

## NOTES ON ART.

It is proposed in this journal to consider, in each week's issue, art work of all kinds, and to review from time to time the various Art Exhibitions. The technical methods of the several schools will also be dealt with. The design of this journal is eminently practical, and it may be expected that the wide subject of Art should be treated mainly from the point of view of the advantages which its study presents to the community in general and to women in particular. Broadly stated, there can be no question that a sense of the beautiful and the sight of artistic things is the best possible remedy for vulgarity, which is the worst possible malady of good taste. But what is Art? No doubt there is deeply implanted in the minds of most educated people, and even in some uncultured ones, an innate perception of what is beautiful, which leads them to turn instinctively to that which is lovely, and to shrink from all that is ugly. It is well known that the appreciation of the beautiful is very variously distributed; but it is not so generally recognized that the power of depicting or moulding beautiful things, *which is Art*, is enjoyed by individuals, and even by masses of people, in very varied degree. Take, for instance, what the distinguished author of the Romanes lecture, recently delivered at Oxford, calls "the shiboleth of art, the human figure." The ancient Chaldeans and Egyptians, like the modern Japanese, did wonders in the representation of birds, quadrupeds, and plant life; they even attained to something more than the respectable in human portraiture, but their utmost efforts never brought them within range of the best Greek embodiments of the grace of womanhood. It may be well to dwell for a moment on this limitation of art power among the Japanese, because examples of it are so readily accessible and may be obtained for a few pence, for, as Sir F. Leighton has observed, the entire race possesses the artistic instinct, in certain of its developments, in a greater degree than any other of our time. With them the sense of decorative distribution, and of subtle liveliness of form and colour is absolutely universal and expresses itself in every most ordinary appliance of daily life, overflowing, indeed, into every toy or trifle that may amuse an idle moment. Still, how limited are their powers. Compare the exquisite spray of foliage drawn on one side; it may be of a

simple paper hand-screen, with the travesty of the human figure presented on the back of the screen. It will be evident that if, among this artistically cultured people, Art consists in "holding a mirror to nature," the power of reproducing the mental image reflected in the artist's mind, must vary with the kind of object reflected. In the case of the human figure, the Japanese artist does not appear even to have the power of copying nature, and he certainly does not fall into what Sir Joshua Reynolds called "the vulgar error of imitating nature too closely."

We have, therefore, got thus far—Art does not consist in merely copying nature. The belief that it does is very deeply implanted and widespread; it prevailed in Shakespeare's time, and is the basis of much of his own Art teaching. Take, for instance, the passage in the "Taming of the Shrew":—"Dost thou love pictures, we will fetch thee straight, Adonis painted in a running brook"; as if the mirrored reflection of a beautiful person must satisfy artistic longings, while, as a matter of fact, the most perfect reflection need not even be really satisfactory portraiture. It takes long to learn that Art is "nature better understood." It is the skill and mind of the artist which lends a new beauty to things, and this beauty is Art. Nothing need be ugly when it has received the impress of the artist's mind. The reader must not be wearied by discursiveness, so let our illustrations again be borrowed from Shakespeare, who points out that "'tis the mind that makes the body rich," and as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds, so a phase of Art, which is well deserving of honour as being true art, may "peer through the meanest habits." "The Jay is not more precious than the Lark because his feathers are more beautiful," and he who paints the less attractive bird, or, it may be a homely peasant girl, says with Petruchio—

"O, no, good Kate, neither art thou the worse  
For this poor furniture and mean array."

None the worse to the artist, because Art enables him to separate what is beautiful in the object from certain of its "accidents," and to model, or depict, the elements his eye has chosen.

Of course, true Art is really dependent on nature, and the higher the artist is, the clearer will be his appreciation of nature. Shakespeare quite understood this, for when, in the "Winter's Tale," Perdita objects to plant certain carnations which owe their tints to cultivation, that is to the "art which, in its piedness, shares with great creating nature," Prolixenes, admitting the artifice, adds:—

"Yet nature is made better by no mean,  
But nature makes that mean; so o'er that art—  
Which you say adds to nature, is an art  
That nature makes . . . The art itself is nature."

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