

play which nobody now reads was once passed off as a newly-discovered masterpiece of Shakespear's, and was produced at a leading London theatre. Are the critics playing blind-man's buff? Are they relying on each other? Is each following his own whim and fancy? Or do they possess a criterion which they never reveal to those outside the profession?

Such are a few of the many problems relating to art which present themselves to us all, and it is the purpose of this book to enable us to reach such a comprehension of art, and of the position art should occupy in our lives, as will enable us to answer such questions.

The task is one of enormous difficulty. Under the cloak of "art," so much selfish amusement and self-indulgence tries to justify itself, and so many mercenary interests are concerned in preventing the light from shining in upon the subject, that the clamour raised by this book can only be compared to that raised by the silversmiths of Ephesus when they shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" for about the space of two hours.

Elaborate theories blocked the path with subtle sophistries or ponderous pseudo-erudition. Merely to master these, and expose them, was by itself a colossal labour, but necessary in order to clear the road for a statement of any fresh view. To have accomplished this work of exposure in a few chapters is a wonderful achievement. To have done it without making the book intolerably dry is more wonderful still. In Chapter III. (where a rapid summary of some sixty æsthetic writers is given) even Tolstoy's powers fail to make the subject interesting, except to the specialist, and he has to plead with his readers "not to be overcome by dulness, but to read these extracts through."

Among the writers mentioned, English readers miss the names of John Ruskin and William Morris, especially as so much that Tolstoy says, is in accord with their views.