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## FINE ART.

### ART CRITICISM.

*To the Editor of the Canadian Monthly:*

SIR,—So it seems that a new era in art-criticism has dawned upon Toronto. Let us rejoice, if it prove a true one. It is just the very thing that we have been looking for, if we could only find it. The 'would-be-critics of Toronto journalism,' we are told, have betrayed 'extreme ignorance.' They have run up to seed in a weak head of 'adjectives.' They have been more prone to praise than to blame. The public must be taught what to 'condemn.' Something more in this way: 'This impertinent fellow, would you believe it, has had the impudence to paint a bad picture; come up here, you sir, and take a stinging rap on the knuckles.' Our new-comer lays a heavy indictment; how do his own credentials stand? Are they quite satisfactory? Well, we are almost afraid, hardly. His method is a little too much in the vein of the celebrated Mr. McGrawler, who held that the whole art of criticism consisted in 'tickling.' There must be some 'slashing' and 'plastering' to be sure, but *they* spoke for themselves, and any whipster like Paul Clifford could do *them*. The only real difficulty was to tickle with skill; that is, to wrap up in a maze of words one of these two propositions: This work would be very good if it were not very bad; or, it would be very bad if it were not very good. Accordingly we find that, while Mr. A.—and Mr. A. alone—is plastered—pretty thick, no doubt—Mr. B. has some 'capital little studies,' but 'his largest picture is a mistake in color, drawing, and everything;' that Mr. C. has 'un-

doubtedly real powers,' but 'halts too often at glum smudginess;' that Mr. D. is 'so good that he worries us by not being better'—one of his pictures is 'warm, true, and artistic,' but another is 'all aglow with the hot breath of the Sahara;' that Mr. F. has a 'very pretty quiet scene, charmingly given, but without idealization or power;' that Mr. G. 'has, perhaps, more power and vigor than any other artist in Canada,' but that 'in many of his sketches he has been betrayed into a crude, hasty, and almost nonsensical scrimmage of colors;' that Mr. H. 'can paint well in some respects, but we do not like his style;' that Mr. I. has done 'much excellent work,' but has given 'grotesque prominence,' etc; that Mr. J. has 'much excellent work mixed with some that is disappointing.' Now, all this is really very clever tickling. It is said that in some countries they inflict a torture which consists in tickling the victim to death. And it is not so bad an imitation to say that a man has 'undoubtedly great powers,' but they carry him no further than 'glum smudginess;' or that power and vigor, greater perhaps than in any other artist, end in a 'nonsensical scrimmage.' It is all very ingenious, but perhaps just a shade monotonous. Give us a little more plastering, or let the critic carry out his canon of condemnation, and slash a little, by way of relief. But then, you see, it is safe. There is no proving or disproving these things, and they *imply* knowledge, at any rate. It is not every critic, that, has the advantage of acquaintance with the art and mystery of painting—how it