

Notes on Art.

GERMAN ART.—Continued.

IN last week's paper we began the consideration of the very remarkable and interesting address on German Art, which the President of the Royal Academy recently delivered before the students of that national Institution, and we pointed out how much less congenial Sir Frederick's task appeared to be, than his previous efforts in dealing with Greek, Italian or French Art.

It is impossible to follow Sir Frederick fully in his exhaustive address, which fills no less than an entire sheet of the *Times*; we can only glance at a few of its more salient features.

First, as regards Painting. Albert Dürer may be regarded as *par excellence* the typical German artist, far more so than his great contemporary Holbein. "He was a man bent on pure and high ideals, a man ever seeking to make known, through his work, the mysterious treasure which was laid up in his heart, and, like many of the great artists of the Renaissance, he was steeped in the love of science." His work is well known to English people, especially his engravings, and we all know how greatly Ruskin admires the Knight riding by the side of death; but even in the case of Dürer, Sir Frederick cannot give unstinted praise, for he says, "that, although superbly inexhaustible as a designer, and minute to a marvel, he was never without a certain, almost calligraphic mannerism of hand wanting in spontaneous simplicity and never broadly serene." The only other painter, to whom special allusion is made, is Holbein the younger, in whom we have a complete contrast to Dürer—"a man not steeped in speculation, but full of joyous fancies, who looked out with serene eyes on the world around him." Unfortunately, we cannot refer our readers to many of Hans Holbein's works in London, the only one in the National Gallery being the *Ambassadors* (No. 1,314), which is not one of his happiest efforts, in spite of the minute care with which the details are executed.

Space will only permit a brief reference to be made to Sir Frederick's views on German sculpture and architecture. Of the former, he says, that in spite of considerable achievement, it cannot be considered as often, if indeed, ever reaching the highest level of excellence.

As regards architecture, perhaps, the best known work to English tourists, passing through Germany on their way to Switzerland or the Italian lakes, is Cologne cathedral, and of it Sir Frederick admits that "we feel we are in the presence of a powerful will, grasping serenely and solving with unflinching intellectual resource a scientific problem, we bow accordingly before a triumph of science, but we are not thrilled by the kindling touch of genius."

With reference to the well-known Cathedral of Augsburg, the President "shudders as he remembers its exterior," with a choir half as high again as the nave, and of the usual cubic shape, stuck on to the nave without a trace of an attempt at articulation or transition. As regards ornament, special reference is made to the German love of intricate ornamentation, more particularly to their love of veiling ornament with

ornament "with a delight in intricacy and involution, and 'a curious fondness for seeing through and behind things to other, and yet other, things beyond—a trait which,' as Sir Frederick wittily observed, 'is, perhaps, not confined to the æsthetic side of the German organization.'"

I fear that the address will cause some disappointment in Germany, where the work is, at least, always conscientious, and the motive pure and high. There has, moreover, been, in Germany, a growing appreciation for English Art, and this was especially shown at a recent Art Exhibition at Berlin, where the works of English Artists created special interest, and received appreciative commendation.

A prolonged visit to the recent Exhibition at Chicago enables me to say that great efforts were made to offer a thoroughly representative presentation of German Art, and the display certainly justifies all Sir Frederick says of German Art in general, "on all things we read the stamp of the race; we trace in them its virtues of vigour, of industry, and of inexhaustible intellectual fertility; we trace in them also its shortcomings—the lack of delicacy of touch and a controlling sense of beauty." FLORENCE M. ROBERTS-AUSTEN.

A Book of the Week.

"THE ROMANCE OF AN EMPRESS."*

'THIS is a romance,' says the writer in his preface, in which fiction finds no place. Even legend enters into it no more than it must need enter into every faithful evocation of the past. The reader's curiosity, however, will lose nothing all the same, for the writer, M. Waliszewski, has searched the Imperial archives of Russia, collected many other materials scattered in obscure Russian periodicals and other documents found in Russia and France, and which have never been consulted before. The consequence of which is both interesting and significant, as the book has been forbidden to be circulated in Russia.

Catherine II. of Russia was not born in the purple. She was the daughter of Prince Christian August of Zerbst-Domburg. He was a beggar among princes, and the future Tsarina of all the Russias was known in her youth as "Figchen."

Destiny, that shapes the lives of princesses, as well as those of humbler mortals, turned the eyes of the Empress Elizabeth upon the humble 'Figchen,' and impelled her to arrange a marriage between the Grand Duke Peter and the daughter of 'Christian August.' While her husband got drunk and gambled daily, Catherine diverted herself by a series of love affairs, apparently, with all the officers attached to the Court in turn. She was a Messalina in her libertinisms, but we gather from their instability and variety that none of her lovers touched her woman's heart, though they served to amuse her Imperial fancy.

In 1762 the Empress Elizabeth died, and in his brief reign of a few months, Peter III. contrived to annoy and exasperate everyone with whom he came in contact; he grew more and more violent as time went on, but all who came near Catherine united in praise of her affability and good graces.

* "The Romance of an Empress." Catherine II. of Russia. By R. Waliszewski. Translated from the French. With portrait. In two volumes, 8vo., Heinemann, 32s.

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