

PICTURE FASHIONS.

WHY THEY CHANGE.

THE THIRD GENERATION.

How fashion rules the prices of pictures was explained by Mr Lance Hannen, the head of Christie's, to a reporter yesterday, when the season in the art sale rooms re-opened after the Christmas vacation.

It is just forty years ago since Mr Hannen, straight from college, walked into Christie's as the last Mr Christie walked out. "The four generations of Christie's ended in 1889, and I came in," Mr Hannen said yesterday, as he consented for the first time to be interviewed, and to talk of the way in which fashions come and go. "Fashions in pictures come in cycles—they come and go upon no definitely recognised principle, except that a picture must go out of fashion after the period in which it is painted—and remain out until you can look at it again without the prejudice arising out of the feeling that it is old-fashioned.

"In the old days, while old masters sold very well, modern pictures were thought of as highly, but the 'Golden Age' of modern art, as people used to call it, began to fall in the 'eighties and 'nineties. That was when we first saw Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Romney coming to the fore. What happens? A portrait is painted for a particular person. It goes into his or her family, and does not come out again until the third generation. No man will sell his mother's portrait or his grandmother's, because he knew them, but he has no objection to selling his great-grandmother's, whom he never knew. The Reynolds and the Gainsboroughs were paintings of the great-grandmothers of the people who lived in the 'nineties, and we had to wait another twenty years before the Raeburns, the Lawrences, and the Hoppners began to sell, they being a generation later. It is only natural to suppose then, that within the next twenty years we shall see a rise in the portraits done by painters who flourished in the time of George IV. and William IV., but those pictures won't come into the market until they represent the great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers of the living generation.

THE EFFECT OF COSTUMES.

"A portrait painter, fashionable in his time, is bound to have a day and then decline, not necessarily because his art is not good, but because his pictures go out of fashion. The definite costumes of a period have much to do with a painter going out of fashion, but if his work is good it will come back when it has got beyond the prejudice of a period. Take the school of the 'sixties. Our mothers wore enormous crinolines, and everybody says how hideous they were. Leech caricatured them unmercifully in *Punch*; but if you look back to Marie Antoinette and Queen Elizabeth you find they also wore crinolines, which on them we do not consider hideous, simply because they have got beyond the range of being considered merely old-fashioned."

The first rise in Raeburns took place in 1897. Not until then had any picture of his touched £1000, but in 1916 a Raeburn fetched £25,000, and several others £20,000 each. "In 1887," added Mr Hannen, "we sold portraits of Lady Raeburn, the wife of the artist, and Sir Henry Raeburn, both painted by him. They then realised £850 and £530, but in 1905 the same pictures had increased to £9100 and £4700."

Sales of portrait painters largely influenced those of landscape and subject painters, so that, Mr Hannen explained, they were all affected by similar changes of fashion. "In 1905 or 1906," he said, "we suddenly saw the rise in old English coloured prints. Very beautiful, they have gone up to fancy prices. In some cases you might almost say the print is worth as much as the painting it is taken from. But it is a curious thing that we seem to have exhausted the supply. They no longer come into the market. Whether they have all been routed out of the old portfolios and sold into new hands I cannot say, but the supply has fallen lately. They are still wanted, and we can't get them."