

THE BOOKMAN'S TABLE

THE ARTIST'S WAY OF WORKING. By Russell Sturgis, A.M., Ph.D. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company. 1905. \$15.00 net.

A Study of the Artist's Way of Working in the Various Handicrafts and Arts of Design, is the full title of these two handsome volumes, printed on enamelled paper, and profusely illustrated, which Mr. Sturgis has prepared for an interested and curious public. In the preface the author thus speaks of his purpose: "It is an explanatory book which is here offered to the reader. It is not a history of art in any sense; it is a treatise on the ways in which the artist conceptions are formed and take visible shape."

In this age of increasing wealth, when amateurs in the fine arts are cropping up everywhere, a book of this character should certainly be welcomed. Garnered here will be found the result of a lifetime's love and study of the various mediums in which the fine arts take expression. Of the very numerous subjects treated in the book, Mr. Sturgis shows the pleasure of the connoisseur in the fitness of the material to the end in view, and touches a wide range of substances that have been impressed into the service of beauty and art. He carefully draws the line when instances occur where mechanical contrivances have done the work which might be regarded by the uninitiated as possessing an element of art, showing where industry and a mechanical skill only had produced the object, and giving the reasons for its differentiation from direct art-inspired work. To find these distinctions clearly stated will be a source of pleasure to the amateur; and this work will be useful in the measure that these differences are well founded and not too finely drawn. It is on this side that the reader will find the book highly suggestive; to the mind alert to objects of beauty in the multiplicity of natural products which yield themselves to forms of art, there is still a controlling genius which says, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther." It is this kind of mentor which books of this character tend to develop; and to find so much information concerning the ways and methods of different crafts, and the uses of materials, natural and those of composition, given between the covers of two volumes only, when ordinarily it would require the delving into innumerable special treatises, is a distinct ad-

vantage to the curious and inquiring student or reader.

Apropos of this, the work has a more intimate value, indeed, than that suggested by the above, for, to quote again the writer's preface: "There are no authorities which can be cited as having aided the author in preparing the present work, which is in no sense a compilation. The author's only authorities are the pieces themselves. No statement is made concerning the character of the certain or probable method of production of any work of art without the immediate consideration of a characteristic specimen of that art. There is no mention of ceramic painting except as made in the presence of valuable pieces, showing all the characteristics of the best decoration; and in like manner, no mention of a piece of carving that was not held in the hand at the moment of composing the passage; no word about the essential nature of expressional sculpture except after close consideration of the full statement made by the sculpture itself, of its own nature and origin.

"The undertaking of such work implies, therefore, a lifetime of familiarity with fine art in nearly all its forms, and in nearly all the stages of intellectual development; and in most cases a knowledge also of the processes employed, a familiarity in watching the work going on, if not in practising it. Such experience comes more easily to an architect engaged in decorative work than to most other persons; but a lifelong habit of making notes, mental or other, has something to do with developing power of observation and a retentive memory of such things."

One's interest, then, in many of the natural products of the world, and those which the ingenuity of man has created for his use and convenience, is stimulated by reading this personal description of the variety of beauty that man's genius has impressed upon them. It is delightful, for instance, to follow the making of various forms of pottery in Chapter VIII., on Ceramic Art.

Doubtless the author has his preferences in the crafts, and from the sympathetic way in which he writes upon pottery, from its earliest discovered examples to the latest specimens of French Faience, this is one of the painted plastic arts that particularly appeals to him; but when this is said, we are reminded that

enamelling on glass and metal, surface enamels, cloisonné enamels and coloured glass for windows are topics on which he speaks with unction in his chapter on The Vitreous Art.

The subjects are multitudinous, indeed, which Mr. Sturgis treats, and it seems invidious almost to claim a superiority of handling of one over the other—to name even the titles would lead us beyond the limits of our space.

Such a presentation of the ways and methods of the different arts and crafts cannot but stimulate an interest in, and an appreciation of, those objects that are so often met with in the decoration and furnishing of the sumptuous homes of the present. In this way one has frequent opportunity to study many of these art productions, to note supe-

rior or inferior specimens, and to see for himself how different materials lend themselves to the artists' thought, and yield more or less facilely to artistic manipulation. How some, more readily than others, encourage that fluency of workmanship which tends to create beauty without too great an interference of the medium of expression. And it may be possible to deduce from this fact that the greatest of arts is practised through mediums least recalcitrant, those which interpose least resistance between the artist's thought and his immediate, spontaneous and vehement expression of it; and which still will permit and admit of the greatest deliberation in handling, namely, clay and pigment—Sculpture and Painting.

Frank Fowler.