

Notes on Art.

THE ORIGIN OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

ALL is worry, work and bustle in the art world of to-day, the most anxious time in the year to the artists, so important is it to them that their pictures should be well hung on the walls of our Royal Academy. It has become such a national institution that it is interesting, although very difficult to realise, that not much more than a hundred years ago there was no Royal Academy. To the mass of the people, art—that is pictorial art—could hardly be said to exist. The court beauties had their portraits painted, some of the best known actresses, and a few statesmen, doctors and men of letters—more from motives of ambition, vanity, or family interest than from any appreciation of the merits of the artist—were painted, and there art almost ended, as regards the public. With the painters themselves, however, there had long been a growing feeling that an institution such as the Royal Academy was much needed. Sir Godfrey Kneller wished for something of the sort, Sir James Thornhill, historical painter to George I., submitted a plan to those in authority, but the Government thought that art was no affair of the State, and refused to find the means, so the scheme fell to the ground for a time. An Exhibition was held at the Society of Arts in 1760, but it was not until 1768, that, on December 14, the first formal meeting of the Royal Academy was held. Mr. Chambers, the architect and treasurer, read a report wherein was stated that a memorial, signed by twenty-two artists, had been presented to the Crown asking for royal protection and help. The objects of the Society were: "The establishing a well-regulated school or academy of design for the use of students in the arts, and an annual exhibition open to all artists of distinguished merit, where they may offer their performances to public inspection, and acquire that degree of reputation and encouragement which they shall be deemed to deserve." This was submitted to the King, who approved, ordered that the plan should be carried out, and with his own hand signed the plan—"The Instrument," as it was called. The Instrument was read to the meeting, and the artists present signed a declaration promising to observe the laws and regulations contained in the document, and laws that might in future be made, and to employ their utmost endeavours to promote the honour and interest of the establishment.

The rules declared that the Academy should consist of forty members; they were to be at the time of their admission, painters, sculptors, or architects of reputation in their profession, of high moral character, not under 25 years of age, and resident in Great Britain. At the end of the report the King wrote, "I approve of the plan, let it be put into execution." It was most fortunate that the first President was Sir Joshua Reynolds, a man who combined much worldly wisdom and charm of manner with real artistic genius. So far, so good; but to our readers there will seem one curious modern restriction of this institution. Why, in a national undertaking, was half the nation ignored by the omission of women, and why are there now no women Royal Academicians? At first it was not so. Among the earliest chosen were Angelica Kaufman and Mary Moser; now, when there are so many better

painters among the women artists, it is difficult to understand the justice of this, and why, year after year, men without special merit, whose names are often little known, are chosen as Associates, when women, whose names are well known, and whose pictures have been selected for exhibition year after year, should be passed by. One cannot but feel that if the "Roll Call" had not been painted by Elizabeth Butler, but by one of the other sex, the painter would have speedily become an associate of the Royal Academy, and in due time one of the sacred forty. The same might be said of two of our most charming painters of Venetian and English water and country scenes—Miss Clara Montalba and Mrs. Allingham. At the Royal Academy exhibition last year one of the most important pictures was painted by a woman—Miss Henrietta Rae. Space does not permit us to mention several women who are of Academic rank, and for whom public opinion will, it is hoped, secure recognition.

A Book of the Week.

"DEGENERATION."*

"DEGENERATION" is a book that should, I think, be exceptionally interesting to Nurses. It is an original study of the influences that are most powerful upon our generation and thought. Without doubt Max Nordau works his theories beyond the limit of common sense or credibility, nevertheless much that he says is very suggestive, and may be very profitable to those people who are inclined to be carried away by the last new craze in music, painting, or philosophy. "Degrades," the writer tells us, are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists and pronounced lunatics; they are very often authors and artists, and in recent years Max Nordau considers many "degenerates" in literature, music and painting, have come into extraordinary prominence, and are revered by a too credulous generation as "creators of a new art, and heralds of the coming century." Having thus trumpeted his protest against the majority of the powers that be, Nordau proceeds with considerable skill and a most sarcastic, and at times venomous pen to dissect the characters, writings, music and painting of the various individuals and schools that are most admired in our days. The first chapter is entitled "Fin de Siècle," which phrase the writer considers is at once a confession and a complaint. The analysis of the symptoms of degeneration that follows is an able and amusing piece of argumentative writing. There follows upon this a chapter upon "Mysticism," which we are told to consider is a principal characteristic of degeneration, and in proof of this Nordau writes many sarcastic paragraphs upon Wagner, Tolstoi, Verlaine, Materlinck, Ibsen, and others, and it must be confessed that if he is rather too acrid in his fierce judgment of the degenerating effect of the influence upon the latter end of this century of these writers, musicians and artists, he contrives at any rate to be very amusing; and though, doubtless, many of us after reading his

* "Degeneration," by Max Nordau. Translated from the German. (Heinemann, 1895, 17s.)

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