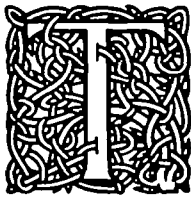


ART EXHIBITIONS AND ART CATALOGUES.



THE book-catalogue and the picture-catalogue stand, manifestly, on a different footing. Broadly speaking, the former is required only for reference; the latter, for description and explanation. The former is hardly needed when the student has before him the books it catalogues; the latter is mainly consulted in front of the pictures (let us say) recorded in its pages. It is useless to carry further the analogy or the contrast of idea in the compilation of the two; but I would draw attention to the fact that the guide-lists to the majority of the most important exhibitions of the day are ridiculously inadequate and unpardonably dry.

There are exceptions, I know—I am coming to them presently. But everyone will admit that in a great proportion of cases the picture-catalogue consists merely in a bald list of titles. For example, I come across a picture representing a stream, signed (or executed, obviously) by Mr. Jones, R.A. I look at my catalogue and find, of course, “No. 22. The Stream. Henry Jones, R.A.” Or else, in place of title, we have a couplet or a verse from one of the poets, which has been so artlessly fitted to the picture that no one could deceive himself with the idea that the painting was wrought as an illustration of the poem. Or, in a third picture, I see a group of peasants walking wearily along a country road, as the setting sun touches the profile of their backs with an edge of gold, and casts a blue-black gloom into the shadow of the trees yonder, in the middle distance. It is one of our friend Lyndon’s most popular and most frequently-repeated effects. “‘Homewards,’ I suppose,” I mutter. I consult the catalogue and find it

is "Homewards"—by Walter Lyndon. *Et puis après?* I throw away the catalogue as I would a furniture sale-list—as a thing of no importance, artistic or literary, unworthy of preservation; and reflect on the opportunity that has been lost to the artist, and to the gallery too, maybe, in the wanton sacrifice of the utility or charm that might have made an appeal to every intelligent visitor.

The majority of picture exhibitions, no doubt, deserve no better fate, and the record of titles is as much as can reasonably be conceded to the demands of history. Moreover, in the case of the summer exhibitions at the Royal Academy, the Paris Salons, and similar displays of contemporary effort, description or other kind of information would clearly be out of the reckoning; and those who care to know anything about the personality of the people who have sat for their portraits—about the scenes dramatically depicted—about the countryside so charmingly rendered—must fall back upon the good pleasure and the knowledge of the newspaper critics. The Academy and the Salons have their own special methods for excluding information from their pages; but in the circumstances, perhaps, no other course is open to them. And as the Academy is naturally accepted by Bond Street as the *arbiter elegantiarum* in such matters, Bond Street catalogues equally are models of reserve. One gallery, indeed, might be named as an honourable exception, through its systematic introduction of prefaces contributed by well-known writers; but here literary enterprise begins and ends. Not that catalogues really need the aid of literary flavour; but if they are to serve their purpose completely, they should contain such information—biographical, descriptive, cyclopædic—as should transform the useless subject-list into a pamphlet of sufficient intrinsic value to secure its preservation in the art library, public and private. Perhaps it is this melancholy barrenness which has discouraged even the Art Library at South Kensington from making a complete collection of the catalogues of our chief annual

exhibitions—although it is the library of all others in which the art-student and art-historian might hope to find them. The Science and Art Department, doubtless, sees no advantage in collecting pamphlets in which a pool of text stagnates in a desert of margin—thinking, maybe, that no one could possibly wish to consult compilations containing nothing but mortuary lists of dead and gone collections.

But when we come to displays of real and permanent value, and of absorbing interest, the matter is entirely different. When great historical exhibitions of works by acknowledged masters are brought together, and the galleries in which they hang are regarded as shrines, as it were, to which the faithful must direct their art-pilgrimage, it becomes a duty on the part of the persons responsible for them that the catalogues should be at once a list, a record, and a treatise. This duty was well recognized by the conductors of the Grosvenor Gallery when, fifteen years ago, they began that fine series of collections of the works of Reynolds, Gainsborough, Vandyck, Millais, and the rest, which stamped their enterprise with the hallmark of excellence, and established an irresistible claim on the grateful recollection of all lovers and students of art. The catalogues compiled by Mr. F. G. Stephens have become classic in their way, and, though they may be disfigured here and there by blemishes rendered inevitable through unavoidable haste, they are to this day regarded as works not to be overlooked by anyone interested in the subject. Ownership, authorship, anecdote, biography, connoisseurship, criticism—all the facts, in short, proper to art-history—are to be found included in this delightful series, the perusal of which enhanced the pleasure of the visitor while it supplied a record of abiding interest to the general reader and of considerable value to the scholar. Similarly, the Burlington Fine Arts Club has petrified, as it were, the glory of a succession of noble shows, and has illustrated limited editions of its catalogues so sumptuously

that the very name of "catalogue" seems to assume a new significance and importance when applied to them. Again, in "A Century of Artists" (1889) Mr. W. E. Henley produced a catalogue of the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888, in which etching, sketch, and comment were so united, that the splendid volume is treasured for other reasons than its lists; while his "Memorial Catalogue of the French and Dutch Loan Collection, Edinburgh International Exhibition, 1886" (1888) is valued for beauties other than its fine typography and brilliant illustration, even for excellences other than its art criticism.

But we may go further than this in our examples, especially in respect of the great permanent galleries. When the century was young it had long been recognized that any splendid collection which was worth the bringing together, and worth the while of visitors to journey long distances to see, was equally worth recording in text and illustration. The great private galleries were thus, in a sense, made available to the public, and few are the art libraries which do not even now contain John Young's publications of the Stafford Gallery, the Angerstein Collection, the Grosvenor House Collection, the Leicester Gallery, the Royal Gallery, and so on, soon to be followed by profusely illustrated catalogues, with generous text and notes, of such national galleries as those of London, Dresden, Berlin, Vienna, and Munich. France had also done her share, and done it exquisitely well, embarking on great enterprises in perfect confidence which the result amply justified. But not one of these publications approached in *completeness* the wonderful undertaking now on the point of publication, concerning which the secret has hitherto been well kept—the Catalogue of the National Gallery, in which *every picture without exception* is illustrated. The text has been supplied by Sir Edward Poynter, the director of the gallery, and, although the work does not aim at pleasing the general reader in the picturesque sense that Mr. E. T. Cook's

catalogue makes appeal to his love of poetry and anecdote, it is a pattern of what I hold that catalogues ought to be. Nothing on this scale has ever before been attempted; and in the interests of the public it is to be hoped that popular appreciation will justify the effort.

Seeing, then, that the importance of a satisfactory catalogue in connection with all fine exhibitions and collections is recognized as indispensable, we may well wonder at the supineness of the Royal Academy and other similar bodies, to whom the credit of the exhibitions themselves is due. We have quite lately seen five collections of extreme importance: the Rembrandt Exhibition at Amsterdam; that at the Royal Academy; the Velasquez Exhibition at Madrid; the Vandyck Exhibition at Antwerp; and the Cranach Exhibition at Dresden—and there is not a single catalogue among them of which the Grosvenor Gallery would not have been ashamed. The object, it almost seems, has been to see how much useful and interesting information could be withheld—by how much the educational and æsthetic value of the collection might be reduced. This is the more surprising as the Academy is known to derive nearly a third of its great income from the sale of its catalogues alone, and it might be thought that a compilation in which thoroughness was the aim, and an aim well accomplished, would insure a sale that would continue long beyond the brief limit of time set by the continuance of the exhibition. That, however, is a matter which concerns the Academy alone. But the public has a right to express its mind in its own interest, and to prefer a request to the Academy for a handbook to its Winter Exhibitions of Old Masters more useful and more worthy than those with which it is itself satisfied.

The coming season offers the desired opportunity. We are to have a Vandyck exhibition of our own very soon, which is, we all believe, to surpass the Antwerp display alike in numbers and brilliancy. The occasion seems to demand some reconsideration of the catalogue-scheme of tradition,

and appears to justify the Academy in inaugurating an era in which the literature of the collection might bear some sort of relation, in point of interest, to the pictures themselves. It is not only on behalf of the visitors to the gallery that this advantage may be claimed, but rather in the name of that greater public who for various reasons cannot visit the exhibition, and who, in the near future, may desire to possess themselves of a record of the display and of all which that display may signify. As a contribution to the literature of Vandyck, relatively meagre as it is, such a work, if committed to competent hands, would assuredly secure the respect (as well as the subscriptions) of the public.

M. H. SPIELMANN.

THE LIBRARIES OF GREATER BRITAIN.



It is our purpose to keep our readers informed on the condition and progress of libraries throughout Greater Britain, and we shall endeavour each quarter to record all that is new and interesting under this head. We think we cannot do better than begin this series of articles by a general sketch of the present position of the libraries of our principal Colonies.

AUSTRALASIA.

Although by no means the oldest, the Australasian Colonies have taken the lead in recognizing the literary necessities of their people, with the result that in almost every town worthy of the name a library is to be found either wholly or partially supported by state funds, varying from a few pounds to several hundreds, in addition to which there are numerous societies and institutions of a high