

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS.

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ART IN PHOTOGRAPHY.

The questions "What is art?" "What are the qualities called 'artistic'?" "What is 'artistic feeling'?" have often been asked, and very much has been said and written for the purpose of defining and limiting art and art qualities. Very often what has been said and written has simply "darkened counsel by the multitude of words without wisdom." It is difficult to deal with the subject in a mere definition, as the appreciation of art is as much a matter of feeling as of knowledge. As an aid to comprehending the subject, we cannot forbear calling attention to, and repeating, a passage in Colonel Stuart Wortley's admirable paper on "Photography in Connection with Art," which, by the courtesy of the writer and of the secretary to the Cornwall Polytechnic Society, we are enabled to give on another page. The Colonel observes:—

By a feeling for art, I mean that intense appreciation of the beauties of Nature that leads us not to be satisfied till we have, in our humble way, done our best by means of such arts and such contrivances in our power, whether drawing, painting, or photography, to reproduce faithfully what we most love and enjoy in Nature; and I maintain that the highest art, the purest taste, is shown in the most scrupulously faithful transcript from Nature itself, because nothing, and no imaginary form or colouring, can equal, or, I might indeed say, approach in beauty what, if we care to look for it, and know how to find it, can find for ourselves in Nature. And it is pre-eminently this earnest desire to seek for and discover the beauties of Nature, and the knowledge of how and where to find them, that distinguishes the artist from the mere painter or photographer.

This love for, and earnest appreciation of, what is beautiful in Nature, from the primeval forest in its solemn grandeur, to the tiniest leaflet or blade of grass that grows by the way-side; from the wild and untameable glories of the eternally changeable sea, to the simplest ripple of the little brooklet just leaping into life out of the mountain side; from the manifestation of the loftiest, the most stirring emotions which ever aroused nations or startled humanity, to the expression of the simplest feelings which illustrate the "short and simple annals of the poor"—this is artistic feeling. The rendering of this feeling, the embodiment with an adequate expression of the beauties of Nature, by whatever means or materials, is Art. Artistic feeling is generally a natural endowment, but it may be largely increased, if not entirely originated, by cultivation. But to give artistic feeling expression requires knowledge, and hence becomes important a study of the experiences of those who have left glorious legacies of beauty to mankind, and observation of the rules—which are not arbitrary—growing out of those experiences: rules which should guide, but not trammel. If these definitions of artistic feeling and of art be correct, on what possible plea can photography be denied the power to give them embodiment?

MR. ROBINSON'S NEW PICTURE.*

Mr. ROBINSON has for some years past set himself a task, which he performs with religious care. Whilst attending, as every man must, to the every-day routine of his profession of portraiture, making pictures of his sitters where he can, and letting likenesses serve where pictorial results are impossible, he also resolved to produce, at least one every year, something for photography, something to show the capabilities, and, if possible, elevate the position, of the art he loves, and by which he lives. Whilst giving the "pot-boilers" every legitimate attention, each summer must yield something for the honour of the art and the artist. The production of large pictorial compositions, by printing from several negatives, is the speciality to which Mr. Robinson has devoted his higher attention, believing that if brain and fingers are sufficiently capable, photography presents appliances and facilities for producing pictures capable of satisfying all the requirements of true art, and of gratifying the art-tastes of all who are content with delineations of Nature as she is, and do not crave for what Ruskin calls the "audacious liberty of that faculty of degrading God's works which man calls his 'imagination.'"

In Col. Stuart Wortley's admirable paper on Photography in Connection with Art, given on another page, he remarks that "composition photography, more than any other, shows how difficult it is to obtain really artistic results in photographs; and he further adds his conviction that these difficulties "will always prevent that class of photography from rising beyond a certain level." We can endorse these remarks; but it must be with a qualification. The first part of the sentence states a general truth, applicable to almost any subject. The higher branches of any art most strikingly show its difficulties; the nobler the results sought after, the more apparent will be the inadequacy of the means to attain them. But these difficulties overcome by ability and perseverance; this poverty of material and appliances surmounted by skill and rightly applied knowledge, the results are immeasurably superior to those produced by less skill and simpler agencies. That these difficulties will prevent composition photography from rising beyond a certain level, is, if taken literally, a simple truism; but if it imply that the level is a low or insignificant one, we think that the progress which has been already made in Mr. Robinson's hands alone, points to a very proud future for this branch of the art; and we are sanguine enough to believe that when the same amount of careful art-study and varied ability, which have been given to the older arts of painting, &c., shall be applied to photography, it will be found that neither are the materials intractable nor the results unworthy of the effort.

Without the facility of combination which has been designated "composition photography," the scope of our art must be greatly limited, either to the production of small pictures,

* AUTUMN: Photographed from nature in several negatives, by H. P. Robinson, Leamington.