

a correct idea of their appearance to other people—with that the duty of the teacher ends.

It will here be objected that all this will never make an artist; that, in all the genuine artistic work, there is an element of taste, of refinement that such training will not give. Granted; but then our draughtsman need not become an artist. This is precisely the question that is feared by M. Viollet-le-Duc. After *petit Jean* has learned to draw, M. Majorin makes various experiments to see if nature has destined his pupil to be a painter or a sculptor. Having decided in the negative, he is not a bit discouraged, being of opinion that knowing how to draw cannot fail to be useful to a man in any position of life. And, indeed, if our definition is correct, it is obvious that a draughtsman must have had his faculties of observation sharpened far beyond those of his fellows. *Petit Jean* gets apprenticed to a cabinet-maker, and of course makes his own fortune and that of his family, with that fine regard for consistency in which books are so much superior to real life. But we may readily grant the extreme value of good draughtsmanship in all pursuits where knowledge of form is at all essential. Indeed, in no other way is that familiarity with form obtained which is essential to dealing with it successfully. But, supposing *petit Jean* had had the artistic sense, would his training have been of benefit to him as an artist? Undoubtedly. It has never yet been held, even by the most refined of art critics, that a painter can draw too well. But will not this extreme accuracy have deadened his artistic sense? Will he not sink into vulgar realism? That depends on *petit Jean* himself; if he has imagination it will come out in his pictures, and all the more freely in that he has fewer technical difficulties to contend with. Indeed, there is nothing sadder than to see high imaginative gifts cramped and spoilt by the insufficient means of expression at the command of the artist. But supposing that he has no imagination? Then he had better be content with realism; if he has the true artistic taste, we may be sure it will not be vulgar; realism, after all means nothing worse than truth to nature. There is an art which teaches and inspires, and an art which records.

Of artists who are qualified to teach the world, there are but few. Of those who can do good service in recording the beauties of nature, there are fortunately many, and there would be more were not so many eager to teach who have nothing to say, and to inspire who have no inspiration. If we wish to be freed from the false sentiment, sickly pathos, and forced tragedy of modern art, let us not be too hard on realism.

IS THE PREVALENT TASTE FOR "ART FURNITURE" AND BRIC-A-BRAC INDICATIVE OF A SOUND OR HEALTHY AESTHETIC CULTURE.

It appears to be generally assumed that there has been no little advance in English society of late years in regard to what is called "good taste," an expression often very vaguely used, but which we may take to imply the critical perception of the distinction between what is graceful and suitable in form and harmonious in colour in all the objects with which we surround our daily lives, and what is the reverse of all this.

This movement in the direction of good taste is, perhaps, hardly as general as is sometimes supposed. As far as we can judge, it has hardly reached the mass of the trading classes at all; and perhaps there are not a few among the professedly more cultured classes who are still sublimely indifferent to the designs of their tables and chairs, their carpets and wall-papers. But even these have to swim with the stream; and this indifference to the aesthetics of house furniture and decoration can hardly be openly professed by any who have the hope of social salvation before their eyes.

It would be very untrue to say that there is nothing to congratulate ourselves upon in regard to this recent outbreak of "taste." It is certainly a fact that we now not infrequently see rooms the *ensemble* of which is harmonious and grateful to our sense of colour, and in which there is no object which can be said to be in tawdry or vulgar taste, and this is wherefore to be thankful. It is when we come to consider these results not absolutely but relatively,—relatively to the principle from which they appear to spring, on the one hand, and to the ultimate ends of art on the other hand, that we seem to meet with that which must give us pause.

The theory underlying this movement, with those who think about reasons and principles at all, is what has become almost a "Shibboleth" among art-critics of the day, that art and artistic feeling are as much shown in the designs of furniture and other accessories as in what have been hitherto considered

the higher or "fine" arts of sculpture and painting. The practical corollary to this is found in the existence of numerous establishments devoted especially to the production of what is termed "art-furniture."

Now this phrase alone, so familiar to us in print and in conversation constitutes in itself a begging of the whole question, an indication of a view of the subject radically false and unreal. A great Scotchman, John Stuart Mill, in his memorable address at St. Andrews (which suggests to us more about the true relation of art to our intellectual life than can be found in whole volumes of "art-criticism,") observed that art might from one point of view be regarded as the endeavor after the perfection of execution. The definition, at all events, precisely covers the section of the subject which we are just now considering. As far as relates to furniture—to the class of articles which are in the first instance for practical use, and only in a secondary sense ornamental,—that is truly artistic which is made, firstly, in the best possible way in the relation to the use for which it is intended, and the material of which it is constructed; and secondly, which expresses in the best and most graceful manner, in the shape and treatment of each portion, the motive and use of the whole and the special character of the material. We might say that when an object, a sofa, for instance, has the first of these qualities, it is workmanlike; when to these is superadded that of expression, or expressive execution, it may rightly be called artistic; but in fact, the two qualities can seldom be separated or divorced. What is truly workmanlike is almost always artistic; what is unworkmanlike is invariably inartistic—unsatisfactory to our sense of beauty and fitness.

There is not, therefore, and cannot be rightly speaking, any such thing as "art furniture," considered as a separate species of article: and to go into a cabinet-maker's and ask for art-furniture is as reasonable as it would be to go into a bootmaker's shop and ask for a pair of art-boots. The request in either case would in reality be for something made for another object than that for which it professes to be made—for show and not for use. In any sense in which the expression is worth anything, all furniture ought to be "art-furniture," and if it is not it is badly made. What is actually meant by art-furniture, as sold in the aesthetic warehouse, is furniture which is a copy of something else that was in fashion at some former period of our history. Much of what is now made as art-furniture, for instance, is in the style which has lately been distinguished as that of the "Queen Anne" period, which has superseded the Modern-Medieval type, though there is combined with this a taste for furniture of a simpler (and, to my thinking, better) Old English Style. A good deal of the furniture of these types is far more artistic and tasteful than that which was in vogue in the last generation, so that the impression conveyed is of a more or less general improvement of taste. But that this is to a great extent a superficial appearance is shown by the fact that the bad is taken along with the good. Were there space here to go into details of criticism, it would be easy to show that while some of the furniture work referred to is good, some of it is as bad and vulgar in taste as it well could be; but it is all alike accepted by the public, and recommended not only by dealers, but by writers and critics who aspire to guide public taste.

Indolence of mind, coupled with a desire for show is at the root of all this. That which might be rightly called *artistic* furniture is precisely in proportion to the thought that has been put into it; every detail should bear the impress of having been thought out in reference to the material and the use to which it is to be put. If it were usual to have furniture and other accessories so designed as to represent the thought of the workman and the individual taste of the owner, it would have a real interest; but this involves too much trouble. The manufacturer is content to take a certain style and reproduce it, and say "this is artistic"; and the purchaser, instead of cultivating his individual taste, and endeavouring to gratify it considerably and thoughtfully, so as to make his dwelling-rooms a part, so to speak, of his own individuality, is content with the easier task of paying his money, and taking what is set before him, furnishing his rooms after a pattern of a hundred years back, and sitting down and flattering himself that he has succeeded in being artistic, even sometimes at the expense of common convenience. If, for instance, you drop in to afternoon tea at an "aesthetic" house, you have your tea in cups without handles. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that the tea were hot (which aesthetic tea seldom is), you burn your fingers and nearly drop the cup; and then you are told, for consolation, that it is an artistic cup. If it were it would have a handle, for the natural and proper way of making an object that is to be held in the hand is to give one something to hold it by. Even Macbeth, at