

## Notes on Art.

## THE NATIONAL GALLERY.

(Continued.)

Shall we now look at one of the greatest masterpieces the world has seen, and turn to the *Bacchus and Ariadne* by Tiziano Vicellio, better known as Titian? We shall find it, numbered 35, in the National Collection. We are authoritatively told that Titian was born in 1477, that he is believed to have studied painting under Bellini, and that, among other great works, he finished the decoration which Bellini had left incomplete in the Sala du Gran Consiglio, in Venice. He died of the plague, in Venice, in 1576, at the advanced age of 99 years. But to return to the picture, we are informed by the official catalogue that—

“Ariadne, daughter of Minos, King of Crete, deserted by Theseus, on the island of Naxos, is discovered by Bacchus when returning with a train of nymphs, fawns and satyrs from a sacrifice. The god no sooner sees the hapless princess than he becomes enamoured of her, and makes her his bride.”

It is a picture all artist's love and reverence for the absolute perfection of its workmanship; look at the gorgeous colouring: the blue of the sky may be impossible, but it was necessary for the composition, and Titian painted it there without fear. Ruskin tells us that “you might as well ask a musician to write without notes as Titian without crimson and blue.” Try to grasp the wonderful movement of the followers of Bacchus, the force and power, and the splendidly broad treatment of the whole picture, and then look at the perfection of its details, the minute rendering of the vine leaves, which, with the little flowers, are perfect in their finish; there are even jewels in the collar of Ariadne's dog, but each gleam of sunlight on the picture will reveal some new and lovely detail. Those who love children will delight in the face of the little fawn in the foreground dragging the leg of the sacrifice as a toy. There is also a beautiful woman's face in the train of the followers of Bacchus, a face that will come back to one in the lonely watches of the night; but what you will most remember is the sense of breadth and air, and intense movement the picture gives, for, as Ruskin says, Titian's supremacy above all the Venetians, except Tintoretto and Veronese, consists in the firm touch of inspiration and masterly understanding of the nature of stones, of trees, or whatever else he took in hand to paint, and in this picture, perhaps in a higher degree than in any other of his works, we see “the golden lights and deep-pitched hue of the school of Titian, whose virtue is in the grandeur of earthly solemnity, not the glory of heavenly rejoicing.” The beauty is essentially vital beauty, and that is what one feels in looking at this pagan picture.

Now let us turn to one other of the five pictures by Titian, which the National Collection possesses, *The Madonna and Child, with St. John the Baptist, and St. Catherine embracing the Divine Infant*. (No. 635.) It was painted in 1533. The figures are placed in a hilly landscape: the angel appearing to the shepherds in the distance, and the whole constitutes a sweet homely scene; an exquisite picture, in more tender colour than is usual with Titian, but it is hardly a devotional picture.

How different from the *Annunciation*, by Fra Lippo

Lippi (No. 666), which we considered together a few weeks since. There can be no question about the deep devotional feeling in it, but on comparing it with the work of Titian, we understand, at once, that Ruskin is right. “No Venetian painter ever worked with any aim beyond that of delighting the eye or expressing fancies agreeable to himself, or flattering to his nation. They could not be other unless they were religious. But he did not desire the religion—he desired the delight. The *Assumption* is a noble picture, because Titian believed in the Madonna. But he did not paint it to make any one else believe in her; he painted it because he enjoyed rich masses of red and blue, and faces flushed with sunlight.” On the other hand, Lippo Lippi and Angelico, trained in the cloister, strove to bring home to people the deep truths of religion in which they themselves believed. Their influence for good is infinitely greater than that of Titian. Why then do we like to look at Titian's pictures? Ruskin has told us—and I will quote him once again—that it is because “there is a strange under-current of everlasting murmur about Titian's name, which means the deep consent of all great men that he is greater than they—the consent of those who, having sat long enough at his feet, have found, in that restrained harmony of his strength, there are indeed depths of each balanced power more wonderful than all those separate manifestations of inferior painters; that there is a softness more exquisite than Correggio's, a purity loftier than Leonardo's, a force mightier than Rembrandt's, a sanctity more solemn even than Raphael's.”

We could wish to leave no other view of Titian's work on the minds of our readers than is thus expressed by the great critic.

FLORENCE M. ROBERTS-AUSTEN.

## A Book of the Week.

CHEAP JACK ZITA.\*

MANY years ago, Mr. Baring-Gould wrote his famous novel, “Mehalah”; it was a master-piece. Since then he has published many novels and stories. Some have been readable, and some have been dull, but none of them have been inspirations worthy of the gifted author of “Mehalah.”

We are very far from thinking that this last production is equal to that vivid work of imagination, but it certainly comes nearer to it in force, picturesqueness and interest than any of the other novels that he has written between. Mr. Baring-Gould has the rare power of being able to describe scenery, so that we have a clear picture in our mind's eye, of the back-ground and fore-ground, between which his characters play out their parts; this is a rare gift, indeed! How often, when an eager reader takes up a tale, he is forced to skip the description of scenery and weather because in the average novel, they usually retard the action of the story; but in “Cheap Jack Zita,” from first to last, they enhance its interest with marvellous skill and vividness.

The story opens with a lively description of Cheap Jack and his pretty daughter selling their wares in the cathedral town of Ely. The poor Cheap Jack himself is very ill, and can hardly bear up enough to carry on

\* “Cheap Jack Zita,” by S. Baring-Gould. Methuen & Co., 1893.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)