

## ALPINE ART IN 1892.

THE small school of enthusiasts, who believe that with the revival of English art a sect of mountain painters is likely to come to the fore, must have been somewhat disappointed by the exhibitions of the present year. It is true that there is no lack of mountain subjects: at any rate, there are pictures enough in which mountains are introduced, but these may be distinguished from works properly to be classified under 'Alpine art.' Where the mountains have not inspired the main motive of the painting, the work can only by a stretch be included in our category. Yet the reviewer would have but a light task unless he construed the term 'Alpine art' rather liberally. Of the works on view this year, which were likely to have attracted the notice of those who take their pleasure amid the sternest yet most beautiful aspects of nature, few will dwell in the memory. Most of them seemed familiar. There is evidence of a strong tendency to adopt traditional and accepted forms of composition while certain effects are reproduced so often that one might almost fear that mountain painters are lapsing thus early into a conventional groove. Yet there are no subjects affording more prodigious variety.

While we can chronicle but few successes this year in this particular branch, we cannot but ascribe the failure in most instances to a very elementary cause, and that is imperfect study of the subjects which the artists have attempted to handle. In most of the pictures no serious attempt has been made to grapple at all with the cardinal difficulty of giving any sense of atmosphere. Sunrise and sunset pictures are repeated over and over again. The distant peak or range, with its crest glowing in a red or amber light, a somewhat vague sky with the details of the mass of the mountain blotted in without any suggestion of form, character, or modelling, together with some rising mist introduced to convey the idea of distance, are the stock materials out of which mountain pictures are for the most part constructed. To the eye wearied in its search for some novelty of treatment, or some endeavour to represent effects out of the beaten line, such pictures are as familiar as the preternaturally attractive fisher girl of a few years ago, or the small child grouped with some animal pet of more recent times. The artists in this country appear more and more disposed to accept as an undoubted truth that the mountains are unpaintable. It may be that the Committees of Selection hold to this opinion rather than the artists, and there is no doubt that the painter who seeks to please and attract the public is considerably hampered, if he belongs to the large body of outsiders, by the fact that he has first of all to satisfy the jury of selection. Broadly speaking, it can hardly but be confessed that in English art at any rate the imagination has less chance of being recognised than a certain proficiency in technique. Yet there is no class of subject that allows greater scope for poetical rendering than mountain landscape, although the fact seems to be little recognised. The influence of Corot and Constable has made itself felt in the more familiar branches of landscape painting, but we are still grievously in want of some one with

the courage to carry matters a step further and soar a little higher than the lake, the forest, and the glade. We require, not so much an individual, as a school to take up mountain painting, whose aims might be midway between the romanticism of the Barbizon and the directness of our own Newlyn group of painters. Such collective efforts would force recognition, and with recognition there would be rapid progress. The greatest master of mountain painting that the world has seen was an Englishman, but the influence of his example would seem to have fallen on barren soil. Turner showed that the mountains were not unpaintable, and others might at least attempt to follow where he was able conspicuously to succeed.

Let us hasten to add, however, that some recognition has been bestowed upon a painter who has boldly attempted an unequivocal mountain subject. Mr. MacWhirter's 'June in the Austrian Tyrol,' though to our mind only a partial success, has been bought under the terms of the Chantrey bequest, and is stamped, therefore, with official approval. The title of the picture is a little misleading, for if, as we understand is the case, the view is that of Gosau, in Upper Austria, the description 'Austrian Tyrol' is hardly accurate.\* The mass of flowers in the foreground and the brilliant blue of the campanulæ rather overpower the distance without contriving to throw it back, and the village is hardly set in happily. A good opportunity, too, of rendering the character of limestone peaks has been lost. Apart from these drawbacks the picture is full of sunshine and air. It would have been much improved by having some twelve inches cut off the canvas on the left of the picture. The railing in the foreground is of formidable size. As a rule, indeed, the upright form seems much more suitable for the treatment of mountain subjects. Long pictures suggest panoramas too strongly, and the composition inevitably tends to straggle.

To our mind the best of the mountain pictures in the Academy is Mr. Matthew R. Corbet's 'A Cloud-surrounded Morn,' a thoroughly well-painted and impressive picture. The rich though low-toned colour is admirable. The modelling of the mountains in the distance is set down with refreshing decision by one who has evidently studied his peaks to good purpose. The range at once takes its proper place in consequence, and indeed suggests what a study of the majority of the mountain pictures would impress still more strongly on the spectator, that the failure in most instances to render them arises almost wholly from ignorance of their anatomical formation. Compare with this Mr. James Aumonier's 'The River Piave, Belluno,' a painting in many respects worthy of notice. The opportunity of drawing dolomite, or even suggesting its characteristic architecture, has here been altogether missed, and the mountains are indicated in a vague, slovenly fashion, permissible only to a portrait painter commissioned to introduce 'an appropriate landscape background.' Mr. Ruskin's admirable chapter

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\* An almost exact equivalent would be the description of a view; say, of Llanberis as 'View in the Welsh Cumberland.'

on 'Mountain Forms' is quoted often enough, but extremely few appear to have laid his teaching to heart.

It is interesting to compare also Mr. Corbet's work with a picture by Professor Costa in the New Gallery, 'Sunrise and Moonset on the Shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea.' The distinguished Italian has here attempted successfully a very beautiful and delicate effect. The tone of the picture is admirable. Though not, perhaps, strictly a mountain picture it may without straining the classification be included in our list, for the effect is not one that is often attempted in art, while it is very familiar to those who seek their pleasure in high places. Other works by Professor Costa in the New Gallery are, though unimportant in size, quite up to the high standard of excellence to which he has accustomed us. Would that more of our painters found time to linger awhile in the valleys of North Italy on their way to Venice. They would find as great a wealth of colour and as much picturesque effect amid more sanitary surroundings. A spring or autumn season spent in the little-painted district north of the Val d'Aosta could not fail to repay, and might even engender a suspicion in the mind of the painter that some mountains at any rate do not strain their permission of being ugly. Artists of the temperament of Professor Costa would find the happiest inspiration amid such scenes. We have such in our own ranks. May Mr. Alfred East one day turn his steps in that direction; for the mountain painter who would succeed must have some poetry in him.

It is pleasant to welcome Mr. Alma-Tadema as a mountain painter. True, the line of distant mountains in 'A Kiss' is but a subordinate feature in a very charming and characteristic example of his finished art, but the peaks are touched in with such delicacy and complete the composition so admirably that it may seem somewhat hypercritical to question the lighting; still it is hard to reconcile the shadows of the foreground with those of the distant hills. The outline of the mountains seen across the blue sea curiously resembles the range at the upper end of the Bodensee.

Mr. Wake Cook, in his 'Last Blush of Departing Day, Lake Como,' has noted well the changing colours of the sunset. The colour of the reflections in the water is rather aggressive, and the rising smoke forms but a smear on the picture.

Assuming that mountain painters may claim as their own not only the highest points of the earth but the regions above them, we may bestow a word of praise in passing on Miss Anna Alma-Tadema's 'Air, Air, Blue Air and White,' a simple study of a cloud-wreath caught by the wind, but touched in with rare delicacy. There is nothing whatever in the picture to help the illusion, but the cloud hangs as unmistakably between heaven and earth as if the spectator were gazing over Italy and the summit of Monte Rosa.

Mr. Arthur Severn's picture of 'Fluelen' was seen in the winter exhibition at the Alpine Club. It is a broadly painted work, which we noticed fully at the time. A good piece of work, a study of the hills of N.W. Skye from the sea, by the same hand, was hung in an early exhibition at the Royal Institute. Mr. Severn has studied clouds to good purpose.

In the water-colour galleries there was not much to note. Mr. Collingwood, who has always shown much sympathy for the mountains, has chosen a difficult subject in a view of the Matterhorn from the little lake by the side of the Furggengletscher. The difficulty of giving an idea of the height of the great peak has hardly been successfully overcome. In his other works Mr. Collingwood was scarcely up to his usual level.

On the whole, then, the mountain pictures of the year presented nothing that was very striking, and manifested no great advance. If any such an advance is to be shown in the near future it will probably be best encouraged by the energetic development of the winter exhibitions of the Alpine Club, which we may trust in the course of a year or two will take a more important form than a mere temporary collection and subordinate feature of our annual gatherings. The Alpine Club has done something to encourage Alpine art; it is capable of doing an infinite deal more, and we may hope before long that it will rise to a sense of its responsibility in this direction. C. T. D.

#### PROCEEDINGS OF THE ALPINE CLUB.

A GENERAL MEETING was held at the Club Rooms on Tuesday evening, May 3, Mr. HORACE WALKER, *President*, in the chair.

The PRESIDENT introduced Mr. A. P. Harper (Hon. Sec. New Zealand Alpine Club) to the meeting, and tendered him a cordial welcome on behalf of the Alpine Club, of which he had recently become a member.

It was announced that the date of the Summer Dinner had been fixed for June 9, but that, in accordance with Rule X., it would only be held if on or before May 20 a sufficient number of members signified their intention of attending the same.

Mr. A. F. MUMMERY read a paper, 'The Aiguilles des Charmoz and de Grépon,' for which a hearty vote of thanks was accorded to him, after a brief discussion, in which the *President* and Messrs. Morse and Wicks took part.

A General Meeting of the Club was held at the Club Rooms on Tuesday evening, June 7, Mr. F. A. WALLROTH, *Vice-President*, in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN referred, with deep regret, to the loss the Club had sustained through the death of two valued and well-known members—Mr. E. T. Coleman and Mr. R. C. Nichols, the former an original member and one of the earliest painters of the High Alps. His work, 'Scenes from the Snowfields,' was well known to all, and, until recently, he had been a constant contributor to the winter exhibitions. Mr. Nichols, though not an original member, was elected as far back as 1858, and from that time to the present year had been a constant attender at the meetings. He had held the office of *Vice-President*, and the Club was indebted to him for the Alpine Club Map of Switzerland, for which he was mainly responsible.