.

RECENT EXHIBITIONS, SALES, ETC.

THE MUTUAL ART ASSOCIATION.—BIERSTADT'S MOUNT HOPE.

The Mutual Art Association still keeps its Gallery open. The collection generally is not interesting to us, as it consists principally of old pictures which the public has, happily, out-grown, and there are a great many pictures which ought to have been suffered to die quietly in the obscure places from which they have been drawn. It gives us pleasure to observe that when, by chance, a good picture finds its way into the gallery, it does not stay there long, but is quickly sold.

This truth cannot be too deeply laid to heart by the artist, that a good picture is sure to be sold, and that if he

will look at the money-making side of his calling, he may lay it down as a principle of business that, in the end, it "does not pay" to paint poor pictures. A half-hour spent in this gallery, and, indeed, in other galleries besides this, will, perhaps, drive the healthy lesson home, when he contemplates these wan, neglected ghosts of pictures looking pleadingly out of their frames for buyers, who, alas, will, in all probability, never come! In vain do they don the newest, shiningest frames, and the glossiest varnish; in vain do they enshrine themselves with aristocratic luxury in shadow-boxes, with velvet and plate glass; the shrewd, hard-hearted, quick-sighted public cannot be wheedled, coaxed nor bullied into investing its cash in them.

There is a device of the fruit-sellers, as we are veraciously informed, by which oranges that, by long exposure to the sun and air, and other evaporating influences, have become so wilted as to make the prospect of a sale somewhat desperate, are subjected to the process of boiling, and, by dexterous manipulation, are given a plump, generous and high-priced appearance. It is true that the purchaser finds but little succulence or satisfaction on a more intimate acquaintance; it is true that when he next wants an orange he may seek a stand where he trusts to find fruit that has not been boiled;—meanwhile, the clever deception has been successful once, and will be successful on many more occasions; and, while the vender drives a brisk trade, and inexpert buyers abound, it is, perhaps, too much to expect that boiling oranges, or pictures, will be immediately abandoned.

The principal picture in the Mutual Art Association Gallery is Mr. Bierstadt's Mount Hope. We think it worth while to examine it with some attention. Indeed, as Mr. Bierstadt's reputation has assumed of late no inconsiderable dimensions, it becomes imperative that we should carefully scrutinize his claim to a leading place among our painters. We desire to gain a name for art; not to destroy one; but, we can only really gain one by refusing to accept what is not proved; by insisting on examining carefully and impartially; and by making our appeal, steadily, without regard to the feelings of the artist or his friends, to the highest standard we have, which is, Nature. By doing this, if the artist be worthy of praise, we establish his worth on the highest grounds; and he may be sure that, if he be not worthy, nature will, in the end, surely vindicate herself, and the artist's reputation must suffer, let critics flatter, and friends praise, and the public assent as they will. We are surrounded, to-day, with the wrecks of reputations that were once showy enough; most of them were founded on some excellence, more or less considerable, and the greater number of them have been destroyed by nothing else but the greediness of their owners for praise and money, and the fatal facility with which the critics and the public have given them their reward.

The artist has left us entirely in the dark as to the time of day or evening represented in this picture. Here is a light, broad, day-sky, with a few cirrus clouds floating across it, and a great, jagged snowy mountain in full sunlight, reddish at the base; lower ranges of mountains beneath and in front of it, all dark and dim enough for moonlight, without the least apparent cause. Then, a large sheet of water, either lake or river, of the same sombre, grim grayness. The left foreground, a forest rising from the banks of the river, is given over to a still more solid blackness of melancholy, and we had quite made up our minds that it was evening, and that it was the last rays of the sun slowly sinking in the west, that

lit up the highest mountains only, when, to our great astonishment and bewilderment, we found, on the right hand side of the picture, a number of tree stems in unmistakable sunlight, throwing sharply defined shadows upon their near neighbors, and a mass of light green intended to suggest weeds, and dark brown lines intended for stems, where some deer are feeding, all in sunlight. How is it possible that the sun should shine thus conveniently on the right side of the picture, and be utterly excluded from the left, as, also, from the water and lower mountains on the other side of the river? They cannot be cloud-shadows, since there is scarcely a cloud in the sky. Besides, cloud-shadows are positive in form, and take the shape of the clouds that cast them, and fly about all over the landscape, not settling down forever on the left and centre of a scene without any form, or appearance of motion. Again, cloud-shadows are of the same quality and thinness throughout, and not solid and black in some parts and light in others, as are the shadows in this picture. Some of the artist's friends very kindly informed us, when we asked for information on this point, that he found it so very difficult to make a distant snowy mountain appear so, that, to throw the mountain back, the rest of the picture had to be made very dark. Truly, an artistic explanation, but it does not improve the case. We have seen mountains covered with snow in broad sunlight, and the foreground—trees, meadows, cattle, and water—flooded with the same golden glory, and yet, strange to say, the mountain kept its place; and if any artist had had the courage and industry to sit down on the spot, and paint the scene just as it was, it would have looked far more artistic than Mr. Bierstadt's rules of central light, and ideas of tone have made it. Of course, it would have been a thousand times more beautiful, and, moreover, would have been all light and color.

There is an absurd error in the painting of the lake. All the water directly under the mountains, is touched by a light breeze which slightly ripples it, and yet it is rather more blue than the parts that are still. Now, the merest tyro in the study of nature knows that when a breeze touches water it instantly destroys all reflection of positive forms on its surface. Mr. Bierstadt has regarded this law in *parts* of his picture. We see masses of still water taking clear reflections that break and are entirely lost where the breeze touches them. But, we find the reflection of a water-fall that comes over a ledge of rocks on the other side of the river, painted right over the rippled water, regardless of truth and nature. The want of light and color seems to have been so strongly felt, even by the admirers of this kind of work, that the exhibitors of the picture have been compelled to resort to a miserable shopkeeper's expedient to give more light and color to the foreground. But, tin reflectors and gas-light are a poor substitute for the brilliant sunlight and inexhaustible wealth of lovely color of one of nature's bright summer days. Unfortunately for Mr. Bierstadt, and all painters who endeavor to substitute their own ideas for nature's perfection of color and form, the Rocky Mountains have been photographed, and geologists have been there, too, on government surveys; men who are compelled to be literal and go over every inch of the ground and measure and examine and get at the *facts* of the place, cost what it may in time and labor; and we have the authority of some of these same geologists, when we say that this picture is a caricature, and not a true portraiture of the country. Will artists ever learn that mountain lines are smooth against the sky, and never, under any circumstances,

cut up into such jagged masses as we see in all modern pictures of mountains, except those by Church and Hill. We know it is done to give an artistic boldness and variety, and it may do this, but it utterly fails to give the size of the mountains, and forever destroys the main beauty of mountain lines; giving us formations which are almost always impossible. It matters not where the mountain is, or of what formation, gneiss, granite or limestone, the studio rules make the same inexorable demand upon them all, so that if you examine a Hudson River hill, a New Hampshire mountain, a Sierra Nevada or an Alp painted by these men, you will find just the same fearfully jagged outline; the same formation in a mountain eight hundred, as in a mountain eighteen thousand feet high. In Gignoux's picture of Mounts Jefferson and Adams lately exhibited at Goupil's, (a picture, by the way, about as much like the place as it was like the Swiss Alps,) we find the same false and clumsy drawing. There is a singular monotony of form in the vegetation and the trees in Mr. Bierstadt's pictures. We have looked in vain, year after year, in all the pictures that have come from his easel, for some sign of change in the trees, but there is ever the same twisted oak-like form in every picture, with, now and then, a tall straight tree intended for spruce, although it has none of the delicate beauty and sharpness of the original. Mr. Bierstadt seems to have invented but two receipts for tree painting. May we be allowed to suggest that in view of nature's infinite variety, it would be well to increase his stock a little, or to invent one new tree, and paint that for a few years. In the photographs of this region, there is a large variety in the forest trees, as well as in the lines of the mountains, and we have searched in vain for any trees at all resembling the gnarled forms in these pictures. The heaviness and clumsiness of the foliage, like that of the mountains, destroys the space and appearance of *infinite fulness* that we find in all large scenes in nature. To render the space and *fulness* and get the beauty of nature, we must draw with marvellous delicacy, and be especially accurate in the proportions of the parts. There is in this picture, facility of touch, skill in the management of paint, and a most remarkable power of covering an immense canvas with almost *nothing*, if nature is to be considered. There is skill of handling and knowledge of the terrible *rules* of art, in Howell Smith's drop scene at the Winter Garden, and if this were a scene at a theatre, it would be pronounced to be good scene-painting.

Now that Mr. Bierstadt has made a reputation and invented a *style* of his own, or rather, by an irresistible law, fallen into mannerism because he has fallen out of study, and can cover immense canvases in an incredibly short space of time, we fear he is in danger of being lost to nature, lost to good art. Let us hope, however, that he will recover himself before it shall be too late, and that he will again walk with nature, seeking in all reverence and humility to discover her truths, and striving with all his power to paint them, trusting to the truth and essential good in his work to make his reputation, which is, once for all, the only possible way by which a lasting and valuable reputation can be made.

Auction Sale of Paintings, Sketches, &c., by Mr. Thomas Hicks, N. A.

In an evil hour, and prompted by we know not what ill genius, Mr. Hicks collected somewhat over a hundred of his pictures and offered them for sale at public auction. We confess that we looked forward to this sale with some anxiety. It promised, we thought, to be a sort of test of the real condition of

the public taste. If such pictures could find buyers at good prices, then the case was hopeless; any picture could find buyers, for, go where you might, worse than these could not be found. Never was an instance to which the old Greek maxim, "Beware of too much," could have been better applied. An occasional contribution to the Exhibition, flattery in plenty from personal friends, these may for a time enable nothing to pass for something; nay, to pass for much! But, if two negatives make an affirmative, what must be the power of a hundred and sixty negatives. The affirmative result of such a combination was manifestly destined to be fatal. The artist had committed the blunder of allowing the public full opportunity to prove by its own unaided faculties that the worst the critics had said of him was an amiable understatement; and it was a relief to find in the sequel that the public knew very well how to look out for its own interest. The result of the sale has probably convinced the most incredulous that the day for this sort of thing is gone by, and it will be a long time, we trust, before such another barefaced attempt will be made upon the presumed credulity and ignorance of the people.

Mr. T. P. Rossiter's Milton Gallery.

We must, in justice to our readers, say a few words about Mr. Rossiter's pictures of Adam and Eve, but the task is one which we would gladly forego. The Exhibition is simply disgraceful. On the artist's part, it looks like a formal renunciation of all pride in his professional position, unenviable as that position has always been. On the part of the public, it is difficult to account for any body's going to see the pictures once. It would be impossible to account for any body's going *twice*. Those who go to gratify a reputable curiosity, or under the delusion that they are to see something which can be called art, probably leave the hall with feelings more easily imagined than described. Those who go, as it is likely many do, from a desire to whet a coarser appetite, might save themselves a small expense, and secure an equal stimulus to their animal natures by the contemplation of the wooden-jointed or stuffed kid dolls in the windows of the nearest toy shop. In his knowledge of the human body and his power to represent it, Mr. Rossiter is quite on a par with the makers of these mannikins. The chaste and noble spirit of Milton sits too high to be smirched by any contact so degrading as this, but that very height makes Mr. Rossiter's assumption of the place of interpreter of the poet seem the more impudent. We suppose, however, that, so long as two hundred people a-day can be induced, from whatever motive, to spend an hour's time, and pay twenty-five cents to see such pictures, there will be artists to paint them. Still, as we cannot shame the painters, we must hope that the public will some day reach that point of culture that they will compel a reform by letting such exhibitions severely alone. Pictures like these, no matter what may be pretended, are painted from none but the lowest and most mercenary motives, and will only cease to be painted when they are found to be unremunerative speculations.

Pictures by Jean Léon Gérome.

The most noteworthy exhibition of the past month has been that of Gérome's pictures, at Mr. Knoedler's gallery. It is characteristic of the way in which criticism is "done" in our newspapers, that the "Evening Post" praised Mr. Rossiter's "Milton Gallery," and was very much shocked at the indecency of Gérome's "Turkish Dancing Girl." It, also, spoke flatteringly of the drawing and color of the American daubs—as in-

deed, what American is not sure beforehand of a good word from that easy journal—and came to the conclusion that the Frenchman's masterpiece was only a clever piece of drawing, poor in color, and not art at all!

The simple truth is, that these pictures —"The Turkish Dancing Girl," "The Prayer in the Desert," and "The Turkish Butcher Boy"—are three of the most masterly works ever seen in this country. The first-named is every way the greatest; elaboration of detail, and truth of realization could hardly be carried further than in these comparatively small works, but everything is subordinated to Art, and it would be difficult to say where the "Almée" is lacking. The drawing is perfect, the color harmonious, the painting of the flesh has all the soft firmness of nature, and she herself in her most Eastern mood never stained the ivory skin with a more delicate olive than that which the sumptuous torso of this Egyptian shows. The subjects which Gérome chooses are often such as would be fatal to an artist of a more sensual type, but the intellect alone seems to be the shaper of his creations; whether he has an ulterior purpose in his choice it would not perhaps be wise to inquire; but, he allows the spectator to suspect none. He stands as impassive and unconcerned outside of the scene he is painting as ever did Goethe, and it is in vain that you ask whether he approves or disapproves the actions of his men and women, whether he seeks to understand their motives, or to solve the problem of their existence; all that you can certainly know is, that a most patient, exact and learned workman, a keen, penetrating intellect, has set himself to the task of truly reporting certain phases of human character, and that your part is to accept his work with thankfulness, and study it with the earnestness that such work deserves.

It is with no little pride that we announce that these three pictures have been bought in this city. The "Almée" was imported without the least expectation that it would find a purchaser; it was Mr. Knoedler's liberal wish to have this fine picture known to America, but it is to remain with us, and adds another, perhaps the most splendid ornament to the choice gallery of foreign works which is rapidly forming in this city.

We know that there are some among us who do not consider it good fortune that brings these foreign pictures to our country, and keeps them here. We remember several years ago hearing a distinguished American painter say that, if he had his way, he would lay a duty, so heavy as to be prohibitory, on all foreign pictures; he thought that they had done us nothing but injury; although, as we remember, the injury had consisted in preventing commissions being given to our own men, rather than in corrupting their style or making their thought less American. And others, as we have said, heartily agree with him in this opinion.

Competition is good in other than material affairs. Of course, if A. keeps a slender stock of poor goods, holds them at high prices, or even at low prices, lets them be rained on, snowed on, mildewed, moth-eaten; allows them to get rusted, faded, dusty, and out-of-fashion, and doesn't much care what happens to them so long as he knows that the neighbors can buy nowhere else, he will be unpleasantly affected by the advent of the brisk, wide-awake, smart new comer who suddenly opens in the best situation on the high street a newly painted, newly furnished shop, supplied with the freshest, jauntiest, newest and most modish goods. As he watches the steady stream of customers that sets immediately in the direction of the new establishment, and contrasts it with the slender attendance at his own counter, angelic in its fewness and its far-betweenness, he will, undoubtedly, if he be sufficiently human and unwise, wish that he had the making of the law, and could compel competing strangers to pay so heavy a toll on the turnpike that they would shrink aghast and betake themselves elsewhere. But if he be shrewd and energetic, he will see that his best weapon is an equal skill and adaptation with that which is opposed to him, and that if he cannot get away all his new enemy's customers, he can at least divide his forces by making it worth their while to trade with him as well.

No one would regret more than ourselves the growth of any art among us which should be un-American, foreign to the character, to the life, the manners of

our own people. Such art might show itself clever, learned, skilful; we would give very little for it. If we thought that bringing over even the works of such masters as Luys, Gérome, Tissot, Millais, Rossetti, would tend to that result, we would fight against them with all our might. For we value nationality, individuality most highly, and don't believe in any literature or art largely abstracted from these notions. We believe Homer, Dante, Chaucer, Shakspeare, Milton, are greater, not less, because their verse smacks strongly of Greece, Italy, and England. We like Dürer's Teutonism, Van Eyck's Netherlandishness, Angelico's, Giotto's, Orcagna's, Titian's, Italian flavor. And so in our own dear land we like best the men who paint America, and American men and women; we like the homely fields, the native hills, red shirts, plain ways, refinement not borrowed from abroad—the men who give us these, as they are, we count our best men; we will forgive much in their work for the savor of that salt.

Therefore, if we thought this element put in jeopardy by the introduction of foreign pictures, we would say so, and act on our belief to the extent of our ability. But we recognize only a stimulating, healthy influence. The pictures painted to-day are more national by far, more individual, more of all that we mean of best when we say American, than ever before. Eastman Johnson, and Griswold, and the Hills, and Charles Moore, and Furness, and Farrer, are of to-day and of here, not of yesterday and Italy. And the older men, the very ones who grumble at the advent of these strange faces, how un-American they were, and are! How seldom their work tastes of the soil! How they paint Italy, Italy, Italy, and classic phantasms, and seem to shun the common as if it were unclean, the homely as if it were and must be low!

We don't in the least doubt that these works are influencing us—both the artists and the public—but it is in a good way. It is a little sad, sometimes, to see poor, feeble, slovenly pictures, hung for sale on the walls of public galleries by the side of these noble guests of ours, creep away to some remoter place where ignorance and inexperience may perhaps think their defects beauties, so that out of the splendor of that dazzling neighborhood they may be bought by some one who has not seen the masterpieces. But the painter, if he be earnest, and modest, and faithful, will not be hurt by the experience; he will be roused to new effort, he will aspire to new excellence, and the lance that wounded him will cure him, as that Achillean one did Telephus of old.

In Memory of

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

——"His mute dust
We honor, and his living worth;
A man more pure and bold and just,
Was never born into the earth.

Sleep sweetly, tender heart, in peace:
Sleep, holy spirit, blessed soul,
While the stars burn, the moons increase,
And the great ages onward roll."