

Perth Art Exhibition

OUTSTANDING PICTURES

(By Our Own Critic)

The interesting exhibition, under the auspices of the Perth Art Association, being held in the Sandeman Library, Perth, until 11th April, was formally opened yesterday afternoon by Mr James Paterson, P.R.S.W., R.S.A., secretary of the Royal Scottish Academy.

Mr William Frazer, R.S.A., presided over a large attendance, and said they were fortunate in having such a distinguished person as Mr Paterson to open their exhibition. Mr Paterson, he said, was one of the founders of the Scottish School of Art, and had done a lot of good work in order to assist its development.

Mr Paterson, in declaring the exhibition open, said he valued very highly the honour of being asked to open that exhibition. In the old days such exhibitions were opened with prayer. They did not carry that out now, but he thought some of that spirit in which the devotional feeling lurked might be used a little more in approaching works of art. It was a glorious thing art. As he got older it did not become any plainer to him what it was. It was undoubtedly a method by which the spirit demanded expression. Long ago in Scotland, art was rather frowned upon as having something to do with the devil. They had passed from that, he was glad to say, and nowadys he thought all sensible men and women admitted that art had a right to exist. More than that, it was a necessity with some people; not necessarily a desire or the capacity to express one's self in art, but the feeling that art gave the expression for what was beautiful, apart from what was useful or even what might be called good or righteous. It was a side of life and its importance could hardly be exaggerated. Although there were hundreds of books published every year dealing with art nobody had been able to define exactly what art was. There was certainly more nonsense talked about art than any other subject except religion. He would like men and women to be quite brave about holding their own opinion of art. They should not pretend to admire a thing because someone else said it was beautiful. He would urge people to indulge their own tastes in the works of art. They might find in the course of time that their tastes would alter, but they would find that they had no no He was convinced that in connection with the influx of commercialism. There were a large number of people who bought pictures, and especially etchings, not because they really cared for them but because they were as certain to appreciate in value as the shares in some Oil Company. Reputations had been bolstered up, and prices had been paid for works of art which were entirely out of proportion to their value. Perth, he said, had to be congratulated in having such a fine exhibition, and he hoped, before many years had passed, to see the Fair City in the happy position of having an Art Gallery. (Applause.) It had very nice room and could quite well have one.

On the call of the Rev. P. R. Landreth, Mr Paterson was accorded a cordial vote of thanks, while a similar compliment was paid to the chairman on the motion of Mr Geo. A. Miller.

The optimist who said he liked Art exhibitions because they were the best way of keeping in touch with the Immortals would find himself in good company in the gallery of the Sandeman Library. Masters, ancient and modern, make a splendid showing. Definitely, this is the best collection of pictures assembled under the aegis of the Perthshire Art Association, and the citizens owe a duty to themselves in showing their appreciation of the enterprise and bold forward step of the artists and connoisseurs. Progress in this desirable direction is pronounced; the exhibition is interestingly representative of leading schools of British and Continental art, and all the loan pictures are of uncommon excellence. In such company the local "practitioners in pigment" give a most creditable account of themselves. Altogether, the exhibition is one that will make the critics sit up and take notice.

The number of works may not compare with the aggregation of canvases seen at the National and other outstanding picture shows in Scotland, but the quality all over is of a standard which reveals sound discrimination and taste on the part of the selectors. The hanging is a task that gives opportunity for the display of individual decorative feeling, and this important aspect of the exhibition has been carried through with aesthetic effectiveness. The Perthshire Art Association has been fortunate in obtaining so ready a response from the eminent artists who were invited to send in works, and these painters will be pleased to know that their works have received full justice in the arrangement on the walls.

Use and wont decrees that courteous attention must be given first to the loan pictures. These are notable, including works by Albert Cuypp, Adrian van Ostade, Leon Lhermitte, Blommers, Sir D. Y. Cameron, Gustave Courbet, Brangwyn, and de Laszlo. The examples of the two old Dutch masters have been lent by Mr J.

characteristic interest. The Cuypp is a simple pastoral study of cattle, with the herdsman seated near by. The foreground is in subdued tone, and the light seeks out a suavely modelled bit of landscape in the distance. The supreme craftsmanship lies in the painting of the three cows, which our Scottish agriculturists will be interested to know are Friesians of the dun and red varieties, forbidden to our present-day importers. Bovine critics will be ready to declare that Cuypp drew true to type. The Van Ostade is described as "Interior, with Boors Carousing." The pupil of Frank Hals chose all his subjects from humble life, but he bathed them in a warmth of translucent colour, that imparted a wonderful livingness to the figures, and he knew the value of chiaro-scuro. The picture here shown illustrates his strong points. The background is full of subtle form which seems to grow in definition. The four jovial drinkers are intensely human in their pose and expression. From scenes like these, the Dutch "interior" school drew draughts of inspiration. The influence passed on to a latter day, and through Josef Israels, reached his disciple, Blommers, who is here represented by one of his familiar "Young Navigators," lent by Mr Andrew T. Reid, of Auchterarder House. It represents children setting adrift their toy boats in a pool by the sea-shore. The little figures are drawn with charming naturalness, and the grouping is perfect.

From the Blommers, one should turn to three of the landscapes which have been lent by Mr Robert Brough from his remarkably representative collection at Ochilview, Bridge of Earn. He has sent a perfect gem by the late President of the Royal Scottish Academy, Sir J. Lawton Wingate. This distinguished painter specialised in "splairging" sunlight, bursting from behind obscuring grey cloud-banks. This example is called "Sunset." It is a harmony in grey without the strong ochre and red colouring which he frequently employed, and connoisseurs regard it as a most interesting example of a painter who will landscape art. Sunlight in sea and shore takes a different aspect in the D. Y. Cameron picture, also lent by Mr Brough. It is called "A Castle on the North Sea," and will be identified by many as a rendering of Dunottar. Sir D. Y. Cameron cultivates an atmosphere of gloom and mystery. That he owes to the Celt in him: The picture glows with a red light falling on the forlorn battlements, and the naked rocks, jutting into the dark blue ocean. The artist means one to read into the picture a story of grim fighting in the old days, and all he employs to give that suggestion is the play of sunlight on old walls. That is the essence of true art.

As a contrast to that type of landscape, one may turn to another from Ochilview. Mr Brough is the fortunate possessor of one of J. C. Winter's finest canvases, "The Vale of Atholl." To Perthshire people especially it will appeal. The viewpoint is near the "Soldier's Leap," and the subject is painted in the grand manner of the British landscape school. With majestic timber in the foreground, a splash of sunlight on Garry's "deepest pool," and the long vista of valley and mountain brilliantly lit. From the same collection have been lent two admirable examples of the great Lhermitte, who has found his most satisfying expression in pastel. In that medium he is unrivalled. These two drawings of his, "Le Repos" and "Harvesters" are superb in composition and draughtsmanship. The former is the more interesting, from the easy grace of the three figures, the child especially being naively natural in the way she holds the curiously pronged rake. Lhermitte is so competent a master that he avoids the slickness which less gifted men resort to. He never scamps a difficulty; he gives full measure in his details and brings them all into perfect unity.

Great interest will be taken in three notable loan portraits by that extraordinarily gifted artist, Philip de Laszlo. The painting of our popular Lord Provost, the Hon. John Dewar, takes us back to the days of "grim-visaged war." He wears the khaki and the Highland bonnet. It is a wonderfully virile and direct portrait, with the suavity of modelling for which de Laszlo is famous. On the opposite wall is the beautiful painting of Lady Forteviot. The artist has given an imposing composition in the manner generally associated with the name of Gainsborough, and there is artistic "tour de force" in the intricate folds of the figured drapery over the shoulders of the sitter. The third portrait by the Hungarian master is that of Mrs J. M. Fraser. This may be described as one of the great portraits of our time. It must be considered as a work that will take rank with the best of Raeburn, Lawrence, or Romney. In artistic tone and unity it is incomparably fine, and the sweet expression of the face, the kindly eyes, the refined and sensitively modelled features are fascinatingly portrayed.