

MODERN ART AND ARTISTS.

THE Exposition of French Arts and Industry in 1849 was inaugurated in the Royal Palace of the Tuileries, at Paris; and a writer of the day, alluding to the former occupancy of that celebrated pile, observed, that "kings might perish and dynasties might be overthrown, but art must be eternal!" Now, however applicable or otherwise this expression was to the occasion, it contained a great truth. Art, if not exactly French art, is lasting and universal. Whether we stand in the shadow of the past, or bask in the sunshine of the present, our sympathies with art are enlisted, and our grosser natures purified; and, in this sense, the painter and the sculptor become great teachers, great poets, great orators!

We have heard of the "golden age," when little gold was discovered or brought into use; the "iron age," which indeed existed before railroads or steam-engines; the "age of innocence," which, by all accounts, was an age of very loose morals indeed; and various other "ages" distinguished by various other positive terms; but few have dared to designate the present time by any similitude to actual materialities. With the news of Australian and Californian discoveries brought daily to our fire-sides, we might, indeed, term this the "golden age;" while, if we look merely to the mechanical results of modern research and invention, we might, with equal truth, esteem ours the "age of bronze," or the "age of iron." Artistically and figuratively speaking, ours has been termed—whether truly or otherwise we shall not pretend to determine,—the "Age of Tinsel!" Glitter and superficiality, says a modern writer, are the characteristics of both the times and the tinsel. Everything appears to be overdone; everything seems to be brought out in the gayest possible forms, at the cheapest possible rates, and with the least possible real utility or purpose. Burke declared, that with the French Revolution the age of chivalry had passed away; and later writers have not hesitated to affirm that the romantic period has altogether vanished from the world's history. In some senses—that is to say, in the senses in which these phrases were, and are, generally understood,—both assertions are probably correct; but in that higher view of chivalry and romance, which regards the most noble and daring action to be the removal of those old superstitions and restrictions which confined the minds of our forefathers, as iron bands and prison walls and rusty chains confined their bodies, the spirit of honour and the love of adventure are more than ever the property of the present. True, we have designated this the age of tinsel, but is it not a period of advancement too? If, in our literature, we place too much reliance on showy and tawdry exteriors, striking illustrations, beautiful printing, glossy paper, and gossamer writing, have we not also some enduring books which will take their stand beside the *works* of the masters of the past? If, in our mechanical arts, we waste, occasionally, the energies of both mind and capital in the production of trifling and shallow nothingnesses,—hundred bladed penknives, patent leather boots with a polish like court sticking-plaster, and ladies' silk dresses with half a dozen tints and shades, according to the light you view them,—have we not also our tubular bridges, and Thames tunnels, and spinning jennies, and caloric engines? And so also in art. Though artists no longer produce "Holy Families," and "Galateas," and "Schools of Athens," and "Annunciations," like those of Titian, and Raphael, and Guido, and Claude, and Murillo, but content themselves with "Pet Kittens," and "Oyster Dredgers," and "Views on the Thames," and "Mousetraps," and such like nonentities,—the world has something to boast in the grandeurs of Turner, and Danby, and Martin, and the naturalnesses of Landseer, and Webster, and Wilkie, and Frith. It is true that, instead of the severely classic styles of the painters patronised by Lorenzo the Magnificent, in the glorious times of Italy, when a church thought it no waste to spend a couple of years' income for one grand altar-piece,—we have numerous examples of what may be called domestic pieces,—portraits and fancy pictures, and illustrations for annuals and drawing-books,—yet must we hold the times we

live in, and not the artists who live in the times, to account for this seeming,—nay, real—degeneration of art. In the place of noble and wealthy patrons, who, like Leo and Lorenzo, directed the artists to higher aims and more ambitious purposes, and disdained not to expend fortunes in the production of splendid art-examples, we have now a middle class public whose patronage can only be secured by the manufacture of paintings small enough to hang over library fire-places, and fill wall-spaces over parlour cupboards. It is the public who control the artists and not the artists who govern the taste of the public. We had a melancholy instance in the unfortunate Haydon, of the failure of an attempt to educate the public mind by great historical and grand gallery pieces. He painted pictures which were too large for modern houses, and the consequence was, that they remained unsold on his hands, and failed to attract discriminating audiences to the Egyptian-hall, in London, when put in competition with the superior claims of General Tom Thumb!

And the reason for all this is, not that the artists of our day want patronage—for the thousand new works which cover the walls of the public picture exhibitions, with the annual budding of the roses, attest to the contrary—but that the patronage is not quite of the right sort. What was it that produced such multitudes of low-art paintings among the Dutch masters? Why, simply because their patrons were shopkeepers and dairymen, who preferred the portraits of themselves and their little houses to anything which the genius of the artist might dare to attempt in a higher walk; because such productions *paid*, and because there was no demand among the wealthy and educated classes for the nobler and more enduring evidences of the painter's skill and labour.

Till within a very recent period indeed, the same remark would have applied to modern patrons and modern artists; but statesmen have shown their appreciation for the higher creations of art, and their love of the true, and beautiful, and noble, by those commissions which produced the statues and frescoes which decorate the walls of the New Palace at Westminster, and by that determination, so lately made public, to provide a better building than that in Trafalgar-square for the reception and preservation of the noble works which have been purchased by, or bequeathed to, the English nation. When a Vernon and a Turner—a well-informed patron and a successful artist—give their pictures to a nation, it behoves that nation to provide them a fitting house.

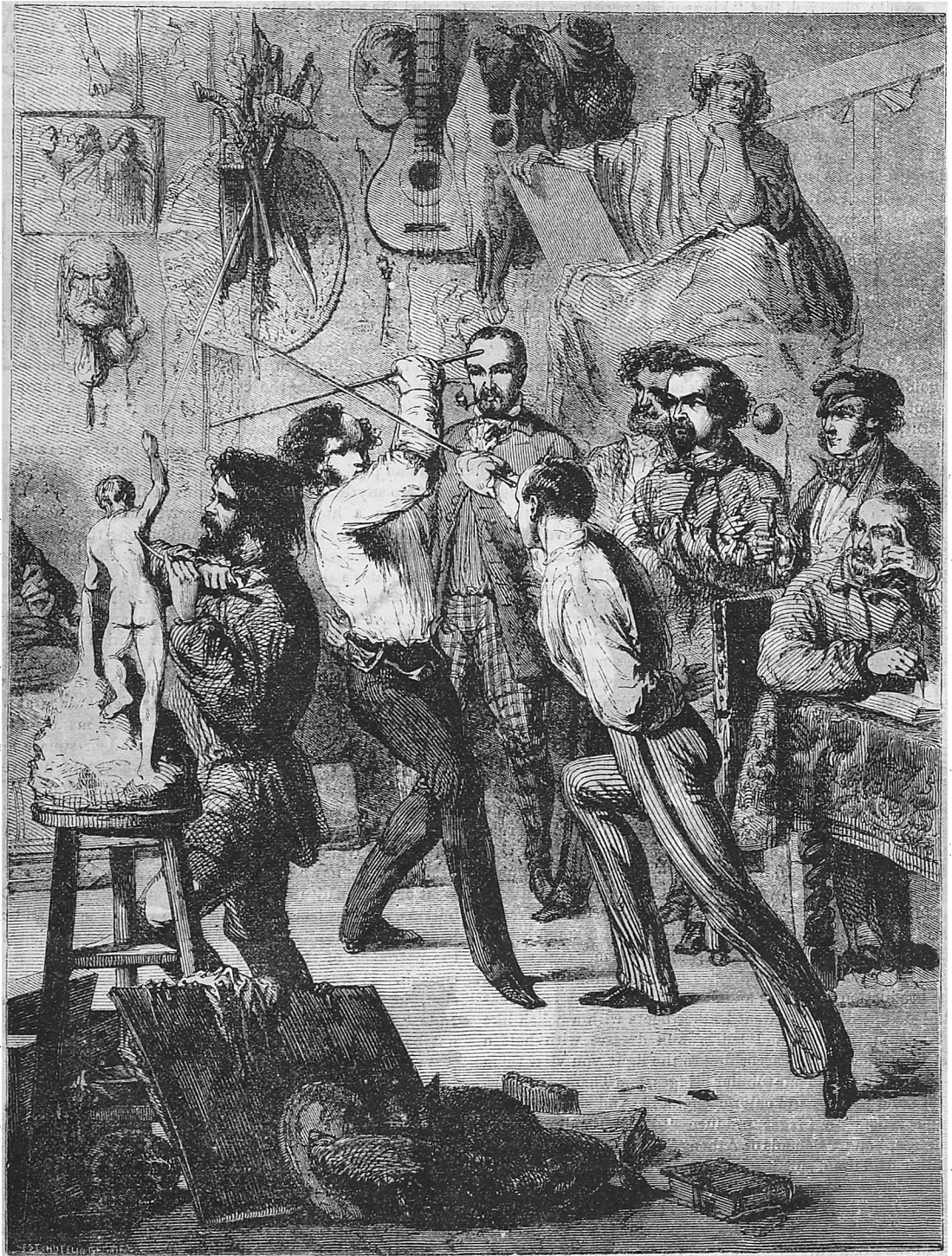
Much, too, has been done for modern art by the establishment of such institutions as Art-Unions, and Fine-art Distributions, Public Galleries, and Free Exhibitions; and much has been done towards the improvement of the public taste by the patronage of the rich and powerful among us. But not enough. It was, we think, a mistake of the Royal Commission, in excluding paintings from the Exhibition of the Industry of all Nations—an example which, we trust, will not be followed in the Great Industrial Fair in New York. Art requires extensive patronage, and that patronage must be judicious as well as extensive. The half-penny ballad-school of illustration must give place to the higher claims of works, such as we insert in this magazine. Art must not be allowed to sink, either in style, conception, or execution, by the low taste of the purchasing patrons, or in the non-appreciation of governmental boards. We have had examples enough of Falls of Niagara painted upon tea-boards, and ship-covered Atlantic Oceans depicted upon canvasses twenty inches by twelve. Even the sellers of pictures now-a-days begin to exclaim against the rubbish they are compelled to sell, and the public demand for better subjects and higher art is beginning to make itself known among artists. Glaring colour and petty artistic efforts are, we trust, about to give way to a nobler and more living style of painting.

As in pictures, so in statuary. The Baileys, and Wyatts, and Steeds, and Bells, are slowly beginning to perceive that the public taste—and therefore the profitable art-trade—is

inclining towards something better than portrait statues of nude children and small busts of unknown celebrities; and patronage is again falling into the hands of princes and potentates. And thus it will suggest itself to artists, that it will be

America and Austria—the Powers and Raphael Montis of the Exhibition—will overtake and pass them in the race for fame.

In architecture, too, we of the modern times are improving. From the gin-palace character of our modern buildings, we



A FRENCH VIEW OF A FRENCH STUDIO

better to lead the growing intelligence of the age, than to go on, as they have been going on, producing statues which are carved by the chisels of marble-manufacturers in Rome, to be filed and sand-papered up to the requisite degree of finish in the studios of London. They must be careful, or the artists of

are slowly returning to the great Grecian and Gothic models, as the Royal Exchange, the Reform Club, the Catholic Cathedral in St. George's-fields, and the New Houses of Parliament, in London, testify; and it will be the shame and reproach of our architects, if they retreat from the position they have

assumed. Art to be eternal must be intelligent and aspiring. We have been led into these brief remarks by the very natural wish to illustrate our engravings by apposite reasoning. Painted by a French painter, the studios of modern French

and the sculptor work on regardless of the noise and riot or intruders, and the lady model sits unconscious of the proximity of small sword practice and the inanity of cup and ball. Of course, it is not to be supposed that such incidents as are here



IN THE PRESENT DAY. FROM A DRAWING BY VALENTIN.

artists are presented to us with just that degree of exaggeration which was requisite to render them attractive pictures. Here we see that, in the place (that should be) devoted to study and reflection, the students pursue their avocations amid the apparently incongruous amusements and gaieties of youth. The painter

depicted ever take place in any artist's studio *all at once*—even though the studio be a Frenchman's: but M. Valentin has generalised and brought together the phases of artist-life in France in his own exquisite manner, simply to show what sometimes takes place in separate and occasional intervals of

study. Many of our readers will remember the works of Pradier, Collas, and Debay, which graced the French Sculpture Court in the Exhibition of 1851; and they will conclude that something more of thought and inspiration were bestowed on, and evolved by their production than the beautiful pictures of Valentin would lead us to suppose. The age of Tinsel is the age of youth; and it is generally succeeded, in art as in nature, by the ages of Gold and of Iron.

SILK AND SILK-WEAVERS.

THE silk-trade of England, employing upwards of half a million of people, is the exclusive occupation of only two localities in that country of any great importance—Spitalfields and Macclesfield. In the latter place, where it employs about 25,000 persons, it is entirely the growth of the last sixty years; in Spitalfields it boasts of a much higher antiquity, dating its origin as far back as 1685. Silk-weaving was not entirely unknown in England prior to that time, it having been carried on at Canterbury, Norwich, and other places, by large numbers of refugees from religious persecution on the continent. A new impulse was given to the trade in 1685, caused by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, when upwards of 50,000 French refugees, chiefly weavers, found an asylum in this country, and were treated with the utmost consideration, both by the parliament and people. A grant of £15,000 per annum was voted by government for their immediate necessities, and they were permitted to settle on what was then an open space belonging to the Hospital of St. Augustine, and known as "Hospital-fields;" hence, by a very obvious abbreviation, the modern name, Spitalfields. The *hospitality* thus afforded, appears to have been in no way abused, for the liberality of the legislature soon became unnecessary, the weavers attaining a flourishing and important position; so much so, that in less than thirty years afterwards, their trade in its various branches maintained upwards of 300,000 persons in England, about half the number at present engaged in it. While the cotton-trade has originated and grown to its present colossal dimensions almost within the memory of the present generation, 140 years has scarcely sufficed to double the number of those dependent on the silk-trade. The early growth of the silk-trade was, however, of a far more extraordinary character than that of the cotton-trade, the first forty or fifty years having witnessed its development to an extent, which, when taken in connexion with the total population of the country, is entirely without a parallel.

For many years the population of Spitalfields was almost exclusively French, and although in a foreign country, they retained almost to within the memory of persons now living the use of their native language, remnants of which may still be traced in names of articles used by the weavers. For instance, the instrument used to turn the work on to the beam after it is woven is called *a tanto*; in Norwich, where the Flemings are supposed to have given most of the names to weavers' tools, the same thing is called *a storking-pin*. *The batteau, the battens, the mownture* of the Spitalfields weaver, are substitutes for *the rol, the boards, and the harness*, of the Norwich weaver; the former words being pure French, and the latter evidently of Saxon or low German origin. Lancashire has synonymes for these words in *rathe, lathe, and moutain*, the latter clearly a corruption or mispronunciation of the French name. The evidence of French antecedents is not, in Spitalfields, confined to the names of tools; numbers of proper names of undoubted French parentage are to be found scattered over the whole district, many of them owned by shopkeepers and small tradesmen. The foreign aspect of the neighbourhood is, however, with the exception of a few names, almost entirely amongst the things that were. The French songs, which we are told were formerly sung about the streets, the French coffee-houses, the French manners, the dash of French in the style of the houses, the porticoes, the seats at the doors, with the weavers on summer evenings enjoying their pipes, all these are gone, leaving scarcely a remnant behind. Spitalfields is changed; and, it is painful to add, not for the better.

There is one pleasant remnant of old times that has survived all the adverse vicissitudes from which Spitalfields has suffered—the little gardens with their neat summer-houses. Of these there are several hundreds, and from the immense numbers of tulips and dahlias which appear to be the peculiar care of Spitalfields cultivators, the whole neighbourhood presents during the latter part of the summer a gay and sprightly appearance. The ancient chronicler of Norwich describes that early seat of the weaving trade as a "city in a garden;" it has certainly, even to this day, some pretensions to that agreeable description; but it must yield the palm in that respect to Spitalfields, whose superiority renders that horticultural vanity, of which a few instances might be given, somewhat excusable. Although their gardens in autumn present all the deep tints and variegated obtrusiveness of the showiest of flowers, the cultivators are not all unmindful of the utilities. We remember, about five years ago, a gentleman, well known for his exertions in the cause of popular improvement, invited a number of the principal weavers of Spitalfields to several meetings at his house, for the purpose of talking over their depressed condition, and the possibility of something being done for them. At the second meeting, an old man between 60 and 70 presented a small basket to the host, saying, it contained some of the produce of Spitalfields. The contents were put upon the table in the shape of several fine *parsnips*. The old man was first speaker that night; and, with the produce of his garden before him, he waxed absolutely eloquent on the sin and shame and disgrace of letting a man who could produce *such parsnips* work from "morn to eve, from eve to dewy morn," and earn no more than enabled him to spend in food for his family just three farthings per head per day! He was perfectly right as to the sin and shame and disgrace existing somewhere; but one would have expected the "reason why" and the pride to have lain in another direction.

The decadence of Spitalfields may be dated from shortly after the commencement of the present century. Up to that period the wages of weavers were higher than those of any other class of workmen. Even in 1814, some years after the stream of adversity had begun to gather strength, a list of prices for labour was published, in which the price of the lowest article in the trade, which was and is made chiefly by women and young persons, was 7d. per yard; the price paid for a similar article, but with a far greater amount of labour in it, in Lancashire and Cheshire, is 2d. per yard. This comparison of prices is a tolerably correct indication of the amount of reduction in wages generally.

From the earliest times, the Spitalfields weavers have sought, by combination, to fix the prices of their labour. For a time they succeeded. The state of the trade would have enabled them to command almost any prices they chose to name; but they endeavoured to maintain their monopoly too long. An enemy was in the field that they refused to recognise; the power-loom was taking the work from the cotton-weavers of Manchester, Macclesfield, and other places, and cotton-weavers needed but little instruction to make them good silk-weavers. Silk manufacturers discovered this, and as Spitalfields has declined, other places have taken its trade. The silk-trade, which, at its commencement, was almost confined to one locality, is now scattered over twenty counties. In the small towns of Essex, in Kent, in Somersetshire, in Norfolk, in Lancashire and Cheshire, in Derbyshire and Staffordshire, in Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, and Warwickshire, and even in Yorkshire, the sound of the silk-loom may be heard. In many of these places the trade is extending, but Spitalfields declines. Although the original cause of this decline was the high wages demanded, the reaction has been so great that prices are now lower in Spitalfields than in some of those places to which the trade has fled. Forty years ago, the best hands earned as much as £7 or £8 per week; and they would any of them have been ashamed of themselves not to have kept St. Monday as a holiday. There was no waiting then: one week's wages was the average wages of the year, and the masters were so anxious to obtain the goods, that some of them have been known to take work in from