



ART NOTES FROM AUSTRALIA.

By GILBERT PARKER.



ART is alive in Australia. It has passed a time of travail. More than is the case with other young countries, the Australian governments are paternal. Though this fact is sometimes perilous to courage and self-dependence, painting and sculpture are not likely to suffer from too much administrative care. Others of the fine arts are practised in an area of wider understanding and patronage. People will dance, and they must therefore pay them that pipe; they will sing and play—especially in Australia—and they in consequence demand songs and music and some one to teach. Churches require organists, musical societies need conductors, theatres must have orchestras; and so the musician can at least make a living. He calculates upon a demand that he has not himself created, but which has been the outcome of a general instinct and predisposition. Not so the artist in the pioneer times. An illustrated journal employs him occasionally, a theatrical manager requires work now and then; but freely speaking he stands alone. He must educate taste, outlive neglect, secure patronage and respect, and be modest therewithal, as the true artist is. It takes a long time for real art feeling to possess the population of a young land. It is taking less time in Australia than elsewhere. Art is there cultivated by government, served by artists' societies duly recognized as national, sought by students, and patronized by the people. Australians have the money to buy with, the land is rich; and when once the fashion sets in, as it must, of buying Australian pictures—then, to native artists, will a good time come. The people of Australia are unconscious of their progress in the love of the fine arts. They are in the movement, and therefore have not perspective; they do not inquire or define. In politics they are ardent students, but they are also partisans, and the division gives them perspective. They quarrel with every item on the estimates save those that concern education and art; those they pass in silence, and that silence means either ignorance or reverence. The instincts of the Australian people are right, they only need direction; there will come, and now is coming, discrimination.

An inquiry here may contribute to a clearer understanding of these things in England as well as in Australia. England can as little afford to disregard Australia in the matter of the fine arts, as she can afford to be indifferent to Australian commerce, to its gold, and wool, and coal. English musicians sell their music in the southern continent, and they have their operas produced at the large theatres of the capitals; sculptors send out their statues for the public squares, parks, and gardens; dramatists sell their plays to managers in Sydney and Melbourne; actors from the London theatres reap goodly harvests there, and painters find liberal customers for their works in Australian governments and Australian citizens.

It may be said without exaggeration, that New South Wales has one of the best water-colour collections in the world. The collection has not its value from the presence of the work of such masters as Turner, but because in its 130 examples it represents most of the water-colour painters of the more modern British School. When nineteen

years ago the New South Wales Government gave its first £500 towards the purchase of pictures for a National Gallery, the trustees of "the Academy of Art," as it was then called, decided to begin with water-colour drawings. This was wise. The trustees thought thus: water-colour drawing is the peculiar achievement of the British School, it is a medium well adapted to a young country and to young artists, and the effect of spending money in this way would probably be greater in proportion to the amount than if the small grants were spent in oils. This was in 1871. In 1881 the Government of New South Wales gave not £500 but £5,000 for the purchase of pictures for the National Gallery, which had taken the place of the Academy of Art. The grant has been continued till to-day. The art treasures in the Sydney National Gallery at the present time represent in money about £50,000. In Melbourne they have spent as much. Sydney has as spacious a room for its water-colours as for its oils. It is notable however that the younger colony, Victoria, led the way in the art movement, and had an endowed National Academy before one was inaugurated in New South Wales. In Melbourne the trustees of the National Gallery are also trustees of the National Libraries and Museums. The Art Gallery however is under the immediate supervision of Mr. George Folingsby, the master of the School of Painting. In Adelaide the Melbourne system is followed. The two eastern colonies have committees of selection in London, and it is through these bodies that the colonies have secured some of the famous pictures that adorn their galleries. Old frequenters of the Royal Academy, the Grosvenor and other exhibitions, and art lovers generally, on visiting these new institutions will find themselves face to face with old friends. In the Melbourne Gallery may be seen Alma Tadema's *The Vintage Festival*, Watts's *Love and Death*, Elizabeth Thompson's *Quatre Bras*, Cope's *Pilgrim Fathers*, *Moses Bringing Down the Tables of the Law*, by John Herbert, Edwin Long's *Esther*, *Josephine Signing the Act of Her Divorce*, by E. M. Ward, Clarkson Stanfield's *The Morning after Trafalgar*, Turner's *Dunstanborough Castle* (presented by the Duke of Westminster), Briton Rivière's *A Roman Holiday*, Thomas Faed's *Mitherless Bairn*, John Linnell's *Wheat*, and Keeley Halswelle's *Heart of the Coolins*. These are but a few of a large number of pictures by men of mark and note; dead and living. Sydney in its oil-paintings is as fortunate as Melbourne, and in its water-colours even more so. There hang upon the walls of the National Gallery of the parent colony, masterpieces of Sir Frederick Leighton, Sir John Millais, Peter Graham, Edwin Long, Luke Fildes, Vicat Cole, Seymour Lucas, and of many more good men.

Not the least satisfactory thing in connection with the Australian galleries is the comprehensiveness of the collections. In the Sydney gallery, for instance, there are works from the French, the Belgian, the German, the Italian, the Spanish, the Austrian, the Bavarian, and the Swedish schools. It was quite impossible, of course, that the colonies should secure a collection of even the old English masters. For their present uses it was better that the work of modern men should be secured. But while acting under this conviction, the mistake has been made in securing several pictures of one artist instead of endeavouring, at every step in this first stage of development, to broaden the area of style by increasing the collection of modern artists. As for the great masters, it must ever be, that the citizen and student of Australia will be obliged to come to the Old World to see them. If the expenditure of money is of any value in estimation, and in this case it is, it may be mentioned here that the collections in the three galleries existing in the colonies represent about £130,000, South Australia, with its annual grant of £1,000, being credited with about one-tenth of this amount in its sixty-five pictures.

The efforts of the governments and the trustees of the different galleries in the purchase of statuary have not been without merit, but the measure of that merit is not great. There are to be seen statues from the hands of the late Sir J. E. Boehm—who has contributed more than any other sculptor to art treasures in this department—Marshall Wood, C. B. Birch, G. Fontana, Christian Rauch, Henry Woolner, and Percival Ball. Yet despite the levy that has been made upon the talent of good men more mistakes have been made in the purchase of statuary than in any other direction in the region of art. There are statues in bronze in Sydney and Melbourne towards which no eyes are turned in admiration. But thanks to one or two sculptors who are giving their life-work to Australia, there is improvement. Mr. Ball's statue of William Wallace, which stands in the public square of Ballarat teaches a daily lesson of the

dignity and beauty of the art. It should be mentioned that the Victorian Government is establishing what may be called branch galleries in the provincial towns. At Ballarat the Fine Arts Gallery contains a dozen paintings lent by the metropolitan gallery. If sculpture and painting are gaining from the efforts of Mr. Ball in Melbourne, New South Wales has certainly lost nothing by the appointment of Mr. Julian Ashton, President of the Artists' Society, to a seat on the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery.

One must write with considerable reserve on the question of art instruction in Australia. Five thousand pounds a year may purchase a masterpiece from the Academy or the Salon, but it cannot make a master off-hand. However, governments think most and first about the masterpieces. The New South Wales Government has been induced at last to give a yearly endowment of £500 to the Art Society of the colony for the institution and conduct of art classes, under the direction of Mr. A. J. Daplyn. In 1890 over ninety students entered themselves for the privilege of studying in the gallery. With feeble private teaching here and there, with limited guidance in design in the Technical College, or with conventional industry in the public schools, elementary art instruction has moved on its purposeless way until at last the New South Wales Art Society has aroused the government to action. But the long inaction has left its lethargy, and art teaching even with this responsible body has not aroused enthusiasm. Still it grows, and there is life and individuality in the work of Australian artists. In Melbourne good has been done. For sixteen years there has existed in connection with the Victorian National Gallery a School of Painting, and a School of Design, the director of the National Gallery governing one, and an accomplished artist directing the other. In connection with this School of Design there is a collection of casts from the antique, of rare excellence and value. This is a thing in which the National Gallery of Sydney is entirely deficient, and with which the Art Society is badly provided. In 1889 there were in attendance on the art classes in the School of Design 140 students. The exhibitions held in connection with the schools make one hopeful. As might be expected, the drawing is not remarkable, but there is some perception of colour and some faculty for composition. Too much must not be expected of a land to which Art is new.

The growing earnestness of the Victorian Government may be judged from the fact that it provides a liberal scholarship to the most successful student of each year in the School of Painting, who has completed his course, to enable him to study three years in some art centre of Europe. The effect of such action has been not only to send to Europe the fortunate possessor of the scholarship, but also to influence many other students to go to Munich or Paris to study. It may be seen from this that the art feeling is stronger in Victoria than in New South Wales, whilst instruction is more comprehensive and developed. In Adelaide also a commendable work is being attempted. The Government, as in Victoria, has required that students shall pass through a thorough course in the School of Drawing or Design before they enter the School of Painting. Acceptable as this is it does not commend itself to the young student; and last year there were but twenty-one students in the Adelaide School of Art. Behind this as a cause lies the wage-earning factor. It is felt in all the colonies. Rising communities do not learn easily the secret of patience, and the eager young, urged on by ambitious parents, desire to rise quickly from the shackles of drawing and to revel in the region of colour and composition. As soon as some pretty tricks of colour and sentiment are mastered, and that is not hard, the student can begin to sell. There lies the rub. In Melbourne and Adelaide the authorities are learning that the lines must not be made too rigid at first; conditions must be reckoned with in making regulations. There is no conscript service in art; there can be no state prison discipline in new communities; the element of compromise with necessity and circumstances must exist. Yet good has been done. The South Kensington examinations are being held in the colonies with excellent results.

Of the work done by the artists of Australia no final estimate can be made. With early days—that is, a quarter of a century ago—the names of Conrad Martens, Brierly, Chevalier, Prout, Terry, and Louis Buvelôt are associated, and how little appreciated Australia knows. Like the poems of Kendall and Gordon, their pictures were without honour until the grass was growing over their graves, or until they had passed into a larger area of recognition in which Australian praise or blame was of

small account. In later days came George Folingsby, S. Glover, of Tasmania, John Gully, of New Zealand, Alex. Johnstone, W. C. Piquenet, an Australian by birth and in feeling, and the Collingridge brothers; and still more recently, a large number of such earnest men as Charles Hern, Ford Patterson, C. Roberts, George Walton, George Ashton, L. Hopkins, A. Fulwood, and others. In Sydney and Melbourne there are now two exhibitions of the Art Societies held in the year, and where once a handful of people, chiefly personal friends of artists, attended, thousands pay their shillings to see the couple of hundred pictures that represent the half-year's work. It cannot be said that the artists have always been patient in their struggling life. Criticism and reproach have been levelled at government, people, and trustees of the National Gallery because of lack of support and patronage. Why did the governments not aid the societies? Why did the trustees not purchase the pictures of Australian artists? Why had the Art Society of Sydney no representative on the Board of Trustees, of which not one member was an artist? These questions have been answered so far as Sydney is concerned with much satisfaction to all. The Art Society has received a grant, the trustees have bought several good pictures of Australian artists, and the President of the Art Society and a member of it also sit with the trustees of the National Gallery. It was not the protests alone that did it. Artists have done better work during the past five years, the societies have therefore advanced in importance; and the newspapers of the colonies have loyally advocated the interests of local painters, and often have given extraordinary prominence to the work done by their organizations. The public are tempted yearly by Art Unions, which if not a very dignified kind of business on the part of the artists, serves at least to give them advertisement and to enlarge their constituency. And the happier order of things will come in time. With such of the public as have become art patrons there is a demand for subjects having local colour and feeling. This is perhaps the best thing that could happen to the artists. It tends to make them more observant of home life and to humanise their work. A special room has been set apart in the Sydney gallery for the work of Australian artists. The light of larger appreciation rises but slowly in this land of little leisure and much money-hunger; but it rises. A token of this is the presentations of pictures to the National Galleries during the last few years. One gift has brought forth another. During 1889 pictures by Edwin Long, David Cox, and A. W. Holden were presented to the Sydney gallery. In the growth of the art feeling of the past half decade there are special influences to be considered. The Grosvenor Collection which came to Melbourne in 1888, the Loan Collection that drew vast crowds to the Centennial Exhibition in 1889, and the Exhibition by the Royal Anglo-Australian Society of Artists that was held in the colonies last year did good work for both students and people. They refreshed and inspired the former, and interested and excited the latter. And the healthiest sign of that interest and excitement is the improving character of the work of the last four years. The pictures exhibited now are of the life around; they are honest in that at least. A distinguished literary man said not so long ago that there was nothing to paint in Australia. There is nothing anywhere that may not be painted if the eye that looks upon the world and all that therein is, really sees, and if the mind to which it reflects its impressions has the power of selection. A bullock-team on the Darling Downs is as worthy a thing to paint as an English wheatfield; Govett's Leap lends itself to stately power as much as the Highlands of Scotland; and there are tints in the skies of the South and colours on the shores of Australian seas as full of beauty as any that ever rose before the eyes of a master. There is something more than a long monotony in Australian scenery. The man who really lives the life knows that. The true Australian knows it, and he is beginning to see what the office of the artist is.

During the year 1890 the Trustees of the National Art Gallery at Sydney expended £6,530 in the purchase of works of art. Among the artists from whom oil-paintings were published are E. Waterlow, Marcus Stone, David Roberts, and John Brett.

The London Committee of the Melbourne Gallery have purchased this year Mr. F. Dicksee's *The Crisis*, one of the most notable of the Academy pictures, and J. W. Waterhouse's *Ulysses and the Sirens*.