THE ALPINE ART OF THE YEAR.

THE mountain enthusiast, anxious to revive recollections of his favourite haunts while seeking to harden his muscles and get himself into condition by tramping round the picture-galleries, must have been grievously disappointed this year at the paucity of works that could by any stretch be included in the category of Alpine art. Not only were the paintings few in number, but the pictures of mountain interest were, with but one or two exceptions, of unusual mediocrity. He might have searched far and wide for any evidence of new departure in the treatment of mountain subjects; of any endeavour to carry out, other than in the most conventional manner, the most commonplace styles of composition; or of any effort even to carry out the tradition of the best school of painters, who have found in the mountains subjects worthy of their attention. To a great extent, of course, this may not be the fault of the painters. Committees of selection may, wilfully or unconsciously, have decreed in their own minds that Alpine art is not a branch to be encouraged, and the acres of rejected canvas may possibly have included many laudable endeavours to put into practice the suggestions which have been so perseveringly and so fruitlessly made in this Journal. If, however, in many instances the works actually hung were the best of their class, we can but sympathise with and endorse generally the decision of the judges. Possibly some explanation of the dearth may be found in the strong influence which contemporary French art has over our own painters. French artists find no attraction in the scenes we love so well—a pity, for in their power of drawing and wonderful appreciation of tone they have two great qualities which would go far to ensuring success.

A yet more prosaic reason, however, there may be—that though there are plenty of experts to criticise Alpine paintings of the higher regions, and a smaller number who can appreciate works of sub-Alpine interest, there is probably no very safe market for such work, and the process of educating the public up to the point at which they may desire to purchase is a very slow and a very thankless one. But while for what we are going to review we cannot be truly thankful, we may yet freely acknowledge that a very few of the works which fall into our special department have great merits, and deserve to be remembered.

The water-colour painters at the Institute seem almost wholly to have turned their backs on the mountains. Conspicuous in an exhibition which was more noticeable for a few good works than for any general level of excellence was Mr. Arthur Severn's large drawing of Fluelen and the mountains at the end of Lake Lucerne. This work, which was shown at one of the winter exhibitions of the Alpine Club, has already been fully noticed in our pages. In strength and vigour it held its own well amid its new surroundings.

A study by an artist whose name escapes us, an endeavour to render the effects so familiar to those who wander in the Italian Alps—the flat sea of cloud foaming slowly up out of the valleys in the early morning—was perhaps more bold than successful. But at least the painter

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in this instance had sought an effect only to be seen in the high regions.

Of the other paintings it would be more charitable not to speak. A remarkable view of the Jungfrau, which might have been painted to ornament a tea-tray and have been rejected as too crude by the proprietor of a hardware shop, strangely enough found a haven in a corner of the gallery. Since pictures of purely mountain interest (not that this work could be counted as such) are sent in to be judged, it would be as well if some competent authority could be called in to decide on their value. No members of a selecting committee who had ever seen Alpine scenery in Nature could have admitted such a travesty.

At the New Gallery good and interesting work by Professor Costa is generally to be found. Unfortunately the artist's contributions this year were somewhat below their usual level, and disappointing. Delicacy of colour there was, and some good drawing of distant mountain forms; but the astonishing puerilities that Professor Costa sometimes permits in his work were more evident this time than usual, and the artist seemed to have laboured more to get smoothness of surface than quality or meaning.

At the Royal Academy there was more variety of work, and this exhibition contained two of the best mountain paintings of the year, by Mr. Matthew R. Corbet. If Mr. Corbet is influenced in his work by Professor Costa, his 'Evening' shows in many respects an advance on the methods of his master. There is the same skilful mingling of lights and the same excellence of tone. The distant hills, as they might be viewed from the plains of Lombardy, are drawn with beautiful firmness and accuracy, not blotted in and blotted out at once. Distant though they be, they are firm and solid, and the tone on their powdered summits shows close observation of the colour produced in snow when viewed through a veil of impalpable haze. One could not but feel that the artist understood minutely the detail of the texture of the rocks that he was painting, and yet had set down nothing that could not actually be seen in the distance. All this Professor Costa does, and does well, but the strength and vigour of the drawing of the foreground were all Mr. Corbet's own. Some of the reflections in the pool of water close at hand were perhaps a little violent, but the picture was a very noticeable and beautiful one.

Scarcely less excellent was another work by the same hand bearing the title of 'Spring.' It is to be hoped that another year Mr. Corbet will get a little nearer to his mountains.

Mr. MacWhirter this year made no attempt to follow up what was by many considered his success of last summer, but the compliment had been paid him of an imitation of his 'June in the Austrian Tyrol,' and we recognise with no particular pleasure the same colossal daisies and the same prodigious railing in Mr Gilbert Foster's 'Summer Pageant.'

For the most part, the cause of comparative failures in the mountain pictures was only too apparent. The artists had neglected to study the texture and form of the rocks or mountains they sought to paint. The minutest observation and the most careful study is lavished on

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drapery—witness Mr. Perugini's 'Pandora'; on marble—see Mr. Alma Tadema, *passim*, and Mr. John W. Godward; flesh (occasionally)—as in Sir Frederic Leighton's 'Hit' and Mr. Arthur Hacker's 'Sleep of the Gods'; water—as in Mr. Henry Moore's superb work, and the equally excellent painting by Mr. Somerscales. But with scarcely an exception they will not study the texture of rock, of ice, or of snow. Thus it comes about that in a picture such as the 'Romsdal,' by Mr. Frank Dillon, the solidity of these striking peaks is utterly missed, and the rocks in the foreground look as if they might be blown away with a puff. For extraordinary want of texture, again, it would be hard to beat the stone wall in Sir John Millais's picture, 'The Girlhood of St. Theresa'; it is a pity that so great a master should not have given as much attention to this as to the dresses of the children. The painting of the wall, indeed, which runs right across the picture, is about on a par with the drawing of the boy's legs. Because such details in the picture are subordinate, there is no reason why they should be rendered in a slovenly manner. It was not so with the old masters; witness, for instance, the beautiful drawing of the flowers in the foreground in Titian's masterpiece in the National Gallery. The flowers are perfectly subordinated, and take their proper, unobtrusive place; but they are beautiful and complete if studied separately. A similar touch is shown in Mr. Frank Dicksee's much and justly praised 'Funeral of a Viking.' The rounded pebbles on the beach are not put in anyhow. They show, each one, careful study of form and colour. Unfortunately, they show it a little too conspicuously. Few painters, probably, who seek to portray large effects would have taken the trouble to fit themselves for the undertaking by making such laudable studies as may be seen in No. 1,109. Here is the result of endeavouring really to understand rock texture. The effort is too apparent, of course, the minuteness of work too pronounced to be pleasing, yet it is only by such labour that the artist can really hope to succeed. Painting and work of this description, if not attractive, is still admirable as example. The effect is still further heightened in this latter instance owing to the work hung next it, which is the most astonishing bit of perspective that has probably ever been seen in the Academy. The room in which the children's dance is going on appears to be convulsed by an earthquake.

Before taking leave of the Academy we may call attention to No. 471, 'The Home of the Salassi, Val d'Aosta, North Italy,' by Henry Howard. The work may be fitly described by the rather vague epithet, so freely used in picture-galleries, of 'nice,' though it is rather conventional. The traditional rose glow on the mountains, with the green sky behind, is reflected in the water in the foreground. The composition is not exactly novel, but the reflections on the left of the picture are particularly true.

The collection of paintings, by Mr. Arthur Croft, which were on view for a short time at Messrs. Dowdeswell's Gallery naturally attracted all lovers of mountain paintings, for at the winter exhibitions of late years new work by Mr. Croft has been only too scarce. But most of the Alpine pictures were familiar friends, and were not Mr. Croft's

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best. We should have been glad to see again the 'Sunset in the Rhone Valley,' one of Mr. Croft's best efforts in rendering Swiss scenery, a drawing that ought to be in the Alpine Club Collection. Excellent work there was, indeed, in the gallery, but it was chiefly of scenes very different from those by which Mr. Croft has made his name. The views of the Cornish coast showed that the artist had gained in vigour and breadth. The large painting of 'A Bit of Nature's Architecture,' exhibited some years ago at the Royal Academy, was scholarly, if rather uninteresting.

An etching recently issued by the Fine Art Society deserves mention here, inasmuch as it is one of the first attempts that we know of to render on a large scale the conventional mountain scene by means of the needle. It is from the hand of Mr. Slocombe, and represents the familiar view of the 'Matterhorn' from the path to the Riffel Alp. The view is taken apparently in the early part of the summer. Patches of snow cling about the ridge of the Hörnli and the slopes of the Schwarzsee, and the mountain itself, which is well drawn, shows a good deal of snow on its face. To some extent it is a pity that this time of year was chosen, for a certain flatness is the result, and the modelling of the east face of the mountain is almost wholly lost. In the rendering of the Gorner Glacier much conscientious work is shown, and the artist is perhaps justified in representing a rather remarkable advance of the ice. Mr. Slocombe has still something to learn of the anatomy of a glacier, and it would perhaps have been better to have given the details as they actually exist. The difficulty of dealing with the straight lines of the trees has been fairly well overcome. We may hope that the etching may meet with enough success to induce the artist to persevere in the new line that he has struck out for himself. Technically the plate is an excellent one, and the artist has on the whole succeeded well in a most difficult subject.

C. T. D.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ALPINE CLUB.

A GENERAL MEETING of the Club was held at St. Martin's Town Hall on the evening of Tuesday, May 9, 1893, Mr. Douglas W. Freshfield, President, in the chair. A large audience, nearly 600 in number, consisting of members and their friends, including many ladies, assembled to hear Mr. W. M. Conway describe his climbing experiences in the Karakoram range. The lecture, which was followed with deep interest, was accompanied by the exhibition of some very fine photographic lantern slides. A large number of paintings and sketches by Mr. A. D. McCormick, one of Mr. Conway's party, and also some kindly lent by General Sir Michael Biddulph, K.C.B., were on view.

Before the lecture commenced the PRESIDENT said that the circumstances of that meeting perhaps needed some explanation. It was known to all the world that the meetings of the Alpine Club were generally shrouded in mystery and tobacco smoke. But on this occasion the com-

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