

## A NATIONAL SPIRIT IN ART.

BY W. A. SHERWOOD, A.R.C.A.

THE necessity of cultivating a National Spirit in Art is seldom advanced in the criticisms of the press.

The refining and elevating functions of the fine arts, even to the casual observer, are ever apparent in the most common-place society. There exists, however, in art an element not easily discerned, exercising a momentous influence upon the affairs of a nation, and this influence I will in some measure endeavor to discuss.

The intricate conditions retarding research into the underlying elements of national structure render the presentation of art literature exceedingly difficult; it is like one sailing upon a sea without charts or guiding instruments.

In the nursery and in the school-room, during our very impressionable period of child-life, it is, indeed, no easy task to determine the influences which are at work moulding the youthful mind. The silent language of pictures must, upon the very earliest dawn of intelligence, communicate its simple stories to the child. Reclining upon its little cot, who shall determine the stretches of its thought, as its wondering eyes hover over the pictures upon the walls. The school period follows, and in a methodical way the child now acquires knowledge, inquiry being rewarded by explanation. But the scope of inquiry being limited by the artificially-arranged conditions and surroundings of the school, makes this the best understood, though the least interesting, stage of the child's growth. It is lacking in spontaneity. Occasionally, however, the child does make a rambling excursion in the "Realms of Gold," turning leaf after leaf in search of pictures, and drinking with mental thirst from the fountain.

Advancing to manhood, stronger and more mature thoughts lay hold upon the mind, and it is now that the differences of taste and temperament most strongly assert themselves. If of a meditative nature, the man turns, almost with the spirit of reverence, to pictures possessing solemn or sublime qualities: upon the portraits of Divines, he traces the lines of spiritual humanity, and determines the course of his life. If of a military character, his blood courses hotly as he views upon the canvas the wild dash of the cavalry on the solid squares of Waterloo, and, alternately with the common soldier and with the commander, he plays his part upon the field.

The military pictures of Elizabeth Thompson have filled the heart of many a Briton with the proud purpose of serving his country, even though in the ranks. It is said that the Duke of Wellington, in his youthful days, was accustomed to look with breathless silence upon the portraits of Marlborough and other famous generals. Turning from them with triumph upon his face, and catching, as it were, the very inspiration of their genius from the canvas, he momentarily assumed the air and attitude which the artist had delineated. I have often thought that the portraits of Washington, by John Trumbell and Rembrandt Peale, were before the minds of many a gallant officer in the late civil war in the United States. Not confined to the pictorial sphere is this military influence,—the noble statues of Old England have made thousands of heroes.

The little lad, as he romps through the parks of New York, pauses with conscious pride before the imperishable statue of Daniel Webster, and re-