

to, or reproductions of, works—old German legends, Greek myths, or Hebrew poetry—which moved us long ago, as they moved generations before us. And we thought all this was “art.” Not clearly understanding what art is, and wherein its importance lies, we were not only attached to these things, but attributed importance to them, calling them “artistic” and “beautiful,” without well knowing what we meant by those words.

But here is a book that obliges us to clear our minds. It challenges us to define “art” and “beauty,” and to say why we consider these things, that pleased us, to be specially important. And as to beauty, we find that the definition given by æsthetic writers amounts merely to this, that “Beauty is a kind of pleasure received by us, not having personal advantage for its object.” But it follows from this, that “beauty” is a matter of taste, differing among different people, and to attach special importance to what pleases *me* (and others who have had the same sort of training that I have had) is merely to repeat the old, old mistake which so divides human society; it is like declaring that my race is the best race, my nation the best nation, my church the best church, and my family the “best” family. It indicates ignorance and selfishness.

But “truth angers those whom it does not convince;”—people do not wish to understand these things. It seems, at first, as though Tolstoy were obliging us to sacrifice something valuable. We do not realise that we are being helped to select the best art, but we do feel that we are being deprived of our sense of satisfaction in Rudyard Kipling.

Both the magnitude and the difficulty of the task were therefore very great, but they have been surmounted in a marvellous manner. Of the effect this book has had on me personally, I can only say that “whereas I was blind, now I see.” Though sensitive to some forms of art, I was, when I took it up, much in the dark on questions of æsthetic