"The Exhibition of the Women Artists."

The Forty-sixth Exhibition of this Society opened on Monday the 11th February. The Private View took place on Saturday preceding, having been postponed for a week in consequence of the Royal Funeral. The Show is a large one—and besides the pictures—the exhibits in the crafts department are numerous, and—judging from a mere glimpse—exceedingly beautiful, including hammered metals, enamels, wood carving, cut-leather work, and book-binding, as well as woven materials with designs, embroideries with gold and silver, and laces. These will require a separate attention later.

Entering the large Gallery, the eye flies at once to the central picture—a large panel—showing a "pillar" of Angels singing. It is boldly and originally grouped, and the drawing is remarkably good, while the handling and the treatment of the reds recall the "School of Siena." The painter's name is E. S. Ford, and the title is "To Thee All Angels Cry Aloud."

Close by hangs No. 347 (Blanche Jenkins), a portrait of a young girl in a green dress—her golden brown hair tied back with a black knot—very delightful in its expression and its harmony of colour; 491 (M. A. Bell), "When spring rides through the wood," a couple of quaint children walking hand in hand on the edge of an archaic wood—it has the modern style of cleverness—is striking but hardly beautiful. Mrs. Murray Cooksley sends a highly finished work entitled "Pluie D'Or." No. 474—An Odalisque lying on a couch of gold embroideries and tiger skins, with laburnum boughs and blossoms drooping over her—she wears a coronet of fine wrought gold on her darker golden tresses, and is draped in a yellow vestment caught about with chains of jewels—she is a delicately sumptuous exotic and her tawny eyes are enthralling.

An entirely different ideal is Miss Alice Grant's "Portrait," number 453, a large canvas low in tone—extraordinarily life-like—but the life of a London day, gray, gray. When you have looked at it a bit the face smiles out at you—a clever, a masterly work, but one tires of the decadent London "eye" and longs for the *pure* color of Italy or the East—the flash of scarlet, the "bits" of turquoise blue, the scintillation of gem-like hues. John Lewis, who knew the East, said to an Academy student, "Treat your colors as if they were jewels, my son." But to-day our painters translate the London atmosphere into painting, and the degradation of the English eye for color is nearly complete.

447, "The Harbour" (C. Atwood), is an instance, however, of darkness or semi-darkness which is infused with rich color—the harbour lights shine palely over a sea of splendid deeply-purple blue, the last red gleam of the after-glow touches the masts of the dim brown fishing smacks, one feels the swell of the water and the salt night breeze rising, and in the ear croons the well-beloved verse—

"I remember the long wharves and the slips,
And the sea-tides tossing free;
And the Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the Ships,
And the magic of the Sea.
And the words of that Indian Song,
The wind is repeating them still.
A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts!"

Ah—Good-night.

A Book of the Week.

THE BISHOP'S GAMBIT.*

Not for years has there been such a dearth of fresh fiction as reigns at this moment. Solemn issues such as war and national bereavement make the people indifferent to the lighter and more amusing side of life. In face of vivid reality, the imagination seems a flimsy thing.

Among much that is utterly worthless this week, I select Mr. Cobb's work because, though it is in no sense what one means by a really good novel, it is by no means without merit, and because the writer offers a very good example of the novelist who understands one sex fairly well, and the other not in the least.

There is a certain amount of originality in the idea. Judith, the Bishop's elder daughter, is engaged to Norman Deane, who is made co-respondent in a divorce case.

There is the situation. The Bishop has known this young man for some years—the engagement has lasted for three—and in all that time he has found him an honourable young fellow, steady, reliable, trustworthy. When he hears of the trouble that has overtaken the young man, what steps does he take? He simply prejudges the case. On the spot he makes up his mind, in face of the oath both of Norman and of Myrtle Darbishire, the lady in question, that his daughter's betrothed is guilty. That this conduct is not only both unchristian and ungentlemanly, but also unnatural, does not seem to strike the author.

Judith at once bows to her father's wish, and breaks her engagement. Such a girl as Judith would very possibly have done so. But Judith has a sister bearing the ghastly name of Rickenda,—a product of the author's brain, it is to be supposed: and Rickenda is introduced to us in the preface as a revolting daughter. We are given to understand that she has been to Girton and become revolutionary.

> "She was a good round-armed bowler, and an excellent 'forward' at hockey. She distinguished herself in the 'gym'; she attained a certain notoriety in the debating class for the latitude of her opinions, and . . . . . returned home, at the age of eighteen, with an exalted opinion of herself and a tendency to disparage other persons. Her figure was wide and full; she walked with a free if somewhat swinging gait, and she had an aptitude to fall into boyish poses. Her complexion was clear and fresh; her eyes were the colour of a speedwell. She took a keen interest in the affairs of this world, and sometimes caused the Bishop seriously to question her fate in the next."

Now a girl like that, in a Bishop's family, ought to be very amusing, but, alas! Rickenda's creator, having invented her, does not in the least know what to do with her. She does nothing whatever from first to last to justify the above description. She is only able to flirt mildly with two men, and to do exactly what her papa tells her, after all.

But Mr. Cobb's faults are almost forgotten by all but the critical reader, because his style is so easy and pleasant.

Some of his dialogue is quite admirable in its absence of strain and quiet ease. If he could get a clearer grip of life's realities he should be a good novelist; and that is a want which the years will no doubt supply.

G. M. R.

* By Tom Cobb. Grant Richards.

previous page next page