

A French doctor has described the symptoms of poisoning by coffee which are not to be found mentioned, it is said, in any of the standard works on medicine. The symptoms so closely resemble those of alcohol poisoning that they are seldom referred to as their true cause; as in the case of the abuse of alcohol, so in the abuse of coffee, the stomach and nervous system are chiefly affected. The patient suffers from morning vomiting and loss of appetite, the disgust excited by the idea of solid food being so great that he will take nothing but bread soaked in coffee. He is afflicted with sleeplessness, or if he sleep, with horrible dreams. There is also a tremor of the muscles of the extremities and of the tongue.

Happily, the elimination of the poison from the system is more rapid in the case of caffeine than in that of alcohol. With the discontinuance of coffee-drinking the symptoms immediately disappear.

Speaking of the methods employed in different countries for slaughtering animals, the *Daily News* remarks that the butcher is often a hereditary craftsman, and like others who have learnt the duties of their craft by early manual training, he is conservative and slow to change. This must indeed be so with the butchers of Switzerland. We read that in 1893 a law was passed in favour of stunning the beasts or rendering them insensible in some other way before killing them. Some of the Swiss butchers migrated over the French border and others strove to render the cattle insensible by the time-honoured method of spirit-drinking. Thus it is said as much as five litres of spirit was poured down the throat of an ox and the animal appeared to be in considerable pain. This is not surprising when we remember that the quantity of spirit is about nine pints, but it is surprising that such an absurdly clumsy and expensive as well as painful method of producing insensibility should have been resorted to.

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## Notes on Art.

### THE PRICES OF PICTURES.

I REMEMBER a doggerel couplet I knew in my youth expressing the cynical opinion that

“The real worth of anything  
Is just as much as it will bring.”

From a certain point of view, of course, nothing could be false; but the strange unaccountable fluctuations in the prices of pictures make one realise how entirely a matter of fashion, or of personal taste, is the market value of a picture.

A guileless old gentleman, a few years back, was the possessor of a priceless set of Chippendale chairs and a sideboard to match. A neighbouring upholsterer was called in for some repairs. He looked pityingly at the dining-room furniture. “Shabby, sir, very!” he said sadly, “but I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll make you a handsome offer. If you’ll let me take the lot, I’ll exchange them for a nice suite of red mahogany and horsehair, with sideboard to match, at a trifling cost to you, sir.” The old gentleman was quite struck by the upholsterer’s generous suggestion, and readily

consented. When he died, a few months later, his heirs did not share his sentiments!

This is a parable, and meant to show how strangely and utterly lacking, in many persons, is the faculty of taste. I have known many persons, who would be deeply and seriously offended if classed among the uneducated or unrefined, yet whose sole standard of taste was the tradesman’s recommendation. When such people take to picture-buying the result is very funny.

Even the price of an acknowledged first-rate picture will fluctuate according to the amount of spare cash possessed by connoisseurs, and also to the fashion of the moment; but it is in the works of recent artists that we see the greatest changes. In my childhood, Mr. Faed’s simple-minded, nicely-painted interiors fetched considerable prices; but a picture of his perhaps his finest, “Conquered, but not Subdued,” which in 1886 sold for £1,155, this year realised only £693. *Sic transit!*

Mr. Orchardson, on the contrary, has almost doubled his prices in the last ten years. Sir William Beechey seems to be rising in fashion—at least, a picture of his which in 1889 cost £78, was this year bought for £1,260. He is certainly a very able and graceful painter.

The sale of the Clifden pictures at Willis’s Rooms, has been quite one of the events of the year. Two prices at this sale are especially surprising to me. A Hondecoeter, which was supposed to be worth about £150, fetched the enormous sum of £4,357 10s.!! I cannot feel that any representation, however faithful, of cocks and hens can, on the principles of true taste, be worth half that sum. And in contrast to this, we have the strange fact of Velasquez’s splendid “Marianna of Austria,” which, as lately as 1893, was bought in for £4,303, going this year at £2,415, scarcely more than half the price!

Certainly the picture market is a fickle one; but that a Hondecoeter, of whatsoever merit, could command more than a Velasquez, seems to me almost as inconceivable as that anyone could prefer the horrors of horsehair and red mahogany to the grace and dignity of Chippendale.

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## A Book of the Week.

### CONVENTIONAL LIES.\*

WHEN I was in Germany in the early part of this year, people on all sides assured me that “Conventional Lies” by Max Nordau was a very important book indeed, that it was epoch making, and likely to revolutionise all the ordinary standards of truth, religion, and morality!—and that the Imperial Council of Vienna had prohibited its sale in Austria, and confiscated all copies that could be discovered. All these considerations, added to its most attractive title, combined to make many people look forward to the publication of what promised to be a most piquant and interesting book by a vigorous and

\* “Conventional Lies of Our Civilization,” by Max Nordau, author of “Degeneration.” Translated from the seventh edition of the German work. 17s. net. (Heinemann). 1895.

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