

As one indication of the approach of a better state of things, we may mention that, as the French army in the East is accompanied by Horace Vernet—whose business is to produce worthy pictorial representations of any striking scenes, any remarkable objects, and any brilliant exploits that may meet his view—so Omar Pasha has an artist in attendance upon him for a similar purpose, who is said to be engaged upon a painting of the siege of Silistria, that glorious struggle in which Turkish valour, assisted and directed by the English skill of the gallant Lieutenant Butler and his friend, effectually repelled all the attacks of a Russian horde, in spite of a great disparity in numbers. It may, perhaps, be some time before Omar Pasha's enlightened views on general subjects and just appreciation of the value of art are shared by the mass of the subjects of the Sultan; but the influence of his example, seconded by the high position he deservedly holds in the estimation of all, must, sooner or later, bring about this desirable result.

THE EXHIBITION OF THE ART UNION.

SOME of our readers may smile at the fact of an exhibition of the Art Union of London being included in matter, great part of which relates to the works of EMINENT MASTERS. But the article will not be so irrelevant as it might upon the first blush appear.

The object of our work is to cultivate amongst all classes in this country a taste for the beautiful, and the beautiful includes, according to the sententious German, the good! It is not unnatural, therefore, that any glaring departure from the rules of Taste and of True Art should be noticed and reproved, for it is by reproof that education is promoted, and by the example of the bad that the good is inculcated.

Very few people are ignorant of the constitution of the Art Union. It is a society, instituted in 1837, and incorporated in 1846, having for its object a promotion of the knowledge "and love of the fine arts, and their general advancement in the British Empire by a wide diffusion of the works of native artists," and also "the elevation of art and the encouragement of its professors, by creating an increased demand for their works, and an improved taste on the part of the public."

That an institution having so generous and so great an aim, should have so signally failed, as this and other exhibitions will show, is more to be deplored than to be wondered at. Taste requires education, and is by no means a mere natural production. It requires also time to grow. It is not to be presumed, that because a man or a woman wins a prize at the Art Union, they should be sufficiently judges of pictures to select the most meritorious out of so many galleries; and the fortunate prizetaker has the Royal Academy, the British Institution, the Society of British Artists, the National Institution, the Water Colour Society, and the New Association of Painters in Water Colours, to select from. It might probably happen that if the fortunate or unfortunate prizetaker had only one gallery to choose from, something like a good selection might be made; but under the present system the body of prizetakers, with a perverseness which is puzzling, clear the whole of the galleries of their dross and refuse.

It is another unfortunate circumstance that the drawing of the Art Union takes place very late in the year. Therefore, if there be a good picture by a rising artist, prizetakers are pretty sure not to get it, because buyers of taste and of art education have had the run of the galleries before them; and, moreover, to render, we suppose, any collusion between the buyer and the seller impossible, the committee of the institute have framed their by-laws in such a manner that one may be construed into a direct prohibition of the prizetaker's using any judgment other than his own—a good rule in some respects, but exceedingly injurious in others.

Thus it is, that the result is frequently very seriously injurious and noxious to British art. Those who have to choose the pictures are of all classes, and the sellers of the pictures are as various. Some there are who get a pretty good painting; but the majority are so bad, that the effect of the gallery to an eye accustomed to good art, is really very sad indeed. But, besides this evil, the Art Union has another effect. It disheartens the artist who may be

very clever, but may *not* have sold his picture, when he sees one with not a tithe of the talent which he has, get for his production a price which is preposterously high. But it has a worse effect upon the artist who sells his painting. Having an eye to the Art Union prizetakers, he has put an enormous price on his production, because he is just as likely to get it as a smaller one. Judges do not buy his pictures—but others do; and the prizetaker must give the full price, or else return part of it into the reserve fund of the society. We happen to know a case, wherein a young artist asked £200 for a picture exhibited in the Royal Academy, purposely to catch the Art Union prizetakers—a work for which, had a dealer bought it, he would gladly have taken £50. He sold his picture; and it so elated him, that his works had such prices put on them that he never sold any more. He is now in one of the English colonies, taking portraits, and gaining a very fair living; but a great or even a talented artist he never will be.

The pictures, also, on account of the advertisement which their exhibition affords, are obliged to be exhibited, and therefore to be chosen from exhibitions of the current year. Artists are not, consequently, allowed to paint upon commission; but, if they were permitted to do so, surely something more creditable might be obtained. In a word, as a purpose of art education for the spread of taste, this society is a dead failure; and, although it undoubtedly gets rid of a great many pictures, still there is not one out of the one hundred and ninety-nine exhibited, for which we would give—and we believe there is no professional person in London would—half the price which the artist has obtained for it. From this censure we may, however, except three; and also the lithograph by Maguire; and the whole of the statuary models, from 195 to 199, both inclusive.

A hasty run through the gallery will, we have no doubt, convince the reader of the truth of remarks which, however harsh, have for their aim the advancement of art and the improvement of taste. The society ought, without any hesitation, to remodel their rules; so that it might be an honour, instead of the reverse, to be selected by a prizetaker of the Art Union.

The present exhibition is held in the rooms of the Suffolk-street Gallery. In the great room the first picture which attracts the visitor will be, in all probability (No. 4), "Common Fare," painted by Mr. Sidney Cooper, and selected from the Royal Academy at the very large price of £367 10s. Mr. Cooper is a first-rate artist when combined with Mr. Lee as a landscape-painter; but in "Common Fare," which represents a group of sheep and a half-starved donkey on a common, he, to a certain extent, fails. The landscape is unpleasant; the position of the donkey, on the apex of a hillock in the centre of the picture, being too prominent; and the effect is, on the whole, unpleasant. Parts of the picture are unexceptionable; the sheep are excellently painted. The amount of the prize is £250, the prizetaker having added the remainder.

(No. 13), "Gipsies leaving the Common," by E. Williams, sen., for which a gentleman has given £60, is a very common specimen of a picture manufactured without the slightest attention to nature; vivid colours and crude greens being the staple commodity.

(No. 19), "A Scene from the Play of the Hunchback," by A. J. Simmons, has, luckily for the artist, fetched £40. Had it to be sold in any sale to-morrow, it might realise £10.

(No. 21), "The Lady of Shalot," by R. S. Lauder, R.S.A., has been chosen from the new institution at a price of £80. It bears the quotation from Tennyson:—

"But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights."

But it is in reality nothing but a very pallid specimen of humanity, with a pretty but unmeaning face, looking into a mirror. What relation it bears to Tennyson's mystic poem we cannot say.

(No. 22), which hangs just below, is a contrast in every particular. It is a sweet landscape, "Evening on the Mackno, North Wales," with a wild duck flying quickly over the still waters of a lake. The colour and the feeling are both good. The taste exhibited in the choice of this does honour to Mr. Allen. The price affixed by the artist, Mr. Dearle, is twenty pounds.

(No. 26), "Game and Fruit," by Duffield, is a very fine picture, which we noticed when before exhibited. We would particularly

call attention to the painting of the blackcock and the partridge. Mr. Cooper, a prizewinner of one hundred pounds, has selected it.

(No. 28), "A Fishing Village," from the coast of Normandy, by J. Wilson, jun., for which Mrs. Saunders has given one hundred and fifty pounds, is a meritorious but by no means a first-class painting.

(No. 31), "The Siesta," by C. Landseer, exhibits a girl lying upon two antique chairs. The position is awkward, and the drawing, especially the foreshortening, not well managed; but on the whole, the picture is more worthy than nine-tenths of the others.

(No. 34), "The Young Boat-builder," is so bad, that it should be gibbeted, not exhibited.

(No. 36), "The Rehearsal of the Village Choir," by F. Underhill, is the production of one, who, with more time and finish, may do much better. The faces of the young girls, whom the music-master is drilling, are very sweet and arch.

(No. 37), exhibits the sort of picture which is likely to be bought by prizewinners. It is of the genteelly pious order. Not that we quarrel with simple piety, but with its theatrical exhibition. It is called the "Mother's Prayer." A lady with a doll-like face, without one atom of devotion in it, watches over her child in bed. It

(No. 68), "The Youthful Hairdresser," exhibits quite as simple an incident; but, from the nature of its treatment, is very much better. A little girl is nailing the wig on a wooden doll, the stolid look of which gives the piece a very comical air. The dress and face of the girl are well painted by the artist, Miss M. A. Cole.

(No. 76), "Keeping Guard," by J. Hardy, jun., is interesting and well painted, with the exception of the sky, which is exceedingly murky and heavy. A dog is watching by some game, which his master has deposited near him.

(No. 84), "The Monastic Life of the Emperor Charles V.," exhibits great knowledge of drawing and a good eye for colour and arrangement. The present little picture is but a sketch, and some crudeness must therefore be pardoned. The picture is decidedly the best ten-guinea prize in the exhibition.

(No. 90), "The Brunette and the Blonde," or course being the portraits of a pale young lady, and of another with a Spanish chocolate complexion, is a work by Mr. R. S. Lander, for which he has been lucky enough to get sixty guineas.

(No. 103), "A Bible Class in a Scotch Parish School examined by a Committee of Presbytery," is one of those pictures which strike you with two subjects for wonder—the one, that it ever got hung in any gallery; the other, and the greater, that having been hung, it ever got sold; the artist mistaking coarse caricature for character,



MOONLIGHT ON THE WATER.—FROM A PAINTING BY VAN DER NEER.

is calculated to touch maternal hearts, and we have no doubt that Mr. Fisher, in selecting it, was guided by his female friends.

(No. 46), "Isola dei Pescatori," an Italian landscape, by G. E. Hering, is very meritorious. With the exception of a certain harshness in the shadows, it leaves little to be wished for.

(No. 54), "A Cabin in a Vineyard," has at least a great name to help it, that of Mr. Uwins. We criticised it in our notice of the Royal Academy. A mother who has left her children asleep in the *cabane* of the garde de vigne, returns to look at them. The figure of the mother is somewhat graceful, but beyond that the picture is unmeaning and lackadaisical.

(No. 61), "Evening," by E. Williams, sen., is excessively after the manner of a tea-board in its finish and treatment. It bears a great many more marks of manufacture than of study from nature.

(No. 66), "What shall I sing?" instances one of those prettinesses with little meaning and small skill in execution, which, nevertheless, captivate the many. A young lady in a curious dress, a mixture of modern and fancy costume, holds a guitar in her hands, and seems to ask the beholder the question which gives its title. It is perfectly unworthy both of the artist and purchaser.

and being content to exhibit a picture without tone, or finish, or colour, properly so termed, in it.

But we will not detain the reader any longer. The water-colour department of the exhibition is perhaps a little better than that of the oil paintings; the best amongst them being "A Head of a Roman Monk" (No. 186), by Carl Haag, to which we called attention in our notice of the Water-colour Society. The statuettes are much more creditable, especially "The Dancing Girl reposing" (198), and (199) "Innocence," after an original by Foley.

The print, to which subscribers are entitled next year, is not worthy even of the Art Union; the artist, Mr. J. J. Chalon, seldom producing anything worthy of engraving, and, in this instance, Mr. Willmore, the engraver, by no means doing what he should have done. Any one familiar with the works of Woolett will at once see what a tremendous distance there is between the water which he represented, buoyant, sparkling, and deep, and the heavy graver and point lines of Mr. Willmore, which look like nothing in nature and little in art. The thirty wood engravings, illustrative of "Childe Harold," promise much better; but we must decidedly register our opinion, that the Art Union is every year less worthy of its position and of the patronage it obtains. Unless the council makes some very great efforts towards improvement, the sooner it gets replaced, or extinct, the better for British art.