

and vagrant quality ; present, at times, in any art, more often absent from them all ; too seldom present in the prose novel, too frequently absent from the ode and epic. Fiction is in the same case ; it is no substantive art, but an element which enters largely into all the arts but architecture. Homer, Wordsworth, Phidias, Hogarth, and Salvini, all deal in fiction ; and yet I do not suppose that either Hogarth or Salvini, to mention but these two, entered in any degree into the scope of Mr. Besant's interesting lecture or Mr. James's charming essay. The art of fiction, then, regarded as a definition, is both too ample and too scanty. Let me suggest another ; let me suggest that what both Mr. James and Mr. Besant had in view was neither more nor less than the art of narrative.

But Mr. Besant is anxious to speak solely of "the modern English novel," the stay and bread-winner of Mr. Mudie ; and in the author of the most pleasing novel on that roll, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, the desire is natural enough. I can conceive, then, that he would hasten to propose two additions, and read thus : the art of *fictitious* narrative *in prose*.

Now the fact of the existence of the modern English novel is not to be denied ; materially, with its three volumes, leaded type, and gilded lettering, it is easily distinguishable from other forms of literature ; but to talk at all fruitfully of any branch of art, it is needful to build our definitions on some more fundamental ground than binding. Why, then, are we to add "in prose" ? *The Odyssey* appears to me the best of romances ; *The Lady of the Lake* to stand high in the second order ; and Chaucer's tales and prologues