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AT THE EAST-END "ACADEMY."

A "PRIVATE VIEW" AT ST. JUDE'S SCHOOLS, WHITECHAPEL.

ONCE a year, as regularly as clockwork, the Houses of Lords and Commons amuse themselves with discussing whether the masses care for high art, whether they would like to have good pictures to look at on Sundays, and whether if they had, they would derive any pleasure or profit therefrom. These annual discussions are innocent enough, but somewhat superfluous, inasmuch as the point at issue was settled some years since by private enterprise in the East-end of London. Six years ago Mr. Barnett, the vicar of St. Jude's, Whitechapel, opened his first Loan Exhibition. The only way of permanently doing people any good, he felt, was to give them the best that was to be had; and it was just one of the marks of good art that, like fine music, it should speak with many voices, and have something in it of soothing memory or pathetic suggestion or stirring thought for every one to discover:—

In spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits.

Mr. Barnett's convictions have been amply borne out by experience. Artists and owners have come forward in the most generous way to lend him first-rate pictures, and the common people have flocked in day after day—but especially on Sundays—to see them. Year after year the numbers became more embarrassing, and the committee have now built some new rooms—and capital rooms they are, too—so that the pictures may be hung in better light, and the crowd of sight-seers may be less inconvenienced. The faces and demeanour of the visitors are as remarkable as their numbers. Most of us gather our ideas of the popular appreciation of art from the crowds who "do" the Royal Academy with such obvious weariness of flesh and vexation of spirit; and it is quite a revelation to see the frank enjoyment and evident interest which are taken at the Burlington House of Whitechapel.

But it is only fair to remember that the East-enders have several advantages in respect of their annual picture-show over the West-enders. For one thing, they are not overpowered by a confusing multitude

of pictures—good, bad, and indifferent. This year the six galleries contain 350 works, and scarcely one is placed so high as to hurt either the feelings of the artist or the neck of the public. And then,

is! A few bad pictures they

doubt out of prudential motives, admit; but there are no superannuated Academicians to insist

figuring the "line," and there are several years' "Academies" and "Grosvenors" to draw from. As

for the public, the boon they most appreciate is the explanatory catalogue that is prepared for them.

They are spared the technical criticism, to the infinite boredom of which the West-enders submit so patiently in their daily and weekly journals, and are given instead intelligible accounts of what each picture means or might mean. The old gentleman, for instance, in the next

sketch has been carefully through

his catalogue, and is now greatly impressing the members of his family with his knowledge of what Mr. Waterhouse's picture of "The



A CONSTANT VISITOR.



AN EAST-END BEAUTY.

Oracle" is about. Sometimes the tables are turned, and there is no prettier sight in the exhibition than that of some sharp lad—who has stolen half an hour in the morning to go round with his catalogue—bringing his father and mother with him in the evening, and showing them the points in his favourite pictures. Mr. Ruskin, in his evidence before one



"CONSULTING THE ORACLE."

of the National Gallery Select Committees, said that what the common people wanted were good modern pictures of domestic pathos. "Nothing assists them so much," he said, "as having the moral disposition developed rather than the intellectual after their work; anything that touches their feelings is good, and puts new life into them." That is exactly the principle on which the promoters of this Whitechapel exhibition have acted. Here in our next sketch is "a couple" looking at



"THE SYMBOL."

Mr. Frank Dicksee's "Symbol," which is thus explained to them in the catalogue:—

A wedding party has broken up, and the revellers pass merrily down the stairs. "Smiling they live and call life pleasure;" but in the shadow below one to whom "the cup of life has been dealt in another measure." The old man asks for alms, and holds in his hands a crucifix—the symbol of self-sacrifice. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" he asks. The plaintive question catches the bridegroom's ears; and he is startled in a moment into the sense that sacrifice is nobler than pleasure.

Close to this picture hangs Mr. Briton Rivière's "Enchanted Castle."

What proportion, we wonder, of those who saw it in the Academy in 1884 would not have been glad enough—if they had dared to confess it—of such a help to its enjoyment as the following little entry in the catalogue:—

In all nations there is a legend of an enchanted castle, where rich treasures are to be found, but which is left untouched by the fear of men, and is guarded by beasts. Men cannot reach their hopes, such legends tell us, because of their passions and their fears—symbolized in this picture by the tigers that are "burning bright" between the pillars, and the adders and poisonous lizards that crawl about the polished floor. At last one man—like the Knight in Tennyson's "Sleeping Beauty"—strong in the strength of faith and inspired by the love of a woman, whose scarf he wears, is brave enough to face the dangers; before love and faith the enchantment is broken, and by one man's sacrifice the hopes of many are realized. The Sleeping Beauty is awakened, and "evermore a costly kiss" becomes "the prelude to some brighter world."

All precious things, discovered late,
To those that seek them, issue forth;
For Love in sequel works with fate,
And draws the veil from hidden worth.

The catalogue does not, however, exhaust Mr. Barnett's "resources of civilization" for adding to the attractiveness of his show. Many of the visitors are "no scholars"; others do not care to spend their penny on the catalogue. For their sake it is that oral explanations are occasionally given. On the Select Committee referred to above, one of the members remarked how, "upon one occasion, a friend of his stopped in one of the galleries and explained some of the objects, and at once a very numerous crowd was attracted round him, until the officials ordered him to move on." There are no such restrictions at Whitechapel. This sketch, for instance, shows one of the crowds that assemble



THE GOSPEL OF ART.

from time to time, and follow Mr. Barnett as he makes the circuit of the rooms and tells his visitors "all about it." Who are the visitors, it may be asked? They are very literally all sorts and conditions of men, from the West-ender who goes down to see how the common people behave, to the factory girls who couldn't tell you why they go, but for whom the pictures have a strange fascination, and who wander in, evening after evening, when their day's work is done. Mr. Barnett and his friends do not expect to regenerate the world by their picture shows, nor do they affect to believe—as the disputants at St. Stephen's sometimes do—that a general Sunday opening of museums would inaugurate the millennium. They only say—in the mottoes printed on their catalogue—that as "life without industry is guilt," so "industry without art is brutality," and that even the smallest service "is true service while it lasts." Any one who cares—just as the three months' picture season is beginning in the West—to subscribe towards the £150 that are wanted to pay for the three weeks' season now closing in the East may at any rate be assured that his charity will do no harm—which, to judge from the recent correspondence in our columns, is about as much as in this tangled world anybody has a right to expect.