

Notes on Art.

MR. FRANK ABBEY'S PASTELS.

THE drawings in this collection are of strikingly unequal value. It seems as though the artist would have been better advised, had he not included in his show some studies obviously executed when he was feeling his way with an as yet unfamiliar medium.

Some seven or eight years ago, the revival of pastel drawing in England seemed to be a *fait accompli*; and it is matter for some surprise that this revival should have almost entirely died away again. It cannot be disputed that this soft, pearly work, possesses certain solid and undoubted advantages over its sisters—oils and water-colours. The velvety surface approaches more nearly in texture to the bloom upon a fair cheek than anything one can imagine; and the manipulation is so easy, the process so free from smell, that for amateurs especially, it seems a particularly suitable form of portraiture.

The main reason for its very limited use may be very justly attributed to the imperfect understanding, by English manufacturers, of the paper best calculated to hold the chalk. In his somewhat too eulogistic preface to this exhibition, Mr. Pennell tells us that this difficulty has now been overcome; which is good hearing. When I was in Dresden, I used to gaze and gaze, with fruitless longing at the master-pieces of Mengs and Liotard, in the vain hope of discovering what their paper looked like before they began to work. Anything more strong and masterly than the head of his father by Gabriel Mengs, or more ineffably delicate than Liotard's inimitable "Chocolatière," I never saw.

There is nothing in Mr. Abbey's show to send one into ecstasies; but among a good deal of very crude work, there is, nevertheless, much to admire.

The best are the illustrations of old plays. "Julia" (No. 1) from "The Rivals" is much too spirited a figure for that exasperating young woman. The drawings of Bob Acres and David are full of fun and life; but surely Acres is made to appear too old?

"Miss Richland" (No. 16) is one of the very best. She is seated, and wears a charming cloak of pale purple, edged with fur, a white dress, and a huge hat, trimmed with mauve. The pose and the colour are fresh and masterly. There is another study in violet, equally fascinating—a lady in a cloak, with no background at all (No. 24).

Grass, with this artist, is always a failure; and, indeed, I think landscape in this medium, is always liable to be crude, from the necessity one is under to use composite or ready-made greens, instead of mixing them, as one does with paint. There is a species of "Shepherdesses," all on grass of precisely the same distressingly green hue, and in the most chalky of white frocks and pink ribbons, with the most impossible of frocks.

One picture, which had a kind of cleverness of its own, was called, "What the Shepherd saw." It represented a belated herdsman, returning home, and seeing by a pool an elvish creature, in curious turquoise draperies, smiling at him a boding smile.

There are very few portrait heads; the two that I noticed made me wish for more. They are both studies from the same model—a very sweet and refined face—in each case she wears a wonderful crimson gown, and a gold necklace.

G. M. R.

A Book of the Week.

"THE DAYS OF OLD LANG SYNE,"

THE present volume is a continuation of "Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush," which was reviewed in these columns in the early part of this year. All the same characters appear in these pages, and, truth to tell, become rather wearisome. There is a singular monotony of conception in Ian Maclaren's mind. No one can describe better than he can the reticent, cynical character of a certain type of Scotchman, but he never seems to get outside that phase of human nature, to wit, the rugged, rigid, saving inhabitant of Drumtochty, who always gets the best of every bargain and every argument, and who yet is possessed of a warm heart and loving constancy.

As we read story after story illustrating this type, the reiteration of these special qualities of heart and brain becomes tedious, and we begin to doubt their vitality, and to feel sure that even Drumtochty must contain a few human sinners and foolish people.

There is another thing which oppresses the reader in these stories, and that is the constant discussion of, and interest shown in, the weekly sermons. No one who has lived in out-of-the-way parts of Scotland can doubt that a very large percentage of the inhabitants of every village do "argle-bargle" during the week about the Sabbath discourse. I have heard them myself debate every point of doctrine in the minister's sermon, but I doubt if even in the remotest village in Scotland the interest is as universal as Mr. Watson, minister of the Church of Scotland, whose pseudonym is Ian Maclaren, would have us believe. "Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush" was a delightful and most human book. It was impossible to read one or two of the studies in it with dry eyes, and its archaic simplicity of language filled the reader's heart with joy and understanding; but the success of that book has been a snare to its author, and has led him into the fatal mistake of resuscitating his creations into this *réchauffé* of tales, the perusal of which leaves us cold and unsympathetic, and almost makes us doubt if we really appreciated the Drumtochty characters in the first volume as much as we thought.

Jamie Soutar has two stories devoted to portraying his character. The first is called "A Nippy Tongue," and in this story it is intended to show how racy and apposite Jamie's speech could be, but, unfortunately, this is not entirely the impression left with the reader, who mildly wonders how any of his hearers could have put up with his rudeness. The next tale about Jamie is called "A Cynic's End," but, of course, having now got accustomed to Ian Maclaren's stories, we know perfectly well that Jamie was only a sham cynic, and that all the time he was a most loving, estimable soul. It is surprising in Drumtochty how all the male inhabitants loved "one woman only," and, even if she died, remained faithful to her memory till death.

I fear that this is rather a captious review. It is bred of the disappointment of too great expectations, but if we can forget the high level of "Beside the

* "The Days of Old Lang Syne," by Ian Maclaren. 6s. (Hodder & Stoughton.), 1895.

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