

THE NATIVITY IN ART.

THE Christmas number of *Harper's Magazine* would be cheap if it contained nothing more than its first item, a magnificently illustrated paper by Henry J. Van Dyke, jun., on "The Nativity in Art," which has not only a full-page reproduction of Raphael's painting in the Pitti gallery at Florence, but also engravings from photographs of the original paintings of Giotto, Filippo Lippi, Correggio, Albert Durer, Murillo, and other masters. The essayist corrects a mistake into which the majority of writers on the same theme have fallen. They speak as if from the beginning the Nativity had been the favorite theme of Christian art, whereas it does not appear in any form of art at all until the fourth century, is represented less frequently than many other events both of the Old and the New Testaments, does not begin to appear in a central and dominant position until the thirteenth century, and falls again at the close of the sixteenth into comparative neglect. The explanation of this is found in the dominant influence of our Lord's divinity and resurrection on the thought of the early Christians. Mr. Van Dyke's criticism is frank, fearless and generally sound. Against Mr. Ruskin's dictum he speaks bravely up for Murillo as the man who touched the Nativity once more, as the earliest artists touched it, with the hand of faith and love, but with an incomparably greater skill. As for the English pre-Raphaelites, Mr. Van Dyke bluntly remarks that their promise has thus far been much beyond their performance in religious art. America, he mournfully confesses, has nothing to show. The prize competition instituted two years ago by the Harpers for an illustration appropriate to Christmas is acknowledged to have been an utter failure, though at the two trials upwards of 600 drawings were sent in. It might have been

expected that among so many devotees of art in the New World there would be some able to enter into the spirit of the Nativity, and to express it with reasonable lucidity. On the contrary, a distinguished committee of judges could not find one of the designs above the level of sheer mediocrity. "The collection, as a mass," we are told, "was an indescribable farrago of absurdities gathered from the whole range of figure and landscape art—such a medley as one may see any day in turning over a collection of Christmas cards." The reason of this failure, according to Mr. Van Dyke's reading of it, involves a very serious reflection on our age. "I believe," he says, "that true greatness in art will only come with a revival of moral earnestness and faith."—*Christian Leader*.

MRS. BUTLER ON IMMORALITY.

A CORRESPONDENT writing to the *Young Men's Christian Magazine* says: "One of the most remarkable meetings which I have attended was held in Markham Square Congregational Church, London, on 4th Oct. It had for its object the consideration of the question which Mr. Stead has brought into so much prominence. It was stated that Mr. Justice Lopes would not permit Mr. Stead to attend the meeting, though his name had been advertised in connection with it. Mrs. Josephine Butler was there, however, and the impression which she made upon the 1,500 people assembled, mostly ladies, was such as I shall never forget. Dressed in black, she came forward in the simplest possible manner, and in a peculiarly feminine voice began to address the great meeting. Her sad story, together with her gentle, unassuming appearance, soon began to melt the hearts of her listeners. So forcible was the address that hundreds of the audience were bathed in tears. She felt that the impulse given to the movement would not cease till the Judgment day."