



SCREEN, NORTH AISLE—AMIENS CATHEDRAL.

## COUNT TOLSTOY ON ART.

Count Leo Tolstoy, in his book entitled "What is Art?" makes a contribution to the question which can hardly fail to affect the progress of art in Europe.

Before making his own definition of art he gives a summary of the views of aestheticians for over 200 years, which must have cost him much labour. It is not easy reading and the conclusion he brings us to is that it is not profitable reading, because the object of the aestheticians is to discover the nature of art by the consideration of examples of all kinds—bad as well as good—and devising a definition of art to cover all these productions. The result of these investigations is a general conclusion on the part of the aestheticians that beauty is the object of art: "that art is that which makes beauty manifest, and beauty is that which pleases." Feeling the instability of this definition of beauty, "many aestheticians have asked themselves why a thing pleases," and "have converted the discussion on beauty into a question concerning taste," and there it squanders. There is no explanation of why a thing pleases one man and displeases another. So that the science of aesthetics fails as a science. "It does not define the qualities and laws of art, or of the beautiful (if that be the content of art), or the nature of taste (if taste decides the question of art and its merit), and then, on the basis of such definitions, acknowledge as art those productions which correspond to these laws and reject those that do not come under them."

Tolstoy quarrels with both the system and its result. He objects to the aim and purpose of art being considered to be the pleasure we get from it, as much as he would object to its being considered that the purpose and aim of food is the pleasure derived when consuming it. He proposes to define art first, and then decide what is and what is not good art by judging whether a work conforms or does not conform to the definition.

"In order to correctly define art," he says, "it is necessary, first of all, to cease to consider it as a means of pleasure, and to consider it as one of the conditions of human life. Viewed in this way we cannot fail to observe that art is one of the means of intercourse between man and man." The peculiarity of this means of intercourse he finds to be that whereas by means of words men transmit their thoughts, by means of art they transmit their feelings.

In order to be a true work of art the feelings transmitted must be the artist's own feelings, which he has lived through either in actual experience or by his imagination. It does not matter what the feelings are, whether they are strong or weak, bad or good: "feel-

ings of love for native land, self-devotion and submission to fate or to God expressed in a drama, raptures of lovers described in a novel, feelings of voluptuousness expressed in a picture, courage expressed in a triumphal march, merriment evoked by a dance, humour evoked by a funny story, the feeling of quietness transmitted by an evening landscape or by a lullaby, or the feeling of admiration evoked by a beautiful arabesque—it is all art."

He therefore makes the following definition:—"Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them."

This is art—the definition seems indisputable—but it is not by any means the whole matter of the treatise. The author reaches this definition in 50 pages but there are nearly 200 beyond. He has still to mark off the classes of work which, though they have been usually considered to be art, do not conform to this definition, and to reject the classes of work which, though they do come under the definition and must be called art, cannot be upheld as serving any useful purpose.

The first of these two heads is of the greater immediate interest to architects.

In order the better to distinguish true art from false, Count Tolstoy traces the course of art from the early centuries of Christianity, when renunciation of the world was the motive of life, and art renounced the transmission of feelings of personal enjoyment; through the Middle Ages when, under the inspiration of the church, pious adoration, the fear of hell and the hope of heaven were the themes of good art; to the time of the Renaissance when the rich and powerful, no longer able to believe in Church religion and incapable of accepting true Christian teaching, stranded without any religious conception of life, involuntarily returned to that pagan view of things which places life's meaning in personal enjoyment. It is here he finds not only a great impoverishment of the subject matter of art but the source of the involved, affected and obscure art which has since grown up.

Art does seem at the time of the Renaissance to have fallen into a whirling gulf from which there is no advance, and the change of motive from religious feeling to pleasure would sufficiently account for it; for the satisfaction of pleasure brings merely satiation, while the satisfaction of religious feeling is a renewal of impulse.

In leaving the way of religious feeling and devoting itself to the satisfaction of easily staled enjoyment, art lost the greatness which belongs to it only when it is comprehensible to every one, and became an amusement of the upper classes; in consequence of which, in the pressure of meeting demands for art which did not spring spontaneously in the artists' inner self, artists have had to devise methods of producing imitations of art.

These methods are those of (1) borrowing, (2) imitating, (3) striking (effects), and (4) interesting.

"The first method consists in borrowing whole subjects, or merely separate features, from former works recognized by every one as good works of art and so re-shaping them with sundry additions that they should have an appearance of novelty." This method in its