

**HOW TO JUDGE OF A
PICTURE: FAMILIAR TALKS
IN THE GALLERY WITH
UNCRITICAL LOVERS OF ART**

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How to Judge of a Picture: Familiar Talks in the Gallery with Uncritical Lovers of Art by John C. Van Dyke

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JOHN C. VAN DYKE

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HOW TO JUDGE OF A PICTURE

FAMILIAR TALKS IN THE GALLERY
WITH UNCRITICAL LOVERS OF ART

BY

JOHN C. VAN DYKE

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THEM," ETC.



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PREFACE.

THE nature of this little book may be told in a few sentences. It had its origin in an incidental way. At the exhibition of the oft-referred-to Morgan Collection I was unexpectedly called upon to play the pedagogue to two young people who wanted to know what there was in "those homely peasant faces of Millet" that people liked so much, and why the landscapes of Corot were considered such very superior art when they were "not half finished." Pleased by their request, and thinking that perhaps I had at last a genuine mission to fulfill, I proceeded to explain as best I could the difference between pictures good and pictures bad, and how and in what spirit all pictures should be looked at. The task was no easy one, and how it was performed remains

for the reader of these pages to decide. Suffice it to say that the talk was exhaustive, and possibly exhausting to all parties; no sooner was one painter disposed of than another was inquired about; and when all had run the critical gauntlet the galleries were deserted, it was quite dark, and the pedagogue was conscious of having told all he knew—and that, too, in a manner calculated to impress his hearers with the belief that the cup of knowledge had been drained to the dregs and there was no more to know. Since that evening I have written out as much of the "talk" as I could recall, and with many additions have made up these pages.

I am quite positive of making no misstatement in saying that the young people referred to are representative of a very large class of intelligent Americans. Of those who visit the galleries during the art season not one in ten is able to tell a good picture from a bad one. They neither know how nor what to look at nor have they any standard of

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judgment except that of their own individual fancy, which is oftener wrong than right. To prove the prevailing ignorance of painting among our (in other respects) educated people one has only to listen to the comments of visitors in a picture gallery, or to examine the pictures at our annual exhibitions which are early favored by having the card "Sold" placed in the frame. Even those who know their Véron, their Lötze, and their Ruskin—those familiar with every history and theory of the fine arts—are often no judges of the paintings themselves. Neither books nor theories nor lectures make the eye of the connoisseur. Studying the canvas—not one, but thousands of them—can alone give practical knowledge, accurate judgment, and good taste.

This may be applied even against this little volume. It is not designed as a complete guide to the fine arts, nor as a short cut to knowledge, and is put forth in all modesty of spirit however dictatorial or positive its lan-

guage may seem. Its main endeavor is to point out some general rules of art which may be practically applied in the gallery. That it has shortcomings cannot be denied, and that the subject itself is full of inconsistencies and hard to deal with is partially evidenced by the fact that no one has heretofore had the hardihood to attempt it.

It may be that these pages will be a hint or a suggestion to those better able to handle the theme than I am; and surely in a country like America, where so little is known of art among the masses, there should be a place for such literature as this.

JOHN C. VAN DYKE.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

COLOR AND HARMONY.

Technical skill—Its importance in art—To be studied first. Leading features of painting, form and color—Color attracts first notice—The natural taste for high colors—The crudeness of the taste—Generally bad in painting, and why. Colorists and color—High color used by young artists—Low colors and half-tints—Examples in pictures. Good taste to be followed by choosing low-keyed pictures—Exceptions—Color in landscape, marines, still-life, and figure compositions. Rich and deep colors next to be preferred, and why—High colors and their use. Harmony—Color theories—Colors, warm and cold—No positive law of color—Practical knowledge of harmony, how acquired—Sobriety in art..... Page 15

CHAPTER II.

TONE AND GRADATION.

Meaning often misunderstood—Definition—How recognized—Analogous to pitch or key in music. Simple tone and