

The only variety that our Academicians have provided for us is a curious outbreak of violent colour, which so irritates the eye as to render one's first criticism of the exhibition hardly a kind one. The prodigal use of aniline dyes seems to have been the one thing needful in the production of their works this year.

Coming out of Bond Street, where every second woman I met was a discord of the most emphatic kind, it was a very odd thing to note how faithfully our painters, for the most part, have yielded to the demands of fashion, and worked in every shade of grass green, royal blue, and the colour which used to be known as magenta.

There is one picture quite free from blemish of this kind—Frank Dicksee's "Paolo and Francesca" (No. 171). This is distinctly fine, in drawing, colour, and feeling. The most wonderful thing about it is the painting of Francesca's gown. It is a graceful, clinging garment of green brocade; and he has painted it with a knife, instead of a brush; the effect is quite extraordinary; you feel as if you could brush the dust out of it!

His other picture is not so satisfactory. It is a memory of the past which takes bodily shape in a very modern drawing-room, by the light of the last new thing in lamp-shades; sentiment like this is foredoomed to failure in our matter-of-fact age. It is somewhat of the same feeling that prevents Sir John Millais' "Speak! Speak!" from being impressive; but in addition to this, the picture does not tell its own story. I may be wrong, but to me it seems a jumble of dates. The young man, whose midnight reading of ghost stories has apparently got upon his brain, appears to belong to the Middle Ages, to judge by his costume and the way he wears his hair; but he has gone to bed in a four-poster which is more suggestive of the seventeenth century.

Luke Fildes has painted another perfectly-fitting black satin bodice with a lady inside it. Professor Herkomer sends some acres of canvas, representing the Town Hall in his native town in Bavaria, with an assembly of excellent but uninteresting gentlemen therein. Alma Tadema is as perfect in manner and as deficient in matter as usual. The ladies who sit for Sir Frederick Leighton have the same lovely complexions, and curl themselves up in the same complicated positions as usual. His "Flaming June" certainly conveys most successfully the feeling of great heat.

There are some charming water-colours. Miss Ethel Wright's "Lilies" is a most attractive study of a most attractive Nurse, in grey and white—that delightful and delicate combination. To have such a vision enter one's sick room, would certainly do much to mitigate one's sufferings!

Mr. Waterhouse has succumbed to the popular demand for crude colour; he has also used the same model for his "St. Cecily" and her angels, and done her hair the same way, which seems to show some poverty of invention.

Mr. Stanhope Forbes has painted another interior of a smithy, and Frank Bramley has tried, not very successfully—in his "Sleep" (No. 471), to rival Sargent's "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose." Among lady painters, Miss Dicksee's picture of the "Children of Charles I." may be mentioned with warm praise.

There is no picture of the year. It is satisfactory to note that our young men are giving more care and time to their studies of the nude; but when will they be able to compete with the "Baigneuse" which Bouguereau sends?

A Book of the Week.

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"DON."*
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THE author of "Miss Toosey's Mission" has again taken an old maiden lady as the principal character of her story. Miss Whately is a charming old lady, and as one reads about her and her gentle, dainty kind-heartedness, the scent of pot-pourri, lavender, sweet peas, and all delectable old-fashioned scents seem to fill the pages of the book as we turn them over. Miss Whately rescues the abandoned daughter of the bankrupt Mr. Harrington, and brings the child home to her own village. In this village there lives a boy called "Don." From the first moment that we read about him we are sure that he is destined to be the husband of the child Sybil. Now Don and Miss Whately, from the first page, are evidently created immaculate beings by their author—and this, truth to tell, makes them a trifle uninteresting—for just as children always beg their elders to tell them a story about a *bad* little boy, so in later years the average reader prefers more human, and less virtuous heroes and heroines; for even poor orphan boys and tender-hearted old ladies have their trials and temptations, and if these were more dwelt upon we should appreciate their virtues more. The interest of the story is, however, sustained by Sybil, because we are not quite sure if she is going to be as loyal and faithful as Miss Whately could wish and desire, and this doubt keeps the reader's attention fixed, which otherwise might possibly flag. If the dear old maiden lady and Don could do no wrong, Mrs. Grant and Mrs. Harrington Jones (poor things) could do no right—they are as perversely wrong-headed and hearted as Miss Whately and Don are perplexingly and monotonously virtuous.

Lord Billington was born into the book to love and dangle after Sybil. (It would really be a relief to read of some lordling in a modern novel who did not come of age, and thereupon improve the drains and sanitary condition of all his cottages.) Lord Billington was a very worthy little earl, and did his duty to his estate in the most exemplary manner imaginable. His sister is a vigorous-minded young lady, and she and her old grandmother are very well and naturally described. Old Lady Billington seems to me the best and most artistically drawn character in the book, and the contrast between her and Miss Whately is very effective.

"Don" is not exactly a child's book, but it may be especially recommended for young girls' reading—and in these degenerate days that is rather a rare and precious quality for a book to possess. At the same time, no truly conscientious mother would put the volume into her young daughter's hands without warning her that, to say the least of it, it was exceedingly foolish of Sybil to refuse the nice little earl and marry the gentlemanly gamekeeper!

The book is written throughout in a bright and sunny manner that is very pleasant to read. There is a note of intrinsic refinement in all this authoress's books which makes one wish that they were as vigorous as they are sweet, wholesome, and cheerful.

A. M. G.

* "Don," by the author of "Laddie," "Tip-Cat," "Miss Toosey's Mission," &c. 6s. W. and R. Chambers.

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