

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE GUIDANCE.

The Dominion Art Gallery, so far as present purposes are concerned, can be viewed and dealt with conveniently from two standpoints—the ancient and the modern.

As regards the ancient, it would take an enormous amount of money to get together a representative collection of the works of different schools, and the funds available in a young country like this could be better employed. Moreover, the prices asked and obtained for old masters are oftentimes far in excess of their artistic value. There should be no attempt, therefore, to secure the purchase of old masters, unless the prices at which they are offered justify their purchase and the works possess true artistic value, and not merely an antiquarian one. Money, however, would be well spent in obtaining casts and replicas of sculptures, coins, and ancient craftwork, and copies of the many excellent prints in colour and otherwise which can now be obtained of paintings by such old masters as have influenced modern art or are landmarks in the history of art. Money can also be well expended in obtaining copies of a few paintings by such men as Titian, Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, Holbein, Franz Hals, and Velasquez, who have specially influenced art, provided such copies are executed by reliable artists who have followed faithfully the technique of the master, otherwise the fac-simile reproductions in colour published by the Arundel Society would be more desirable.

Should the Government at any time decide to offer to rising New Zealand artists a travelling scholarship, as is done by the trustees of the National Gallery in Melbourne, a condition might similarly be made that the winner should within the term of his scholarship paint for the Dominion Art Gallery one original picture and two copies of works by old masters. All honour lies in store for some person or persons of wealth who will do here as others have done elsewhere. The sum of £5,000 or £6,000 would provide an annual income which would permit of a scholarship being awarded, and would be a lasting monument of philanthropy and good citizenship.

While copies only of the great masterpieces which have commanded the reverence and admiration of mankind, and satisfied the yearnings of the human mind for perfection in form and colour, are within our reach, yet in the progress of time it will be possible to gather a collection of works of great merit which should carry their message to a people who have already, in a humble way, made some advance in the fine arts.

We have but one genuine canvas by an unknown old master, probably of the Venetian school; a few copies of the early works; and nearly seven hundred undoubtedly genuine drawings, etchings, and engravings by sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century masters.

The art of ancient Greece is represented in the collection of coins, the artistic value of which is that they reflect the incessant activity of the Greek imagination. Civic pride induced great rivalry, and in the abundance of coins which poured from the mints artistic effort was stimulated to the highest limits. No objects of Greek art better illustrate the diffusion of ancient Greek genius than their coins. The efforts of the artists and potters of Egypt and Greece are represented in the Museum collections by the objects from the royal tombs at Abydos, and in the *lekkythoi* from the Temple of Minerva in the Island of Naxia; also in the fac-simile by Wedgwood of the famous Barberini vase, or, as Erasmus Darwin has termed it, "Portland's mystic urn," the original of which is supposed to have been manufactured in the glassworks of Alexandria at their best period, and is now in the British Museum.

With regard to modern art the world is becoming sufficiently cosmopolitan to obviate the necessity of dividing works into different national schools. British and American artists exhibit on the Continent, and Continental artists in Britain and America; it is often difficult to tell the nationality of the artist by the work of the present day. The object to be borne in view, therefore, should be—

- (1.) To acquire works of real artistic merit, apart from any question as to the renown of the artist who executed them, a question which too often enters into the selection of works of art;
- (2.) To obtain a good example of every school and phase of modern art;
- (3.) To obtain, if possible, an early and a mature example of the work of every modern artist whose influence has been or is being felt in the artistic world; and
- (4.) To acquire a representative example of the work of every New Zealand artist who has painted consistently up to a certain standard, and whose work has therefore had an influence upon the rising New Zealand artist.

As regards the last section, in the above collections there are examples of some of the New Zealand painters of note, but there are still many whose works have not yet been acquired. The Dominion Art Gallery, with its assured permanency of establishment, should endeavour to secure the best of the early as well as the mature work of the artists of each generation. In course of time it would be found by the generations to come that a valuable collection had been formed with comparative ease and at moderate cost as compared with the difficulties and expenditure which have to be faced by many institutions of the present time. For instance, let us consider the enormous sums paid for etchings by Rembrandt, whose work is to be seen in the fifty-four examples in our collections. Willshire, in his work "The Collection of Early Prints," states, "In the early part of last century £30 was paid for a good impression of the 'Hundred Guilder' print. At Verstak's sale in Holland in 1847 this price was quadrupled, and shortly afterwards rose to £200. In 1867 the print was sold for £1,180." At the Holford sale in 1893 a 'first state' of this same 'Hundred Guilder' print realized £1,750, while another 'first state' print by the great master was sold for £2,000.

We must not, however, be led into the error of thinking that a museum or art gallery is to be organized and stocked by outlay of money for works of art, and thrown open to the public as a finished and furnished establishment. Art is long; and its history, which the Dominion Art Gallery is intended to teach, is as long. It begins and ends with the history of the race.