

## Fine Arts.

### THE STUDY OF THE BEAUTIFUL.

On the 30th ult., Mr. G. A. Storey, A.R.A., delivered a lecture in the theatre of the London Institution, Finsbury Circus, on "The Study of the Beautiful." There was a crowded attendance. The lecturer began by quoting a passage from the *Dialogue of Plato* to show that even Socrates was puzzled when asked to distinguish between what was ugly and what was beautiful, and at a later time Hogarth stated that the subject was too high and delicate for any attempt at a true definition. Yet though the Greek philosopher could not answer the question, the Greek sculptor and even the humble potter had demonstrated that art was really the language of the beautiful. All great art was like nature. In these days we have no longer the Delphic Oracle or the worship of the temples of the gods; but Greek and Roman sculpture still remained and was still admired. Thus, no beautiful art could exist unless founded upon the study of nature, nor could mankind appreciate it unless they knew something of nature's laws. Artists themselves well knew that truth. If an artist found that by putting real art into his pictures they were not likely to attract purchasers, he would be tempted to forget the higher and legitimate walks of his profession, and think only of what would attract the eye and tickle the fancy. In this way might be traced the rise and fall of art in its external aspect. By the study of the beautiful he (Mr. Storey) understood seeking for the beauty and goodness of things as opposed to looking for their faults and badness. For one, however, who could perceive and appreciate the beauty of a fine work of art, thousands could only find fault. For one who could understand the goodness of humanity, thousands could only take note of its weakness, and so betrayed an absence of the capacity to perceive beauty. Now, it was right to expose a fault, and not to be unduly lenient; but it was wicked and unjust wilfully to ignore all beauty and goodness. Which was best for the mind—goodness or badness? The answer was obvious. The poet or artist stored his mind with all the good deeds which he perceived his fellow-men capable of, and made it his study to show them to the world, producing those pictures and poems which were the delight of ages. Still beauty was not all sweetness. Ophelia was beautiful in her sorrow, in her madness, in her death. As in music there were certain discords which conduced to the harmony, so in art there was a certain ugliness which enhanced the beauty of the picture. Men's minds were like bookshelves, on which they can stow away only a certain number of ideas. Should they be occupied with the marvels of nature and true wisdom, mirth, and innocence; or should they be cumbered with the record of man's villainy and the morbid reflections of the pessimist? The one was the light and the other was the shadow, and when both were studied it must be confessed that the light was the better of the two. The question resolved itself into this: In what did the beauty and goodness, and in what did the badness of things consist? That had been so ably treated by Mr. Ruskin that little more could be said on the point, and doubtless his works had contributed, to a great extent, to that desire for beautiful things and for the improvement of things which characterized the present generation. It was surely well for people to have something to think about besides the routine of business and the everyday affairs of life. Though the question of what was beautiful could not be answered in the abstract, any more than the alchemist could discover the philosophers' stone, still it was one which gave a healthy exercise to the mind and led to the solution of difficult and vexed questions. If the alchemist had discovered the means of turning every metal into gold, then he would in reality have discovered only how to make gold itself utterly worthless; and if men were to discover what was scientifically and actually beautiful, then their efforts to do more must cease. So it was better perhaps for mankind to be as they were, seeking to find out some of the beautiful and continuing those studies which were ever opening up field for enquiry and were ever increasing in interest. It was his (Mr. Storey's) object in the present lecture chiefly to consider beauty as shown in the art of painting. They had to consider the drawing, composition, subject, expression, and execution of a picture. A beautiful picture consisted in exactly expressing the form and nature of the thing to be drawn. If it were a leaf or flower the drawing must be light and delicate; if the branch or bough of a tree, firm, free, and strong; if rocks, decided, and perhaps hard; if the human form, firm yet flexible; and if the expression of the face were to be delineated, then delicacy and refinement were necessary. A good draftsman must in short handle his brush according to the

nature of the object he was depicting. Hence drawing was not a mechanical but a mental process. Mr. Ruskin said that a careful picture was distinguished by two things—first, moderation; secondly, by never remaining equal in degree at different parts. The lecturer here illustrated his meaning by a Greek and Etruscan vase, both showing how ingeniously man could adapt and mould the great truths of nature to purposes of art. The great doctrine of true art he continued, was that each part of the world was designed to benefit the rest, and it would be well if that could be carried out in real life. With regard to the law of fitness they must be careful to consider whether beauty consisted in fitness only. In nature, fitness certainly grew out of it; but in the works of man there were many articles very ugly but nevertheless useful. There were the chimney-pot hat, the water can, the lamp-post, the ordinary square London house, and even a kitchen jug which he held in his hand, though not offensively ugly, could not be compared with the Greek vase. But if things were called only because they were exactly adapted to their uses, then the jug was as good as the vase. When he called the jug ugly his cook replied, "It may be, sir, but it is very useful." He pointed to another jug, with the remark that it was equally useful but prettier. "It may be prettier," retorted the cook, "but I don't like it so well as the other because I can't get my hand in it to clean it out." People must not, therefore, abuse kitchen jugs: they were good, honest, and meant to be useful. Passing on from outlines to speak of color, the lecturer incidentally alluded to the Japanese, who had a wonderful idea of color, consummate taste, love of nature, keen sense of humour, and great power of delineating human character. Sir David Wilkie, after studying all the great masters on the Continent declared that color, if not the first requisite, was the most essential part of painting. There was something so subtle and intricate about color that one could not speak of it without mentioning his own sensations. Colour affected the emotions almost more than anything else. He could quite understand an artist in the enjoyment of the effects of colour as nature showed them to us, being tempted to make colour the one and only aim of his art; but all great colourists had been men whose senses of proportion had taught them that art was not colour only nor form only, but a combination of the characteristics of nature. Passing on to another branch of the subject, the lecturer observed that false sentiment was never found in true art. A subject might be revolting and terrible, but still was a grand work if true in sentiment; and the most lofty subject might be spoilt by affected attitude and expression. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin," and he who would depict the thoughts and passions of men must himself be human, so that his sympathies might enter into all the joys and sorrows of his fellow creatures. The real academy of art was in the green fields among the wild flowers; in the woods, in the rivers, in the sea and sky, and in all living things which inhabit them; among the mountains in all their grandeur; and in the populous streets of towns. If students would study earnestly in this academy there was no reason why modern art, or the art of this country, should not be capable of equalling, if not surpassing, that of the ancients. (Applause). He did not say whether it would or did, but the road was open. Nature was as good as ever, mankind had as kindly feelings, were as beautiful, children as sweet, and men as handsome. Why, then, should not modern art be as fine as in the old times? Mr. Storey, in alluding to the admirable manner in which familiar toy and story books were now illustrated, paid a high compliment to Mr. Caldecott, Miss Kate Greenaway, Mr. W. Crane, and to Mr. Stacey Marks, who was the founder of this delightful and important branch of art. It had been said that there was nothing new under the sun, but the illustrations of these artists made one doubt the truth of the assertion. When artists copied from each other instead of from Nature degeneracy took place. Of course lessons must be learned from the art which preceded us; but all great artists like Raphael drew straight from nature, both for their inspiration and details. Certain German imitators of the great master doubtless reminded the beholder of him, but only that he was dead. Pose was the first essential in art. Mr. Frederick Walker used to say that "oneness" or unity was the great quality to aim at. Yet everything that was painted should be put in its right place, right tone and colour. A work of art should put us in a pleasant frame of mind. The contemplation of it should give us peace. But some pictures had the opposite effect, and appeared to be painted with the aim of startling their beholders. Raphael's and Reuben's pictures led the heart and mind along with them. In the study of the beautiful we had only to open our eyes and seek for the beauty and loveliness which were everywhere visible and which were never before