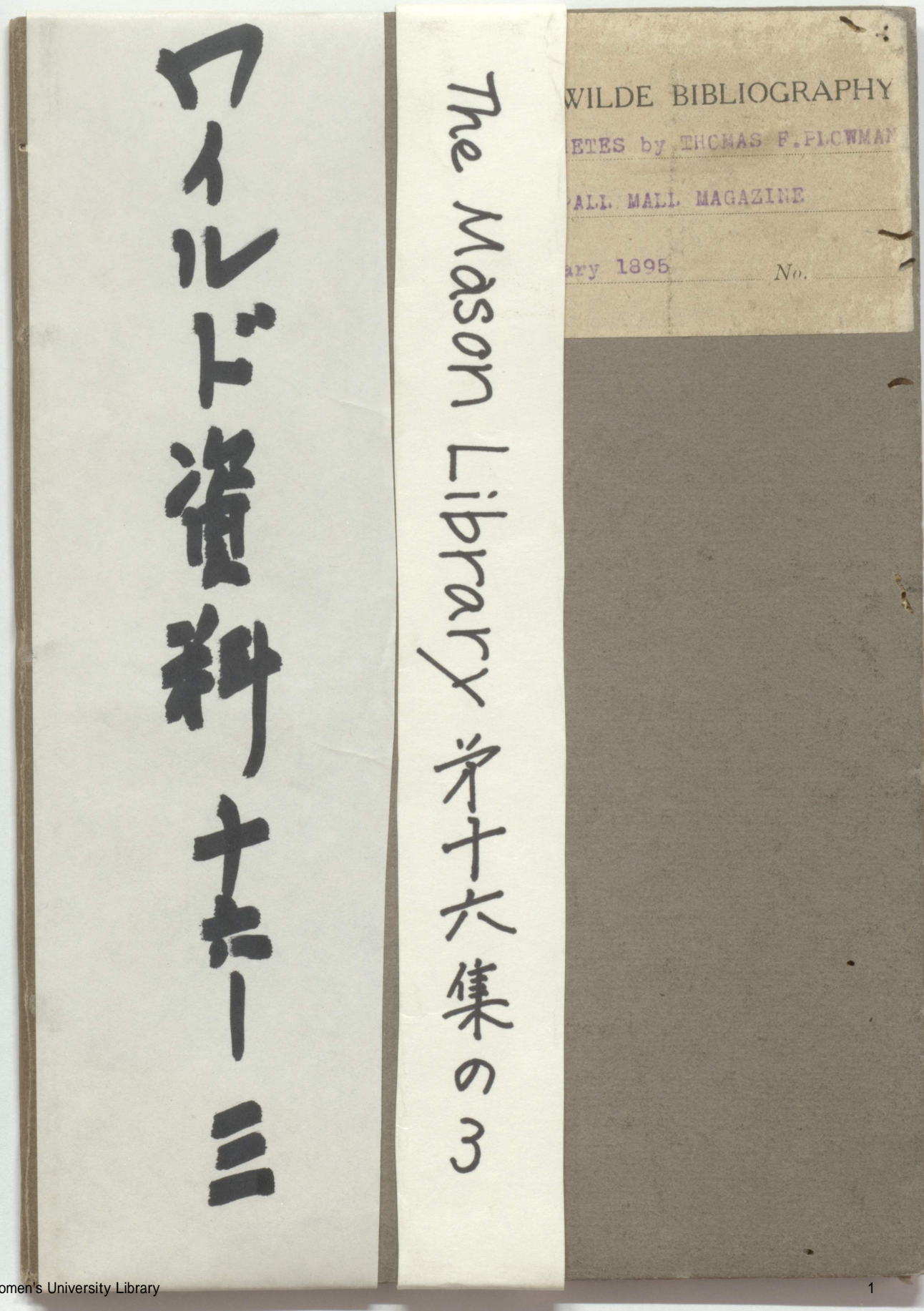


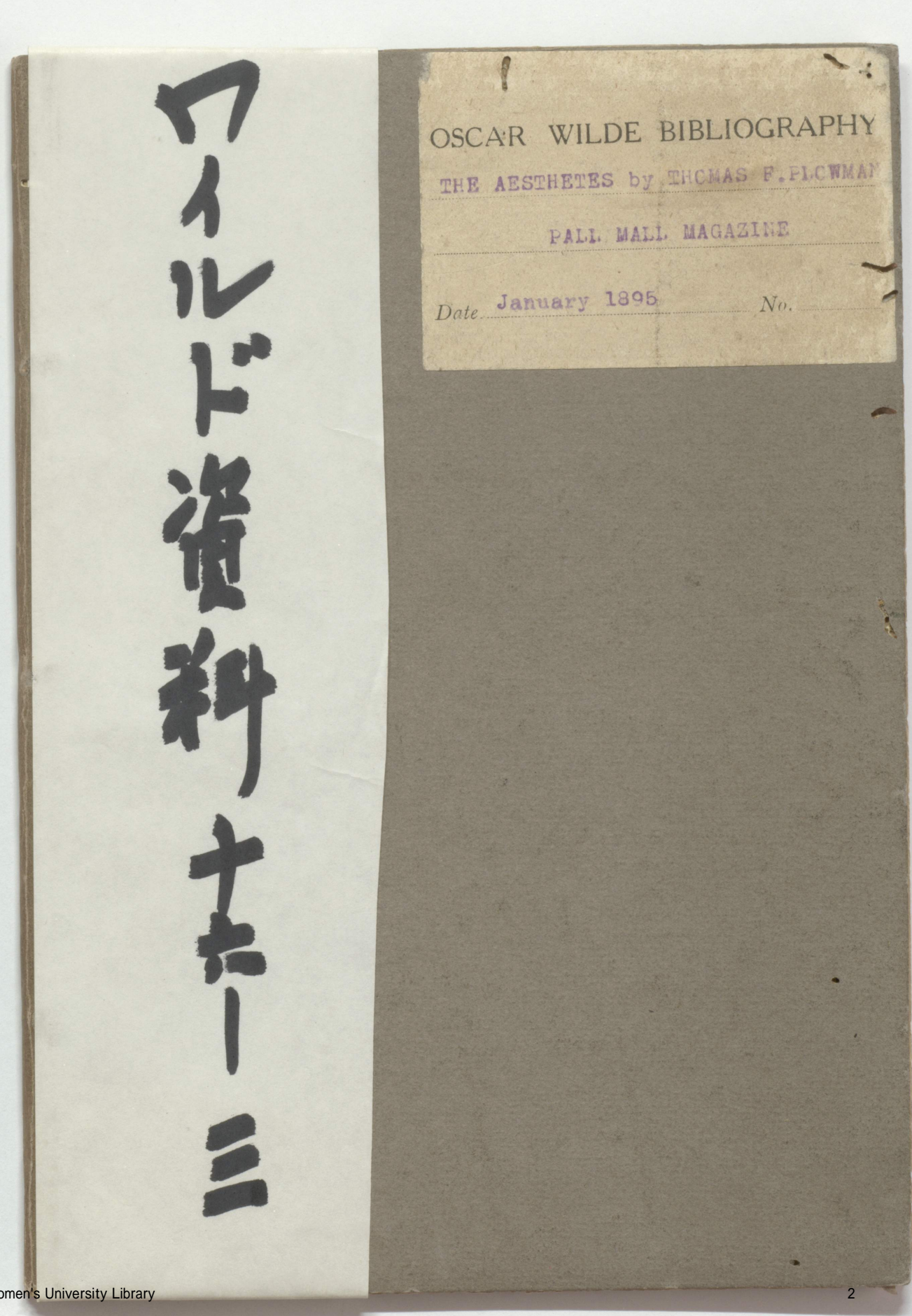
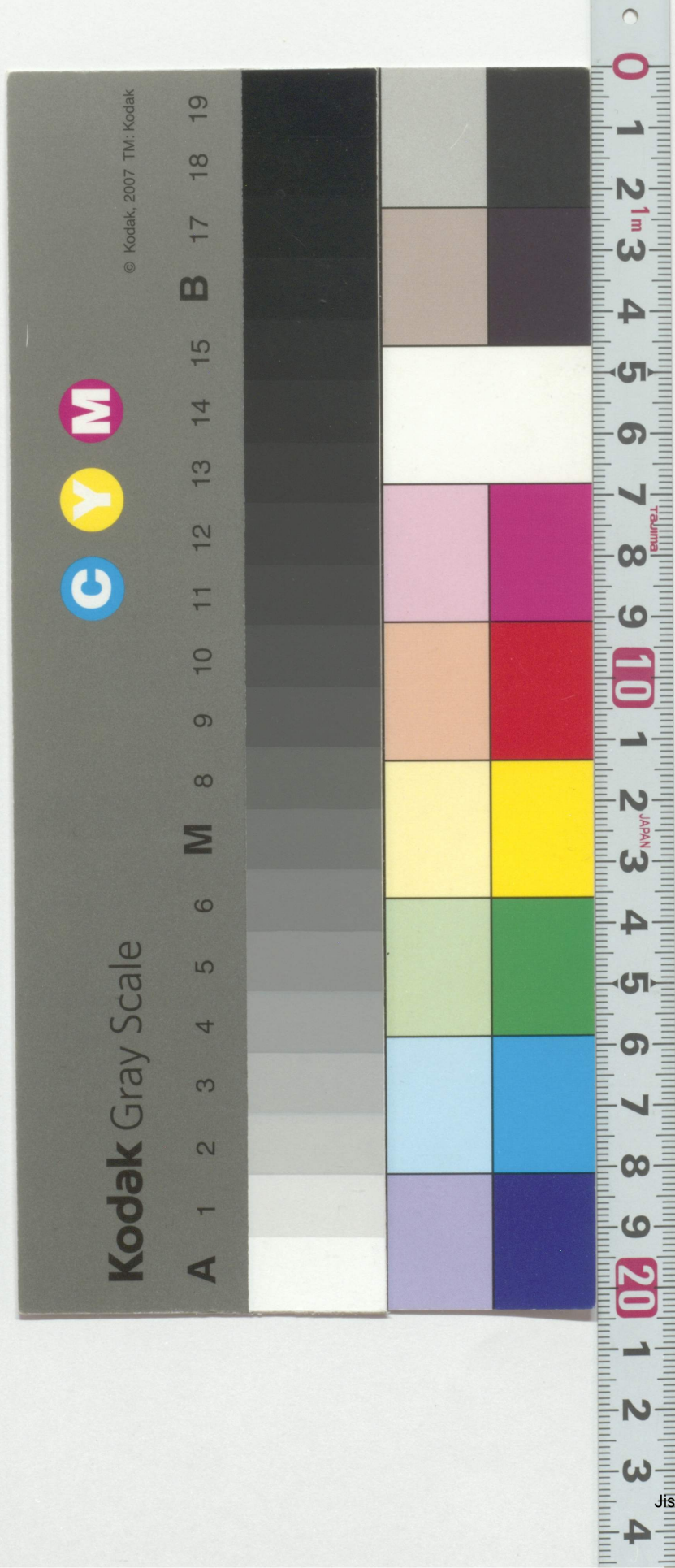


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DEATHS (continued). 1919

PLOWMAN.—On the 19th Oct., at 69, Pulteney-street, Bath, THOMAS FORDER PLOWMAN, aged 75.

160

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PALL MALL MAGAZINE.—JAN. 1895.

EDITED BY
LORD FREDERIC HAMILTON, M.P., AND SIR DOUGLAS STRAIGHT.

	PAGE
THE BIRTH OF A YEAR <i>From the Drawing by Henry J. Stock, R.I.</i>	Frontispiece
SHADOWLAND <i>Illustrated by J. W. West</i>	P. Morgan Watkins 1
BOLINAS PLAIN <i>Illustrated by P. Frenzeny.</i>	Bret Harte 7
THE ÆSTHETES. THE STORY OF A NINETEENTH-CENTURY CULT. <i>Illustrated by Reproductions from Old Drawings, Portraits, etc.</i>	Thomas F. Plowman 27
FOX HUNTING. NO. I.—THE BREAKFAST <i>Illustrated by A. L. Bowley.</i>	George Roller. Facing page 45
PRINCESS CRYSTAL'S QUEST	Dorothy Stephens 45
PAINTING AND SCULPTURE <i>Engraved by Florian.</i>	R. Sauber 64
WELLINGTON. NO. V. <i>Illustrated from Old Prints of the Period, Map of Waterloo Campaign and Facsimile Despatch.</i>	General Lord Roberts, V.C. 66
A LOST PLEIAD. <i>Illustrated by Oscar Wilson.</i>	Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler 91
FALLING LEAVES	Richard Osborne 97
CONCERNING THE OFFICE OF THE MASTER OF THE HORSE. <i>Illustrated by Photographs specially taken for the PALL MALL MAGAZINE, and from Old Prints.</i>	Earl of Cork and Orrery, K.P. 98
WITHIN THE GATES. <i>Illustrated by Edward King.</i>	G. B. Burgin 116
WAR NOTES, NO. XIV.—"KETTLEDUMS 1ST LIFE GUARDS." <i>Arthur Jule Goodman.</i>	Facing page 123
WESTMINSTER. CHAPTER V. <i>Illustrated by W. Patten.</i>	Walter Besant 125
JOAN HASTE. CHAPTERS XVI.—XVIII. <i>Illustrated by F. S. Wilson.</i>	H. Rider Haggard 141
THE BIRTH OF A YEAR (see FRONTISPIECE)	Christian Burke 160
GUESSES AT FUTURITY. NO. IV. COURTYARD TO MANSIONS, A.D. 2000. <i>F. T. Jane.</i>	Facing page 161
THE DEVIL STONE <i>Illustrated by E. Vedder.</i>	Beatrice Heron-Maxwell 161
WITHOUT PREJUDICE <i>Illustrated with Thumb-nail Sketches by L. Baumer.</i>	I. Zangwill 170
"THE HUMOURS OF THE MONTH"	Frank Chesworth

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** For Pall Mall Magazine Hotel Register see page 5.

■ For Seasonable Presents Section see page 25.

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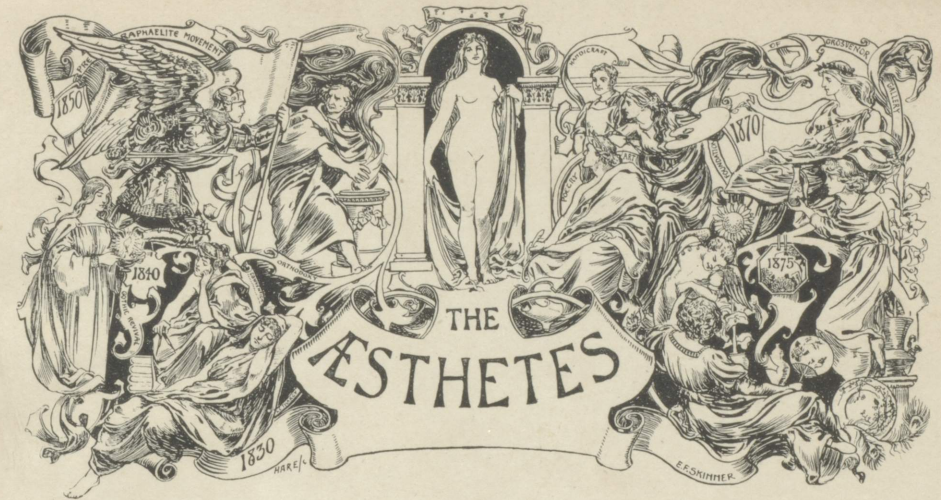
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THE STORY OF A NINETEENTH-CENTURY CULT.

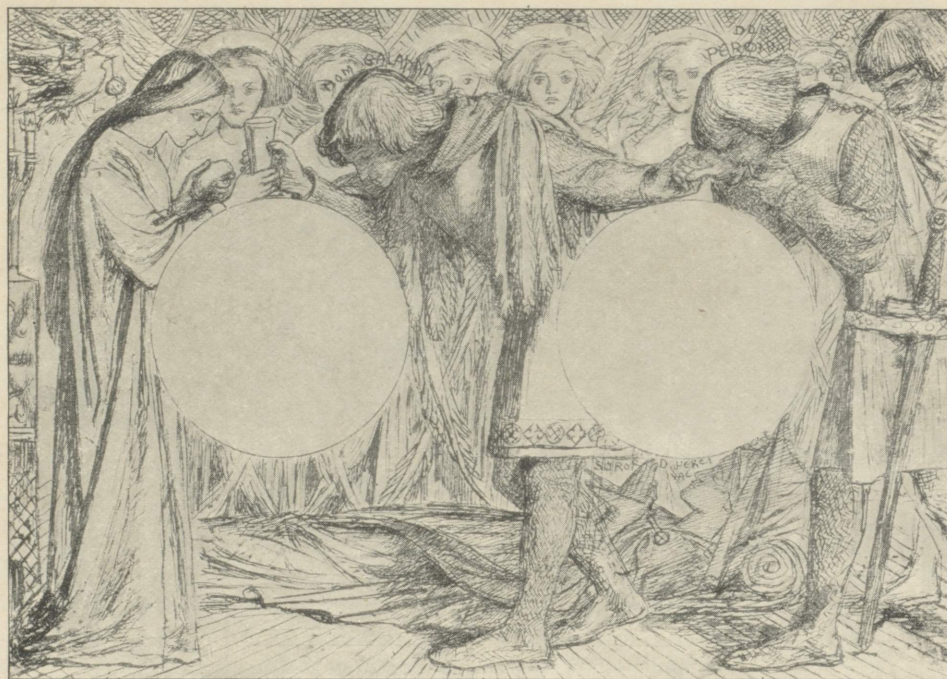
IN the days of the 'seventies the æsthetic movement was the social topic of the hour, and "culture," "high art" and "intensity" were the catchwords of the time. Votaries of the cult were rejoicing in the dawn of a new Renaissance, and congratulating the world upon the re-discovery of the Beautiful. The sunflower was in the height of its bloom and the blue-china craze in the zenith of its glory.

But all the world did not worship at the same shrine; and so, while the latest embodiment of an art-faith was glorified as a Heaven-born offspring by its high-priests, it was jeered at as a misshaped abortion by those who ministered in the older temples. As long as the charm of novelty was upon it, society stood its friend and fashion claimed it as its own; but the inevitable day came for its dethronement in favour of a newer divinity, and it was hustled out of sight. It has lain long enough in the limbo of forgetfulness for the haziest notions to prevail concerning it. In the popular mind, Pre-Raphaelites, Mediaevalists, Queen-Annites and China-maniacs jostle each other in a common crowd, in which Rossetti, Morris, Burne Jones, Swinburne and Oscar Wilde mainly stand out as recognisable personalities. They are collectively labelled "æsthètes," without regard to species, and are credited with an equal share in the floating and direction of a sort of joint-stock company for the regeneration of things in general and art in particular.

A retrospective glance in an impartial spirit at some of the phases of the movement and its effects may possibly help to correct some misapprehensions.

The æsthetic mission was to inculcate a love for the Beautiful; and, at first sight, it does not appear that this could afford much opportunity for difference of opinion. But as long as the old saying that "every eye makes its own beauty" holds good there will always be a rallying-point for contending factions. The æsthètes considered that they were qualified to be the arbiters of what constituted beauty on the ground that they had educated themselves up to a higher point, artistically, than the rest of the world had attained to, and that their perceptions were acuter and their tastes more refined in consequence.

Long before Æstheticism came into vogue as one of the fashions of the day, the Beautiful had been the subject of speculative discussion with many a philosopher. The literature of the subject, in the shape of scientific dissertations, is voluminous. It extends over many years, and England, France and Germany are foremost among the nations who have contributed to it. One writer after another has theorised and



Study for a Fresco for the Oxford Union, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

argued as to the origin of the sense of beauty, how it is evolved, in what it consists, and the laws that govern it. They have discussed the subject in its metaphysical, psychological, physiological, emotional, and every other purely academic aspect, and they will probably continue to do so to the end of time. The materials are the same, but a shake of the philosophical kaleidoscope rearranges them, and they do duty once again as a new and original theory satisfactorily accounting for everything. The æsthètes, although they philosophised on occasion, did not, at any rate, confine themselves to the region of speculation, but endeavoured to reduce their theories to practice.

In the earlier portion of our century the sense of beauty found little practical expression, and art-taste, as reflected in the architecture and social surroundings of the time, was at its lowest ebb. The Gothic Revival was the outcome of a desire for better things. As the first organised effort to reduce the art theories of a section of the community to practice, it paved the way for succeeding endeavours, and the more general awakening that followed was largely due to its influence.

Gothic, however, is pre-eminently ecclesiastical, and does not readily lend itself to the requirements of nineteenth-century householders living under different social and domestic conditions to their mediæval ancestors. The latter attached less importance than we do to light and air in a dwelling, and were content to sit on Glastonbury chairs or wooden stools, without much regard to bodily ease. So the Gothic Revival, which could not dispense with certain Gothic discomforts, naturally made more headway in the church than in the home. The æsthètes better realised the wants of the age when they adopted the "Queen Anne" style of architecture as more suitable to the domiciliary wants of the ordinary Englishman.

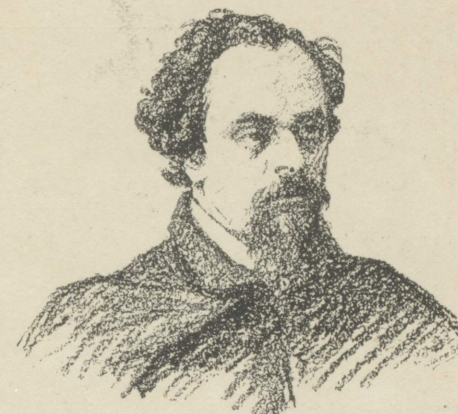
Whilst these new influences were bearing fruit, old-fashioned orthodoxy in painting was suddenly shocked by the appearance in its midst of a small band of young

enthusiasts who had the temerity to cast down the altars which the high-priests of Art had set up, and claimed to worship at the shrine of Nature only. The story of the Pre-Raphaelite rising and how it originated has been too often told to need recapitulation here, but the movement has too close a connection with our subject to be left unnoticed. In those days the embarking upon a crusade against the conventionalities and traditions of the academic school was a piece of courageous audacity which we can hardly sufficiently appreciate now. No ordinary storm of condemnation and ridicule had to be faced; but the very violence of their opponents did the exponents of the new faith a kindly service by rousing so powerful a champion as Ruskin to make common cause with them.

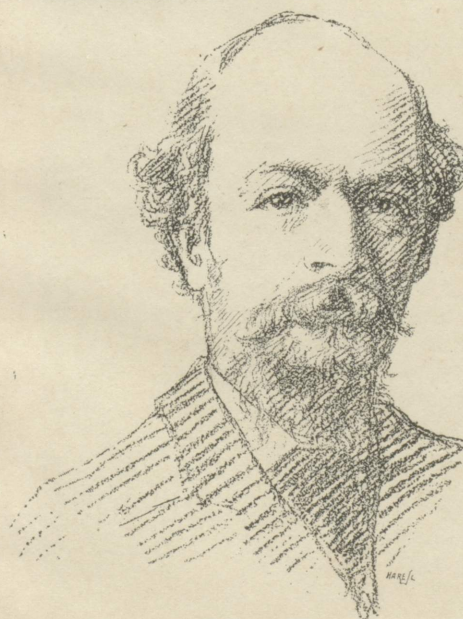
The keynote of the æstheticism of the future was struck when the brotherhood insisted upon the intimate relationship of one art with another, and sought to unite under one banner the poet, the painter and the critic, working in harmonious conjunction for a common end instead of in isolated groups. Most of the seven—viz., Millais, Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, Woolner, F. G. Stephens and James Collinson—composing the fraternity practically exemplified this in their own persons by their dual qualifications, as the pages of the *Germ*, the short-lived monthly organ of the brotherhood, testify. This periodical numbered among its contributors, in addition to the brotherhood, several outside sympathisers with the movement, including William Bell Scott. In after years Scott, by his contributions to the last of the æsthetic organs, the *Hobby-Horse*, brought the older and the later æstheticism into direct contact.

The outcry which had been raised when the Pre-Raphaelites first dared to cross swords with orthodoxy gradually moderated as the strength of their primary contention gained recognition, and the little band of reformers, having vindicated their position, soon ceased to exist as a brotherhood. It was at best but a frail bond that united them, for their temperaments and general sympathies were very diverse, and it was no commingling of congenial spirits except in a very restricted sense.

The outside world wrote down the Pre-Raphaelite movement as a failure, under the impression that its effects would be as evanescent as its early mannerisms. It left, however, an abiding impress upon art, and was



Dante Gabriel Rossetti.



Mr. Algernon Charles Swinburne.

No. 1. (Price One Shilling.) JANUARY, 1850.

With an Etching by W. HOLMAN HUNT.

The Germ:

Thoughts towards Nature

In Poetry, Literature, and Art.

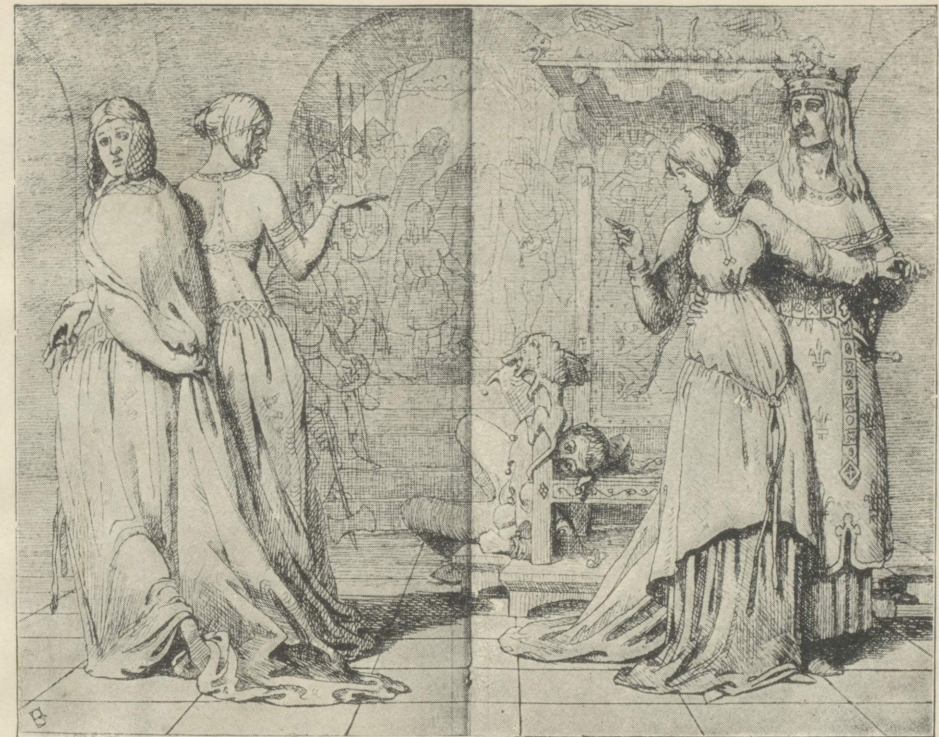
When whoso merely hath a little thought
Will plainly think the thought which is in him,—
Not imaging another's bright or dim,
Not mangling with new words what others taught;
When whoso speaks, from having either sought
Or only found,—will speak, not just to skim
A shallow surface with words made and trim,
But in that very speech the matter brought:
Be not too keen to cry—"So this is all!"—
A thing I might myself have thought as well,
But would not say it, for it was not worth!"
Ask: "Is this truth?" For is it still to tell
That, be the theme a point or the whole earth,
Truth is a circle, perfect, great or small?

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Facsimile of Frontispiece of "The Germ."



"Cordelia." Etching by Madox Brown. From "The Germ."

a clear gain to it. It had its weaknesses, but it is possible to appreciate its main object (the breaking down of artificial barriers) and its guiding principle (fidelity to nature) without endorsing all its methods. It demonstrated that the beaten track was not the only road by which art could be approached, thereby smoothing the future for those who aspired to be something more than followers in a common ruck.

When Pre-Raphaelitism, as originally formulated, fell into the background, a new chapter in the history of the movement was opened, and an amplified form of æstheticism took its place. This may be said to have been cradled at Oxford, which gave the Gothic Revival its greatest stimulus and held out a helping hand to the Pre-Raphaelites. Included in the new group of leaders were Algernon Charles Swinburne, E. Burne Jones, William Morris and W. G. Pater, all of whom were Oxford undergraduates at one and the same time. They fell under the influence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was the leading spirit of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, and whose presence on the scene supplies a connecting-link between the new movement and its predecessor. He was engaged upon the ill-fated frescoes in the Debating Hall of the University Union, and William Morris and Burne Jones joined him in the work of designing and executing them.

A desire to regenerate many things, and art in particular, was the bond that united the party, and the correlation of the arts and a veneration for the works of the early Italian school were, as they had been with the Pre-Raphaelites, leading articles of faith. Like their forerunners, they had an organ for the dissemination of their views—viz., the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. The life of university serials is proverbially brief, and this was no exception to the rule, for a year covered the term



"My Beautiful Lady." Etching by Holman Hunt. From "The Germ."

of its existence. In that time, however, several of the best known of the poets of the æsthetic school made their *débüt* in it.

The movement was at first confined to a very limited circle. Not having yet attained to the position of a fashion, its influence on the general public was inappreciable. In due course the university career of its apostles came to a close, and their setting forth into the larger world of work was followed by a wider promulgation of the ideas which had been generated at Oxford.

The scheme of reformation, as ultimately developed, was extensive in its aims, for little came amiss to it. The remodelling of taste in general, as displayed in our houses, our pictures, our decorations, our furniture, our books, our attire, and most other things with which we were brought into contact, was the task of the new regenerators. Not that the programme was originally so large and varied, but it resembled some others, political and otherwise, in its capacity for absorbing any special fad that was drifting about.

The painters were in the forefront of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, but now the poets, of whom Rossetti and Swinburne were typical representatives, were conspicuous.

A pessimistic amativeness, coupled with a strongly marked aversion to cherished beliefs, were the main characteristics of æsthetic poetry. Pallid maidens in clinging gowns were always being loved with a fervour of ecstasy, and were themselves consumed by a hopeless passion, which never seemed to lead to matrimony; and the moral and religious susceptibilities of the average Englishman were alternately

trampled upon. The lesser poetic lights of æstheticism affected the style without the redeeming qualities of their superiors, and added sickly sentiment and verbal obscurities to other graver faults.

The critics and satirists soon found a congenial field in the poetry of æstheticism for the exercise of their talents, and a series of paper wars was the natural result. Mr. Robert Buchanan was one of the hardest hitters of the attacking party, and his "Fleshly School of Poetry," contributed to the *Contemporary Review* of October 1871, stands out as the most scathing of the onslaughts. Rossetti, in the *Athenæum*, defended himself with considerable skill and effect, and found a backer in Mr. Sidney Colvin. Others mingled in the fray, and much acrimony was displayed on both sides.

When, in course of time, æsthetes increased and multiplied, and their views were more in evidence, the strife waxed hotter, and the law courts echoed with the clash of arms. In 1875 the æsthetic poets were fiercely assailed in a poem published anonymously, entitled "Jonas Fisher." An anonymous letter in the *Examiner*, assuming that Mr. Buchanan was the author of the poem, attacked him in no measured terms. This resulted in Mr. Buchanan's bringing an action against the *Examiner* for libel. In the course of the trial it transpired that the author of the poem was the Earl of Southesk and the writer of the anonymous letter was Mr. Swinburne, whom Mr. Buchanan, under the signature of "Caliban," had previously somewhat severely handled in the *Spectator* in his verses "The Session of the Poets." The result of the trial was a verdict for the plaintiff with £150 damages.*

Whilst the poets were enjoying a certain notoriety, the painters of the same school were by no means idle, and many canvases were peopled with pale and distraught maidens, with touzled locks and faces full of the sad weariness of love-lorn languor. Morbid melancholy was as predominant in the works of the æsthetic painters as in those of the poets. There was the same tendency to look upon the darker side of life and to accentuate its shadows. Humanity was too often represented as gaunt and sallow visaged, as though a robust constitution, typified by the bloom of health, was inconsistent with true art. The nearest approaches to beauty were of a wistful, sorrowful kind, indicating a smothered discontent with things in general, suggestive of a household where the washing is done at home. The inventive genius, poetic feeling and beauty of colouring which were conspicuous in the work of the leading lights of the school, Rossetti and Burne Jones, did much in their case to induce a forgetfulness of other characteristics which did not appeal to every taste.

The correlation-of-the-arts theory was practically illustrated in the persons of several of the professors of the cult, who, as critics as well as either painters or poets, worked in a twofold capacity. Much mutual admiration was the outcome of this. The painter would take his subject from the works of the poet, and the latter, as a critic, went into ecstasies over the pictorial embodiment of his own poem. Next the poet would illustrate in verse the depth and meaning of the symbolism which was the strong point of the painter, and the latter then took up the running and, as a critic, rhapsodised in print over the genius of the poet. All which, as Mr. Pepys would say, was "very diverting."

* The following are the verses referred to:

"A sick putrescent dulcet lay,
Like sugared stick with meat too high,
To hymn, or hint, the sensuous charms
Of morbid immorality." ("Jonas Fisher," p. 140.)

"How he did laugh! 'Dear friend,' said he,
'The sort of Art I have in view
Is moral mostly in its themes,
Though oft immoral in its hue.'" (*Ibid*, p. 150.)—ED. P.M.M.



"My Beautiful Lady." Etching by Holman Hunt. From "The Germ."

A local habitation was soon the want of the æsthetes—one in which their particular idiosyncracies could be brought under special notice. The atmosphere of staid respectability and sedate orthodoxy associated with the Royal Academy was felt by the high-priests of the cult to be oppressive to them; and although the acknowledged excellence of their work would have secured a place for it on its walls, they disdained the distinction. On the other hand, many of the lesser lights of the same school would have put up with uncongenial surroundings for the sake of admission into academic company, if only their pictures had been sufficiently to the taste of the Hanging Committee to allow of it.

The want that was thus created Sir Coutts Lindsay supplied in 1870 by the erection of the Grosvenor Gallery. Its object was to provide a home for the best and most intellectual art of the day, without restriction to any particular school; but, as a matter of fact, it was *par excellence* the exhibition ground of the æsthetes. This was clearly manifest from the first; and, by providing a spot where kindred spirits could forgather and the eyes of the public could be focussed upon them, it did much to stimulate the fashion that was setting in. Much *éclat* attended the starting of the new temple of art, and it began to be said that the Royal Academy was an antiquated institution, and that its youthful contemporary must be the future medium for infusing fresh life into Art. The result supplies one more example of Fate's irony. The Academy pursues the even tenor of its way with unruffled serenity and a flourishing exchequer, and as to its rival—"where is dat barty now?"

Among the painters whom the Grosvenor Gallery brought into special prominence was Mr. Whistler. His etchings were accorded a place of honour upon the walls of æsthetic homes, and there was a mutual sympathy between himself and disciples of the cult, arising out of the fact that both he and they were warring against the powers that represented established authority in art. His borrowing the phraseology of music for the nomenclature of his pictures may or may not have been the outcome of his study of the æsthetic theory of the correlation of the arts; but this singularity—or, as some preferred to call it, affectation—of description found plenty of imitators, and nocturnes, harmonies, scherzos, symphonies, arrangements, etc., on canvas soon began to abound. The mystery as to subject which enshrouded some of these musical ambiguities was satirised on the stage by the exhibition of "A Dual Harmony," by "an artist of the future." This, one side up, represented an azure sea overlooked by a burning sky, and, reversed, an azure sky overlooking a sandy desert.

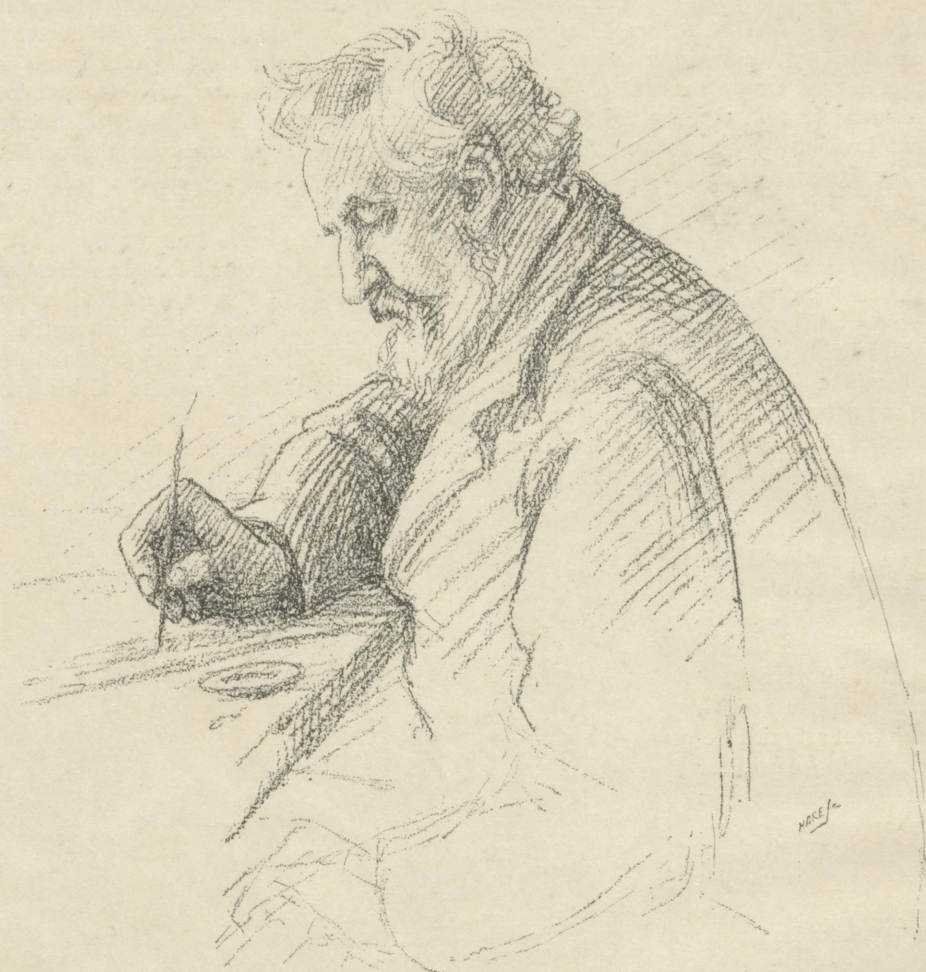
The foremost of art prophets could not view these new developments with equanimity, and in a *Fors Clavigera* criticism on "A Falling Rocket" (a nocturne exhibited by Mr. Whistler at the Grosvenor Gallery) took the artist to task in a style that did not err on the side of leniency. Upon this, Mr. Whistler brought an action for damages; on the ground that this was an attack upon his personal character, not justified by his works. The most amusing feature in the case was the conflict of professional evidence as to the merits, or otherwise, of Mr. Whistler's paintings. W. M. Rossetti, Albert Moore and W. H. Wills, testified in favour of the plaintiff, and Burne-Jones and Frith (a most curious conjunction) were brought up for the defence. A court of justice was by no means an ideal tribunal for such a cause, and the jury must have been sorely puzzled. The verdict may be taken as an expression on the part of both judge and jury of an inability to definitely settle a point upon which the artistic world was hopelessly divided. The jury awarded the plaintiff a farthing damages; and Baron Huddleston, by an exercise of his own discretion, gave judgment without costs, leaving each side to pay its own. The verdict of the outside public may be said to have been adverse to both parties to the

suit, as it amounted to a deprecation equally of Mr. Whistler's paintings and Mr. Ruskin's language. "The whirligig of time brings about its revenges," and the picture which the great art critic declared to be so dear at 200 guineas was recently sold for 800. A notable instance of Mr. Whistler's boldness and originality was seen in his peacock scheme of decoration for the dining-room of the late Mr. Leyland, the wealthy patron of æsthetic art, which was a daring experiment, strikingly effective in its result.

As the æsthetic movement progressed, its aims were enlarged and its influences were brought to bear upon matters of domestic interest as well as upon studio life. It having been laid



"Viola and Olivia." Etching by W. H. Deverell. From "The Germ."



Mr. William Morris.
After a drawing from life by Miss C. M. Watts.

down that the Queen Anne style was the most fitting for an Englishman's house, the interior decorations and ornaments of the home were taken in hand. And here, especially, it was that the ideas of the aesthetes, to use an expressive slangism, "caught on." Most people live in a house over which they have some control (at least their wives and daughters have, which is the main point), and æstheticism in house furniture and decoration opened up a large and attractive field of operations.

Many persons whose notions of art had been hitherto of a somewhat restrictive—not to say chaotic—type began to have views and aspirations. They became possessed with a burning desire to revolutionise—in a decorative sense—the domestic hearth, and discoursed of the subtle beauties of pomegranate dados, sunflower friezes, Persian tiles, Venetian glass and blue china. Those of a more advanced and imaginative school—the younger folk, to wit—who possessed, in a special degree, the characteristic known as "intensity," accorded a spiritual as well as a utilitarian recognition to these outward embodiments of their art-faith, and, in stained-glass attitudes, dwelt lovingly upon the "blessed and precious" in art. These, who sighed over the Philistinism of the age, and were full of soulful yearnings after the

unattainable, were entitled to be classified as the full-blown species, and, to paraphrase an old song, were "fine young mediævalists of a very modern type." Their reverential attitude towards such forms of crockery as they affected laid them open to the suggestion that a leading feature of their creed was the apotheosis of the teapot.

The emblazonment on their banner was "Art for Art's sake"; and this, literally translated, appeared to be that sense, motive and morals must give way if a previously defined sense of the Beautiful demanded it. These were the unpractical searchers after Beauty, who worshipped mediæval, or, may be, Japanese art, merely because it *was* mediæval or Japanese, and not for its intrinsic value.

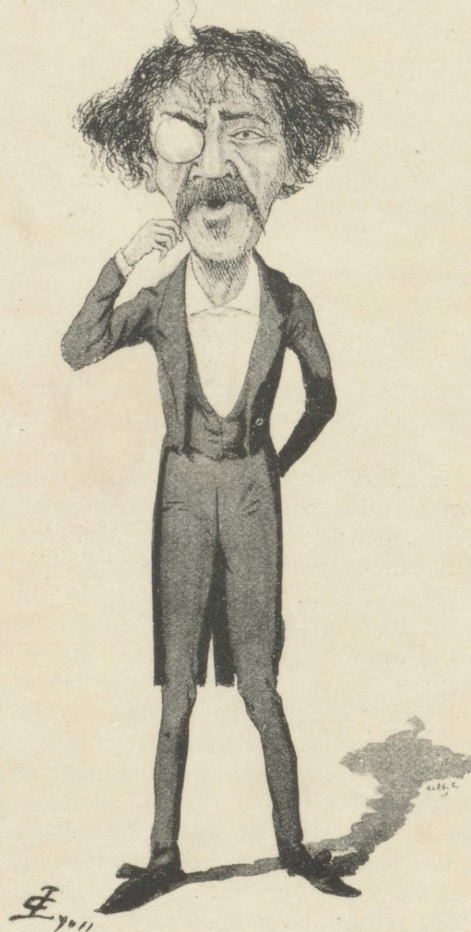
This was a type of æsthete entitled to mention as one of other items in the life of the movement, but it is not to be taken as representative of the majority. Older and wiser men—the greatest of art critics among them—have sometimes forgotten that we live in a work-a-day world, where art is only one of other forces which have to be propitiated in the struggle for existence. To exalt it as a divinity is to misapprehend the conditions under which the majority of the world is working out its destiny.

To Mr. William Morris the "household decoration" phase of the movement owes almost everything. By his work in this direction his name has become familiarised in thousands of households that his "Earthly Paradise" had failed to penetrate. He it was who gave practical expression to the new-born desire of the modern householder to have his domestic surroundings more artistically fit and harmonious than they had hitherto been. When, in conjunction with Mr. Burne Jones and other æsthetes, he started an establishment for the designing and manufacture of wall-papers, stained glass, ornamental tiles and household decorations generally, the æsthetic theory of the intimate connection of one art with another was once again illustrated. Poetic sentiment was united with the artistic instinct, and an intimate knowledge of art, in an archæological sense, was a security against the perpetration of such anachronisms as the modern upholsterer was distinguished for. The natural result of success—viz., imitation—followed; for other firms had to recognise an increasing demand for something artistically better than that which they had been in the habit of supplying.

Taste in art was wont to be looked upon as the appanage of the rich and leisured classes of the community. By virtue of their means and position they were considered to be entitled to gratify this propensity to the full, while the rest of the world was content to gaze upon the result with the feeling that, beyond this, they had no part nor lot in it. To them, art was labelled with the stand-off injunction—"admire, but touch not." To old-fashioned, middle-class folk, art was synonymous with luxury, and luxury meant extravagance—which, of course, people of limited means had best avoid. A cultivation of the sense of beauty tended, as they thought, to distract attention from the serious concerns of life and its primary business—the making of money. One of the best effects of the new movement was to discourage exclusiveness in art; to create a taste for it in the pit and gallery instead of confining it to the stalls and boxes. Mr. William Morris well said, "I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few."

It would not, of course, be correct to assert that there had been no previous appreciation whatever of the Beautiful on the part of all those who did not belong to the upper classes of society; but it may be safely asserted that, as a rule, they did not bring it to bear upon everyday life. They could admire beautiful scenery or a fine painting, but the matter ended there, and did not result in any serious effort to apply art-principles at home.

The early adherents of the "new craze," as it was called, were treated to a plentiful supply of ridicule, some of which was no doubt deserved. As Mr. Gilbert



Mr. Whistler. From a caricature drawn in 1889.
By Charles Lyall.

says, "You can't get high æsthetic tastes, like trousers, ready-made," and time and experience were required to tone down the eccentricities of many whose enthusiasm was not always tempered by judgment and knowledge. Some persons erred in thinking that æstheticism consisted in putting their willow-pattern plates on a shelf in the drawing-room, in pinning up odd bits of oriental drapery in places where they could not possibly be required, under the impression that they gave "a tone" to something or another; in sticking a Japanese umbrella in the fireplace, and Japanese fans at fourpence-three-farthings each on the walls. These were the people who effusively patronised æstheticism for a very brief period, because in the first place it created an excuse for shopping, and secondly because it afforded an opportunity of impressing their neighbours with the fact that they were quite up to date in the matter of taste. When æstheticism began and ended in this, it undoubtedly afforded opportunity for disparaging remarks.

But, allowing for the little weaknesses to which the new fashion gave rise, I doubt if we should care to go back to the old state of things which it supplanted. Most of us can call up mental pictures of the drawing-room as it was, or, if we cannot, the report of the jurors for the Great Exhibition of 1851 will help us. Speaking of English furniture, it says:—

"In fabrics, where flatness would seem most essential, the imitative treatment is often carried to the greatest excess; and carpets are ornamented with water-lilies floating on their natural bed, with fruits and flowers poured forth in overwhelming abundance in all the glory of their shades and hues; or we are startled by a lion at our hearth, or a leopard on our rug, his spotted coat imitated even to its relief as well as to its colour; while palm trees and landscapes are used as the ornaments of muslin curtains."

To complete the picture, add a dazzling white-and-gold wall-paper; a suite of furniture upholstered in either emerald-green or turquoise-blue rep; and a centre-table, concealed by a cloth, like Joseph's coat, "of many colours," on which are arranged a collection of brilliantly-bound books at mathematically precise distances one from the other. In summer, cover up the only reposeful spot in the room—viz., the fireplace—with anything that will attract attention by its colouring. Place a golden-legged console-table or two round the sides, and garnish the whole with some unblushing travesties of nature in the shape of wax flowers or fruit, under glass shades; some birds very evidently stuffed; a few Bohemian glass vases on bead mats as centrepieces; an assortment of aggressively obtrusive antimacassars in Berlin wool; and enough crudely coloured chromolithographs to show your appreciation of

pictorial art. You will then have reproduced the main features, in all their simple beauty, of the fine old English drawing-room of a very common type before æstheticism came into fashion. It was essentially a state room, with a stern sense of propriety about it, and a frowning deprecation of comfort and cosiness.

The dining-room of the time (which may be described as the old port period) was a more comfortable apartment, but its furniture and surroundings suggested a solemn ponderosity indicative of how serious a business eating and drinking were.

The æsthete certainly showed us how to improve our surroundings, and the drawing-room of the present day is a very different apartment to the one just described. It would be rash to assert that every vestige of the old order of things has passed away, for the genius of the nineteenth century has not been equal to the production of an Aladdin's lamp or a Fortunatus' cap, to enable us, at a moment's notice, to gratify whatever tastes we may possess. But, when we furnish or decorate, we do not straightway reduplicate the taste of our immediate predecessors.

We also owe something to the æsthete for bringing home to us that what was high-priced was not necessarily artistic, or that what was cheap was not as a consequence vulgar. It was gradually realised that the worth of an article lay in the effect it produced and the pleasure it gave, irrespective of its intrinsic value. So a demand was created for goods which, while they possessed grace of form or beauty of colour, were not costly in price. Quaint curios and artistic knickknacks, which of late years have been imported in such large quantities from India, China, Japan and elsewhere, have taken the place of the shell-baskets and glaring Bohemian glass vases studded with imitation precious stones that previously figured as irreproachable drawing-room ornaments.

We are frequently reminded of the disadvantages of living in an "age of cheapness," such as the present; but there is some gain to persons of limited incomes if they can enhance the artistic charm of their homes at a less cost than in the old days of gilt console-tables and royal-blue drawing-room suites. At the same time, such changes would have been impossible had there not been a growing desire, on the part of the world in general, to throw off the old trammels of conventionalism and to live in an atmosphere of greater freedom with reference not only to art but other matters.

Whilst art was popularised by being brought within the pecuniary reach of those who had previously regarded it as an unattainable luxury, it must not be forgotten that the new school had its wealthy patrons, amongst whom Mr. Frederick Leyland and Mr. Graham of Glasgow may be quoted as conspicuous examples. The handsome commissions which such connoisseurs could give enabled Rossetti and others to work out their own art theories, irrespective of what the popular taste of the moment might be.

The exteriors as well as the interiors of our houses owe something to the new movement, though an Englishman's reluctance, through fear of being thought eccentric, to give bold advertisement to any changes in his taste, has, no doubt, militated against a more general application of æsthetic principles in the direction of imparting a more cheerful aspect to the outsides of our dwelling-places. Although bright colours were not thought out of place for the decoration of our shop-fronts, private houses were considered by most persons to be above taking advantage of any such aids to attractiveness. When a few people had their front doors and window sashes coloured Pompeian red, sage green, or peacock blue, and sometimes the whole house front similarly treated, it was described as "very *outré*" by their neighbours, who preferred a bad imitation of oak for woodwork, and whitewash for anything else. But the innovation has brightened many a street and square that needed something to relieve its dull monotony.

Wearers of female costume had for generations been content to ring the changes upon primary colours; now many gradations of shade began to be utilised. Being more subdued and reposeful in tone than those to which we had been accustomed, they were described by those who could only appreciate undiluted brightness as "faded" and "washed out." A form of costume, too, which aimed at preserving rather than destroying the contour of the figure, was exposed to much hostile



The Shutters in Mr. Whistler's "Peacock Room."

criticism on the part of those who had lived in an age when a pork-pie hat and a crinoline were the highest embodiments of taste in dress, and when the palm of fashionable superiority fell to those who laced the tightest.

It was in the final stage of the æsthetic movement that the best-known apostle of the cult, Mr. Oscar O'Flaherty Wilde, came upon the scene. His fame is probably due less to the importance of his achievements than to his having been the exponent of extreme ideas, the embodiment to the outside public of all that æstheticism

represented, and the particular individual upon whom the efforts of all the satirists of the movement were especially concentrated. Oxford may be again credited with having a hand in the development of an æsthete, for it was at that university that Mr. Wilde's special proclivities were brought to the front. He fell under the influence there of Mr. Ruskin, and was one of the band of undergraduate enthusiasts who, at the Professor's bidding, devoted themselves, between the intervals of study, to road-making. It has been authoritatively stated that "he had the honour of filling Mr. Ruskin's especial wheelbarrow," and that it was the great author of "Modern Painters" himself who taught him to trundle it. His rooms at Magdalen College, in which he endeavoured "to live up to his blue china," were filled with innumerable artistic treasures, and were a rallying-point for those whose tastes and aspirations were akin to his own.

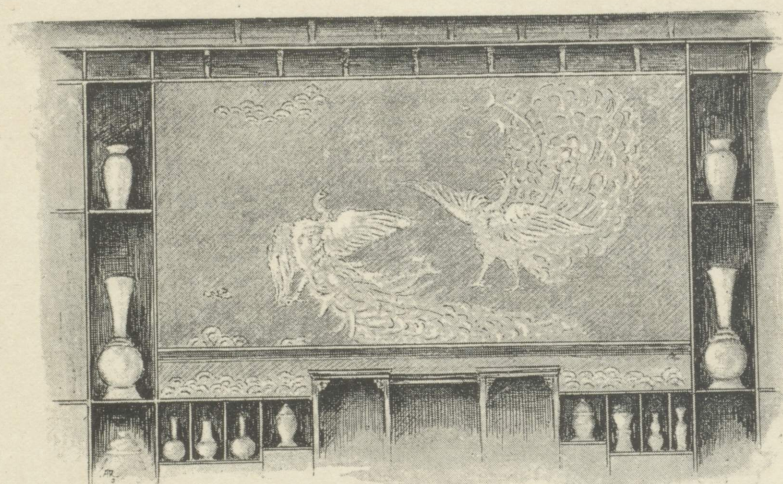
Taking the cue from the professional humourists, outsiders pictured Mr. Wilde as the incarnation, merely, of all the affectations that æstheticism was heir to, and metaphorically as attitudinising with a sunflower in his buttonhole, a lily in his hand, and a peacock's feather in his cap. This, the popular estimate of him, stood out sufficiently in relief to throw all else into shadow. Yet his academic distinctions were of no small account. He could write poetry that was worth the reading, and could lecture sufficiently well to attract large audiences, both in England and America. Since those days he has shown himself a more than capable dramatist.

Mr. Wilde laid himself out to play a certain rôle, and when he attitudinised he did it sufficiently well to make it pay, and to induce the world to take him seriously. When he was interviewed by newspaper correspondents his remarks made what is professionally known as "good copy," because he usually said something that startled a serious world by its audacity. When, after crossing the Atlantic, he responded to an inquiry on the subject by expressing his disappointment with the "mighty ocean," persons of a superior type, who expect poetic rhapsodies on such an occasion, in accordance with precedent, were naturally shocked.

He set conventionality at defiance in other respects, and in his lectures expressed some revolutionary sentiments with reference to modern costume, from an art point of view. He had a good word to say for knee-breeches and silk stockings, but spoke disrespectfully of coats and trousers, and more in sorrow than in anger of the chimney-pot hat, which he did not regard as "the thing of beauty" referred to by the poet as "a joy for ever." He even had the hardihood to insinuate that the



A Panel in the "Peacock Room."



The Fireplace in the "Peacock Room."

nineteenth-century Englishman in his "Sunday best" was not, from a spectacular point of view, comparable to the ancient Greek in his temple get-up. As neither the fashionable tailors nor Mrs. Grundy could endorse anything so heterodox, it need hardly be said that he made but few converts to his views on costume, and we go on "just in the old sweet way" in the matter of outward apparel. The freedom with which he enunciated extreme opinions, such as these, induced the polite world, or, as we prefer to term them nowadays, the "smart people," who are always on the look-out for something piquant, to flock to his lectures in order to listen to the next dreadful thing he would say; and this must have been very much in consonance with Mr. Wilde's expectations and desires.

Mr. Wilde had to thank others, as well as himself, for much of the success attending his impersonation of the typical æsthete, and to no one was he more indebted than to the professional humourist, literary, pictorial and dramatic. When the delineator of "society manners," the apostle of "good form," Mr. Du Maurier, took æstheticism in hand, its claim to fashionable consideration was conclusively established. But, whilst the graphic portrayals, week after week, in *Punch*, of the vagaries of the Maudles, the Postlethwaites, and the Cimabue Browns, largely helped to keep æstheticism in the front, as a social topic, it at the same time did much towards laughing out of existence its besetting weaknesses.

If the æsthetes were not themselves witty, they were undoubtedly the cause of wit in others, and this is particularly true of the satire which the stage brought to bear upon them. Mr. Burnand's clever adaptation, under the title of *The Colonel*, depicted, with admirable humour, the discomforts of a home given over to ultra-æstheticism; whilst any cult that provoked so sparkling and melodious a piece of merriment as Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* would be entitled, on this ground alone, to kindly remembrance.

The pictorial and stage satirists so cleverly hit off the characteristics with which the world credited the advanced æsthete, that it is hardly surprising that many theatre-goers and readers of comic papers, representing a large section of the general public, who were not brought into direct contact with æstheticism itself, accepted these creations as portraiture from the life, and went about imagining that all æsthetes were alike, and talked and acted similarly to the Bunthornes, the Streykes,

the Cimabue Browns, *et hoc genus omne*. The satires themselves had a distinct value in indicating, with the necessary exaggeration, what æstheticism might lead to if pushed to an extreme, and this tended to arrest the further development of its objectionable side.

Those who had taken up æstheticism either as a means of self-advertisement, or for a passing whim, in due course succumbed to the thwacks and thrusts of the stage and press combined. So æstheticism fell into disrepute, so far as society was concerned. As a fashion it had lasted longer than it had any right to expect, for it had endured the strain and wear-and-tear of several London seasons. When the time came for it to receive its *congé* it had lost the freshness of youth, and so it was laid upon the shelf reserved for society pets that have passed into the sere and yellow leaf. Here it has the companionship of such shorter-lived favourites of fashion as the professional beauty and the American cowboy, who, having had their little day, have been "moved on."

Mr. Oscar Wilde was in possession of the stage at the fall of the curtain, when æstheticism was said to be "played out." But the fact of society dropping it did not drive it out of existence, but merely out of fashion. When society frowned upon the professional beauty she straightway disappeared, but beauties did not die out on that account. Æstheticism, in the sense in which it was understood by those who, in all honesty and sincerity, sought to cultivate a knowledge and love of the beautiful, irrespective of anything else, still lives. Its best features remain to us while the weaker have gone to the wall, so once more the fittest survives. The young men who grew their hair long and posed before the world as superior beings—who were, as Mr. Sidney Grundy would put it, "not only as good as they *were*, but as good as they *ought* to be," in everything pertaining to art—could well be spared. They were an incident, and not a necessity of the case. But we need not, therefore, generalise so far as to classify every æsthete as a prig, any more than it is fair to set down every Conservative as an obstructionist, every Liberal as a socialist, or every disbeliever in the Thirty-nine Articles as an atheist.

The Great Exhibition of 1851, the wisely-directed efforts of the late Prince Consort, the writings of Mr. Ruskin, and especially the work carried on at South Kensington, have all had a share in the education of the art tastes of the community. But a concerted movement, systematically directed to a certain end, was required to focus public attention and to create an interest in art among those who were neither professional artists nor wealthy patrons. Art has been brought into more immediate contact with everyday life and everyday people, and whether æstheticism be fashionable or unfashionable matters not now.

The days when an unquestioning acquiescence in traditional methods was considered as evidence of a well-regulated mind, and an inquiring spirit as proof of the contrary, are, happily, passing away. If the hue-and-cry raised against the Pre-Raphaelites, when they warred against conventionalism, had been too much for them, or if their successors had been laughed out of court when they first said



Mr. Oscar Wilde.

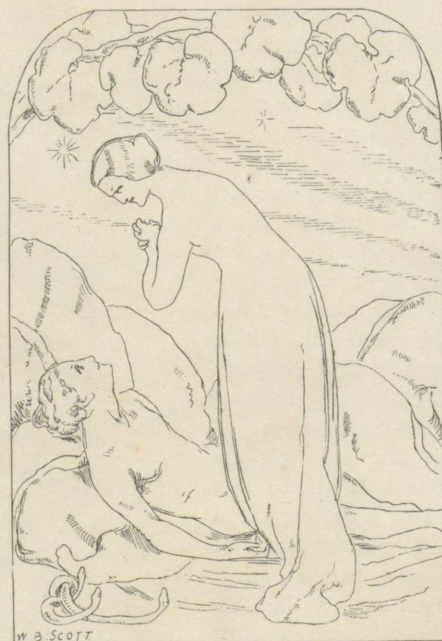
our household taste needed reformation, the loss would have far out-balanced the gain. The æsthetes themselves erred in setting up a too strictly defined standard of taste, and in stigmatising as "bad art" that which did not exactly conform to it.

The drawing of hard-and-fast lines must ultimately fail, for we are forced, in the long run, to recognise the truth of the old saying that "circumstances alter cases." Some allowance must be made for surroundings and associations. We think the Japanese costume artistic and becoming, and we condemn the recently-developed taste of the natives for arraying themselves in the garments of European civilisation. Much, however, as we may admire the flowing draperies of old Japan as worn in the streets of Yokohama, we should hardly consider them equally effective if displayed in Oxford Street upon the person, and with the carriage, of a true-born Britisher.

We must think for ourselves in Art, as in all else, if we are to derive any real satisfaction from it. He who, regardless of expense, hands over the decorating and furnishing of his house to an art firm to do as seemeth best to it, may get all the taste which he pays for, but he is little better than he who buys books by the yard to cover the walls of what he is pleased to call his library.

If we buy beauty at other folks' bidding, and are content with their warranty as to genuineness, or if we pin our faith upon a trade-mark, in lieu of bringing our own perceptions into play, there will be little joy in the transaction. We must work out our own salvation; and, although the evolutionary process may be slow and tedious, it will be sure and enduring. At the worst we may say of its result, "A poor thing, but mine own."

THOMAS F. PLOWMAN.



A Drawing by W. Bell Scott. From "The Germ."

