THE PICTURES AT THE ALPINE CLUB WINTER EXHIBITION.

THE reviewer of the annual picture exhibition labours under the singular disadvantage that any remarks he has to make are not published until the exhibition itself has been closed for some two months. Detailed criticism, therefore, seems superfluous. The hope expressed in some quarters, that it might be possible to maintain for a few weeks each year a loan gallery of Alpine pictures, seems very unlikely of fulfilment. In the meantime we may be thankful that this winter, for the first time, the exhibition was kept open for an additional day, so that a more leisurely inspection of the works was rendered possible. The attendance on the extra day was so large that it may be taken for granted that the experiment will be repeated. Those who have predicted that the annual supply of Alpine works was likely to prove unequal to the demand must have been somewhat agreeably disappointed this year. Never has so interesting a collection been got together, and never before we fancy have so many artists been represented.

There were two distinctive features by which the winter exhibition of 1891 should long be remembered. The first consisted of four works all very remarkable, and all differing in the most amazing manner in treatment; the second, in the very complete collection of paintings by the late Elijah Walton. The four pictures to which we refer, and which would have made any exhibition notable, were by Turner, David Cox, Brett, and William Stott, of Oldham.

The hanging committee have always, and wisely, construed the definition of paintings of Alpine interest rather liberally. Not that they have to stretch their privileges in this instance unduly in placing Turner's 'Diligence Overturned in a Snowdrift' in the place of honour. Any work by the greatest master of mountain painting that the world has ever known would have been more than welcome, and it was perhaps well to accentuate the fact that Alpine paintings need not necessarily represent familiar snow peaks shown from conventional points of view, and rendered in stereotyped lines, but that the mountains and their surroundings offer an infinite scope for the artist. For the loan of the Turner the Club was indebted to Mrs. Moir, who contributed also a David Cox. The 'Diligence Overturned' was obviously one of Turner's later works. It was painted in 1829, soon, therefore, after a journey to Italy, and at a period when his powers as a colourist were pre-eminent. The drawing had had the good fortune of being carefully preserved. The colour was singularly fresh. The picture told its story with the utmost directness. One of the huge old-fashioned diligences has been overturned in a snow drift on the edge of the road. The party are making strenuous efforts to haul it again into an upright position, while the passengers, making the best of matters, have lit a huge fire around which they are grouped. The lighting of the picture is its most remarkable feature, the vivid glare of the bonfire contrasting in Turner's best and most powerful manner with the moonlight just breaking through a dense mass of

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clouds. The coldest possible light over part of the picture, and the warmest imaginable glow over another, and yet the relations between the two preserved with the most perfect skill. Here was a work in which the artist showed that he could be dramatic and picturesque at once, while deliberately setting himself technical difficulties, apparently almost for the pleasure of showing how easily and successfully they could be overcome in his hands.

The David Cox was a small water-colour measuring about 10 in. by 8 in., representing the Pass of Llanberis. The work was hardly what is known as a characteristic one, and it appeared to have faded a little. Still there was an extraordinary amount of distance and atmosphere in the painting.

The hanging committee had, perhaps designedly, placed close to each other two paintings, one by Mr. John Brett, A.R.A., of the Val d'Aosta (lent by Mr. Arthur Severn, R.I., to whom the best thanks of the Club are due), and the other by Mr. William Stott, of Oldham, of the Jungfrau, which afforded as absolute a contrast as could possibly have been provided. Mr. Brett's work, painted some thirty years ago, showed the artist strongly under the influence of pre-Raphaelitism, and might have been the work of any member of the P.R.B. who had devoted his attention to Alpine subjects. Its origin was probably due to an encomium by Mr. Ruskin of another work by the same artist. Yet we may say at once that if Alpine painters, in search of a style, are led to adopt this in its entirety, we have little hope for the future. The painting, of course, was marvellously minute, but, Mr. Ruskin's praise notwithstanding, it seemed to transgress that great authority's dictum—that you should only paint what you can see, and not what you know ought to be there. The amount of work lavished on the painting was astounding, and the minuteness so great as to be obtrusive. The painting altogether was, in fact, a curiously false, though almost direct, transcript of nature. Distance, indeed, there was, and very cleverly rendered by preserving most faithfully the relative hues. But the distance was forced back by the strength of colour in the foreground. A girl's figure, the head clad in a bright red handkerchief, lay recumbent in the middle under the shadow of a rock, on which the lichens were painted with microscopical fidelity. A white goat, that appeared to have strayed from one of Mr. Holman Hunt's works, was close by. Almost every hair on the animal's back could be counted, and at one and the same time almost every leaf on the trees some miles away could be recognised. On the other side of the picture some startlingly vivid foliage gave the required note of colour. Viewed through a lens the distant trees were seen to be painted with the same minute finish and detail as the goat or the lichen, or, for that matter, the powdered fresh snow on the still more distant peaks. The range of focus that was assumed in the spectator rendered the painting impossible. Artistically speaking, it may have been correct; optically, it could not be. Still, it must be admitted that the picture exercised a sort of fascination; it compelled attention, and, at the same time, contained many beautiful passages of drawing and colour. It would be well if every young artist were set to work—or to try to work—in

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this style at the outset. Such a work was more instructive to the craft than attractive to the public, who called it 'wonderful,' but did not like it. Wherein they were greatly in the right, for the art was obtrusively unconcealed.

Mr. William Stott's picture of the Jungfrau, on the other hand, was an attempt to render the size and the grandeur of the Jungfrau on purely Impressionist principles. There is no need or intention to enter into the well-worn discussion of whether these principles are or are not legitimate art. Whatever faults may be found with that method, and with its 'blottesqueness,' there can be no doubt that the painting gave a remarkable idea of distance, size, and atmosphere without resorting to any of the artificial tricks with clouds, so commonly employed by mountain-painters. True, the painting gave nothing more. The method forbade all detail, and so one or two features only —size and majesty—of the complex mountain personality were aimed at and secured. These characteristics were enhanced by the suppression of whatever seemed irrelevant, and consequently an infinite deal was lost. Here the art of 'leaving out' was pushed almost too far. Lies the truth between the two styles? Undoubtedly; but the pity is so few have it in them to grasp a subject *en gros et en détail* at once, and still fewer the power to render what they realise. To steer between the two is not enough. The middle course may lead but to mediocrity. The very fascination of the mountains leads men into extremes, from the feeling that any commonplace nook is an insult to what is unfolded before them.

Another work by Mr. Stott was so badly placed that it was impossible to form any idea of its merits.

Midway between the 'Jungfrau' and the 'Val d'Aosta' hung a large and most impressive work by M. Loppé, 'The Shadow of Mont Blanc' —midway in more senses than one. We do not remember having seen this fine painting before at the winter exhibitions. To the student of mountain art the three paintings represented the work of the mountain microscopist, the mountain Impressionist, and the mountain scholar.

The collection of Elijah Walton was the best that we ever remember to have seen got together, and included some of his earlier works, before he fell under the baneful influence of the chromo-lithographer. A large and important oil-painting of the 'Grivola' was a characteristic specimen of his art. It showed all the old poetry and all the old, ineradicable faults. The impression made on the mind of the artist may have been conveyed by the painting, but there was such a rearrangement of nature, such distortion of foreground, rock and glacier, and such an obvious manipulation of the sky for the purpose of the painting, that the effect necessarily lost much of its charm to anybody who knew the mountain. To leave out what is inconsistent may be perfectly legitimate in art, but to build up out of fancied materials three-fourths of a picture will inevitably lead to repetition of effect, to monotony of treatment, and is too false to nature to be true to art. A good example of the liberties that Elijah Walton would take was seen in the large water-colour of the 'Aiguille Verte' and 'Aiguille du Dru,' viewed apparently from the path to the Mont Buet. The

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outline of the verte and its modelling, which could hardly be improved upon as seen from this point of view, were most faithfully given, though the lower Aiguille leant over far too much. The fading red glow of sunset coloured deeply the upper parts of both peaks, while above was a sky of the deepest blue—a blue utterly false, and one that no man ever has seen or ever will see, combined with the Alpine glow. And yet to our mind Elijah Walton came very near to being the best of all modern painters who devoted themselves to the Alps. This was well evidenced by some of his smaller works, several of which, lent by Mr. C. E. Mathews, had never previously been exhibited. The difficulties of painting the mountains are well instanced by the colossal mistakes that may be made, and have been made, by those who have attempted this branch of art. A remarkable drawing showed a deep crevasse with a snow-bridge breaking and falling in fragments. The depth of blue was superb. But the falling masses of snow were of far too positive a white, and the delicate colours that must have been reflected on the fragments were wholly lost. Only M. Loppé has really shown the infinite variety of colour in the snow world. A small study by him of an ice-fall (lent by Sir Alfred Wills) was a happy example of his close observation of colour.

Less ambitious in choice of subject but remarkably successful in colour was a strong drawing by Mr. Colin B. Phillip, 'An Sgarnach—the Great Landslip, Loch Ridden.' The character of the scenery was admirably preserved. The spectator, even if he had never seen the country, could not but feel that it must be most faithful, so harmonious was the work alike in treatment and colour.

Mr. Albert Goodwin, whose work has been too seldom seen at these exhibitions, showed, in a view of Simplon, that he could get as much poetry into an Alpine scene as into any study of the enchanted regions of fairyland. The blue depth of the Val Anzasca was given as faithfully as it was possible to represent it. Less successful was the 'Polar Regions,' by the same artist. This, it may be assumed, was an absolutely imaginative work. The sky, though a little surprising and kaleidoscopic, may have been possible, and was at any rate beyond criticism. Icemen would have inquired how some large séracs came to be formed in the middle of the level ice-fields.

No winter exhibition would be complete without the works of Mr. Arthur Croft, Mr. Alfred Williams, and Mr. Garrett Smith.

Mr. Croft's contributions were hardly up to his usual level of excellence. Yet the Club cannot but remember that for many years Mr. Croft was almost the mainstay of the exhibition, and any drawings from him are always welcome.

Mr. Alfred Williams sent some large water-colours of Dauphiné, rather cold and hard in treatment, and two very admirable Welsh drawings, the best that we can remember to have seen from his brush.

Mr. Compton, again, and Mr. Donne were hardly seen to as much advantage as in former years. Mr. Compton's principal work was a large oil-painting of the 'Morteratsch Glacier' and the 'Piz Bernina,' but the artist is most at home in water-colour, though his contributions this year in that medium showed some evidence that the influence of the engraver and reproducer has tended to cramp his art.

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Space prevents our doing more than mentioning Mr. Alfred East's delicate painting of 'Fusi San,' the sacred volcano of Japan; or Mr. Arthur Severn's 'Early Morning, Fluelen,' a bold and powerful study of water and red glow on the mountains above, with the Bristenstock well kept back in the distance.

Some very admirable Norwegian scenes by Mrs. Renshaw were much admired. We must not omit mention of a highly interesting series of views of Circassia, painted nearly forty years ago by Bossoli, from sketches by Admiral Saumarez Brock. In one of the drawings the peak of Elbruz appeared.

Mr. Willink's contributions of new works were too few, and almost limited to a single frame of designs for illustrations for the promised book on mountaineering in the 'Badminton Series.'

Some very graphic sketches by Mr. J. Pennell, being the originals of the illustrations to an article in a recent number of the 'Century Magazine,' showed great facility and boldness. The sketch of the road outside the Monte Rosa Hotel was one of the best, and would form a curious contrast to the well-known engraving in Mr. Whymper's 'Scrambles amongst the Alps,' of the same scene years ago. Most of the studies showed striking originality of method, but in some of the climbing sketches Mr. Pennell appeared to have been inspired, to say the least of it, by Mr. Willink's drawings, while one sketch of a party on a high ridge looked suspiciously like a direct transcript of an enlarged hand-camera photograph. Some excellent black and white drawings by Mr. Warwick Goble were shown, which had been reproduced (but terribly traduced) in the 'Pall Mall Budget.' One, of an early start from the Grands Mulets by lantern was admirably graphic and true, and the lighting was excellent.

On the whole, the exhibition was a memorable one on account of the excellence of many of the works, the number of exhibitors whose works had never previously been on view at these winter shows, and the able attempts made in several quarters to burst the trammels of tradition in Alpine painting. The labour of organising these exhibitions, always great, increases year by year, and something better than mere thanks is due to those who lent or sent pictures, and especially to the Hon. Secretary of the Club, on whose shoulders falls the whole work of organisation.

C. T. D.

Considerations of space must restrict any notice of the photographs to the bare mention of the fact that the show was no less interesting than its predecessors. Most of the old names were well represented, and some new ones appeared for the first time. Perhaps the most notable feature of the collection was to be found in Signor Sella's views of the Dolomites, especially those of the Brenta group, which have never been properly photographed before, and a beautiful panorama of the Adamello region from the summit of the Lobbia Alta. Mr. Eccles showed some 'atmospheric effects' marked by his usual delicacy of treatment; and Mr. Dent, besides a big 'Matterhorn,' had some instructive and entertaining views of climbers *in situ* (or *in motu*).

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