

MEANING OF THE WORD ART.



WE are all a set of refreshing humbugs, according to "Miss Moucher" and perhaps, in our oft-times superficial attempts at gaining what is generally called "culture," we may sometimes feel ourselves half deserving of the little hair-dresser's classification.

We have probably dabbled enough in music to manage a criticism of a concert, at least to our own satisfaction, but to many of us, the word 'Art' presents a vague jumble of Fra Angelica's Saints and decorated tambourines; Pre-Raphaelite landscapes and brass plaques. Goethe tells us that "happy is he who at an early age knows what art is."

Certainly the task of giving the definition is far beyond the power of a feeble student, but we may perhaps by speaking about it get somewhere nearer the true meaning of the word, so short in its utterance so long in its significance.

According to Ruskin "the art of any country is the exponent of its social and political virtues;" while Lessing, followed by some German and many of the English critics, affirms that the aim of all art is pleasure; or stated more definitely: Art is the *interpretation* of the world of matter; the human heart, its joys and fears, its tenderness, in such a way as to give pleasure.

Ruskin's cry of: "truth first, beauty afterwards," struck an answering chord in the hearts of the truth-loving English people, in whom the moral sense is more strongly developed than the artistic. In reading his works sympathetically, one can scarcely divest one's self of the idea that art and morals are identical; that to learn to draw a beautiful curve is to render one's self incapable of uttering a falsehood: that the power to catch the hue of a sunset cloud and to keep one's self unspotted from the world must needs go together; that training a people to lead a moral life necessitates teaching them how to use a water-color pencil.

The doctrine that "Art is one of the natural forms assumed by joy," could not have gained ground with the hard-work-

ing upper-middle class of commercial England like Ruskin's seemingly more serious theory, that art means a definite gain in morals and intellect, and above all, in the accumulation of facts. The nobleness of play is not always understood, and the value of an imagination that brings to us pleasant fancies to cheer our jaded spirits, is often passed over as unworthy of recognition.

The theory that art should be a perfect imitation of nature was a peculiarly acceptable one, for it brought the general public out of the vagueness of an unexplored region and set it up in business on its own account. Every man has seen an oak-tree, then if there be an oak tree in a picture and a dispute arises about the color, what is easier than to object to the tint in the picture, as being greyer or browner than an actual tree would be against that back-ground? When the vital question is: does it hold its right relation? is it as much darker than the sky in the picture as the real tree is darker than the real sky? is it not made greyer because we have no pigment bright enough to give us the golden sheath of sunshine lying across the emerald sward, and so our poor colors must be coaxed into brilliancy by the softened foliage.

The danger of Leonardo's doctrine (which, by the way, he himself never followed) that a picture ought to be like the representation of the scene in a mirror, is one that, generally speaking, can only hold with very young painters. Ere long the artist finds that, not having nature's palette to work with, his highest light can only be made to represent the sunlight by the judicious forcing of some tones and the lowering of others; that while he lingers to catch the exact twist of the faggot lying at his feet, the subtle spirit of the scene has escaped him; that his imagination must even play around the mountain's brow heightening it somewhat, or, lo! on his canvas appears but a stunted hill, for he has lacked the quivering air and shadow-giving clouds that raised the blue mystery far into the sky.

We sometimes ask ourselves, why it is that the representation of a scene often gives us more pleasure than the scene itself would do; one would think that the