

## ART CRITICISM.

I beg space wherein to reply briefly to the letters which have appeared in the SPECTATOR, in reference to my article of the 10th instant, on the Canadian Academy of Art.

1. I am informed that Mr. J. W. Gray, a teacher of drawing, is the author of the letter over the initials "J. W. G." which you published on the 17th instant. The language, or rather the abuse, he has cast upon me, renders it unnecessary for me to take any further notice of Mr. Gray or of his epistle. The game is not worth the shot.

2. The article signed "Toronto" is evidently written by an artist and a gentleman. In differing with some of my opinions, he expresses his dissent with courtesy. He also kindly admits I have not been entirely inappreciative of Canadian art. On the other hand, I am unable to coincide with some of his statements; and *inter alia*, I would like to be informed of the pictures of Sir Joshua Reynolds on which "Toronto" justifies his charge of inaccurate drawing. Familiar as I have been with the good drawing of some of Sir Joshua's works, and remembering how much he alludes to the lack of it in others, in his well-known lectures, I must be excused for doubting the right of imputing a similar fault to himself.

3. Mr. Matthews, the Secretary of the Canadian Academy, attributes a paragraph to me which I cannot find in my article. I certainly did not say that when the meeting of Academy takes place in Montreal, five years hence,—"that in that time *there is good hope* so great an advance will be made as to make it quite satisfactory." What I did say is as follows:—

"If these suggestions be not followed, and the plan proposed by the printed Constitution does go into operation, we ought at least to be grateful for three of its features—namely, 1st, That which excludes from the Exhibition "all needle work" (such as counterpanes of monstrous designs and of infinite variety), "artificial flowers, shell-work," or "any such performances"; 2nd, That which restricts every Academician to *two* pictures only at any one Exhibition; and 3rdly, That which places Montreal the last in the order of the cities wherein an Exhibition is to be held. For it is fervently to be hoped that when this time arrives a great advance will be made upon the present status of Canadian art; and in the fulfilment of that hope no one will be more delighted, or more disposed to applaud, than we ourselves."

Mr. Matthews states that the artists of Ontario did not advocate the imposition of duty on the importation of works of art. I was absent from Canada at the time the existing duty on drawings was first announced by the Government. Upon my return I was told by those likely to be correctly informed that the proposal originated among Ontario artists, and that they tried to apply it to paintings in oil also. If, in repeating this statement, I have done injustice, I crave their pardon.

4. Mr. T. D. King, in a letter, quotes a part of a sentence of mine, and he makes no reference to a sentence which precedes it, and with which it has connection. He says "the phrasing of this sentence is ambiguous." Under these circumstances, it is not surprising if it be so. I wrote as follows:—

"The number of those who, in Canada, really appreciate art of a high character, and are able and willing to pay its price, is unfortunately, at present, insufficient to sustain here, for any length of time, artists of really good second-class reputation from a European standpoint. In Montreal,—where meritorious works of art are bought oftener than perhaps in any other place in the Dominion, and which can boast of larger and more valuable private collections from among the first painters in Europe than that bequeathed by Mr. Gibb to the Art Association of this city,—this has been proved again and again."

I am unable to see any ambiguity in this citation; and it is unfair to quote, as Mr. King has done, a part of the latter sentence only.

Mr. King also questions the accuracy of my statement that there are larger and more valuable collections of art than Mr. Gibb's in this city. Without depreciating unfairly the value of the Gibb collection and the gratitude due to him for his generous gift of it, I must iterate my belief that there are in Montreal at least two private collections of greater value and numerically as large, if not larger, than his. I have reason for thinking Mr. King has not seen the greater part of these collections, and he therefore may be excused for expressing his doubt. It would be manifestly improper to publish the names of the owners without their permission: but if Mr. King desires their names, he may have them for his private information—not for publication.

It may be true, as Mr. King states, there are no known examples in Montreal of those Royal Academicians he has named. But,

"There were heroes before Agamemnon."

There are other schools of art than that of the Royal Academy, and as an Englishman I am sorry to have to confess that the English school, with all its merit, does not, and never has occupied, in oil painting, the front rank in the world of modern art. It is to be regretted that one possessing such refined taste, and critical judgment as Mr. King does, has not made himself more familiar than he appears to be with the schools of France, Belgium, and Germany. Had he done so, he would perhaps sympathise in the regret not unfrequently expressed by English connoisseurs, of the comparative shortcomings of many of our leading painters, and re-echo the sentiments of Lady Verner, in her paper in the *Contemporary Review* for December last, entitled "Where are we in art?" In drawings in water colours, England has hitherto stood pre-eminent, but in this branch France and Belgium are now making

such rapid strides of advancement that she will have to look well after her laurels. The Millets\* (Jean Baptiste and Jean François), Corot, Descamps, Luminais and Van Marke, of France; Leys and Stevens, of Belgium; Matthew Maris, of Holland, and last, though perhaps the greatest, Gabriel Max—who, with Carl Piloty, stands at the head of the best of German schools, that of Munich—have all of them excellent examples of their genius, I am very proud to say, in this city of Montreal; and they have no superiors, if equals, in their respective *genres* among those of the Royal Academy cited by Mr. King. Such I know to be the opinion of many high authorities in Europe.

5. And lastly, but not least, is due my sincere thanks to the lady who, over the signature of "Euphrosyne," penned the kindly and cleverly written epistle which appeared in your issue of the 24th inst.

John Popham.

## CHURCH DEBTS.

The complete originality of the remark that "this is a utilitarian age" is its best apology. Yet it needs none; while the train of thought to which it is here intended to form a prelude will possibly cause emphatic demands, from some quarters, for a very ample apology.

The one practical matter in which the utilitarian spirit of this age is not conspicuous is that of church building. Real usefulness seems the very last aim or object which enters into the hearts of those who indulge in the pastime of building and "running" a church. Real usefulness is always linked closely to honesty—more or less closely according to the extent of its real reality. It does not build church after church on borrowed money, trusting to throw the burden of maintaining the honesty and good character of religion upon the chances of attracting a crown by brilliant but ill-paid oratory, comfortable surroundings, and a halo of respectability. None of these things have necessarily anything to do with religion, and are therefore by no means certain to attract truly religious and conscientious people. Consequently, we find in all parts of the Dominion newly built churches which could not be sold for an amount sufficient to cover the sandy foundation of mortgages upon which they are built. Missionary enterprise has "outrun the constable" and is fearfully loaded with debt in most, if not all, the varied sects, who run a tilt against each other for converts by the aid of borrowed money. The truly good, honest and sincere among our ministers and missionaries are impelled by their creditable sense of shame to waste precious time and energy in urging the necessities of their respective sects upon a highly inappreciative and inert audience who listen, groaning inwardly, and give—a little—to keep up their credit as men "well-to-do" in a purely commercial sense. When this pocket-pressure becomes too severe in one church, they flee to another. The children of this world are wise in these matters. They get their feelings hurt by the remarks of some ardent but indiscreet brother, and, for that reason only, seek respectability at a cheaper rate elsewhere. And so serious a matter has it become for "respectability" to desert a church in quantity, that there are already isolated instances which bid fair to show to the world ere long the interesting moral spectacle of a church availing itself of the Insolvent Act with a view to effect a happy settlement at the average rate of ten cents in the dollar. Ere that happens, someone, it is to be hoped, will suggest that the property or properties in question be simply permitted to be seized and sold by the mortgagee and bought in at a low figure for the society. This would make it so much pleasanter all round, decrease scandal, and, though the bondholders might bring railing accusations in their temporary soreness at being "done," it would have more of the appearance of irresistible fate about it. It would be equivalent to an illuminated address to the mortgagee to the effect, "There is no compulsion, you know, only you must."

If there be not goodness in our actions towards all, mortgage-holders inclusive, there can be neither truth nor love in the heart of the Church. It certainly goes without saying that "goodness" is an exactly synonymous term with "usefulness," and it is wholly because usefulness is lost sight of to such an extent in the building of churches, and the uses to which they are applied after they are built, that deplorable results follow.

Just here let it be understood that this is not a question of creeds, which are a very minor consideration indeed. These will grow and expand quite naturally to any required length or breadth, if the love of usefulness be the aim of the life. "He that doeth My will shall learn of the doctrine," said One who knew what was in man. More than probably it is this spiritual building on

\* Within the past month another picture by Jean François Millet has been secured by a gentleman of this city. It is known in Paris as "La Pastorale." In an article which appeared in the *London Times* in February, 1875, a few days after the death of this painter, it was truly said that he left behind no equal in pastoral subjects in Europe. The picture is only about 18 x 12, and yet I would cheerfully prefer to possess it, with two exceptions, to any half dozen pictures in this city. But beautiful as it is, doubtless those of the class who could find no merit in that little gem in the loan collection, in May last, by Matthew Maris, and yet admire such "Duffers" as that by Barilli (No. 149) and by Scuti (No. 150) will, no doubt, sneer at "La Pastorale," should they ever be favoured with a sight of it. *De gustibus, &c., &c.*