

CLARENCE H. WHITE—AN APPRECIATION.

Mr. John W. Beatty, Director of the Art Department of the Carnegie Institute at Pittsburg, who has shown much interest in the development of pictorial photography, has written for us this appreciation of the work of Mr. White.—EDITORS.

IT IS often difficult to define the quality in a work of art that raises it above the commonplace and makes it notable. It is manifestly not a particular technical method, because various and often radically opposite technical qualities are represented in works conceded to be masterpieces of art. Often it is color. More frequently it is form or construction, one of the dominant qualities in plastic as well as pictorial art.

I remember asking an eminent Scotch portrait-painter, since then raised to an exalted position by his fellow-artists, what he considered the supreme quality in portraiture. He promptly answered, "distinction." Distinction as represented by the poise or action of the figure expressed primarily by line and, secondarily, by a skilful arrangement of light and shade. That the quality which lends distinction to a work of art is inherent in nature goes without saying. If it were not of nature it would not be repeated in art—"a stream never rises above its source." To discover and, having discovered, to seize the attitude or action that is distinguished, noble, or expressive of charming grace has always been the achievement of a master-mind. The power to do this seems to be intuitive. It is a rare endowment bestowed upon few. It was possessed by Van Dyck; it belongs to Sargent. It was to a remarkable degree the heritage of Velasquez and of Memling. The technical methods of these painters differ widely, but there is one quality common to all their works, namely, distinction. Given the impress of this quality, any work, no matter whether it be statue, painting, drawing, or photograph, is raised above the dead level of mediocrity, and by virtue of this quality alone takes rank as a work of art. It seems to me in examining a group of Mr. White's pictures representing many subjects that they possess much of this quality. This at least seems to be the dominant note. To secure this quality he must, doubtless intuitively, see the distinguishing quality of grace or dignity in nature; and, having seen, he seizes it quickly and with precision.

Theodore Child once wrote: "The only model and the only standard is nature, and the whole theory and practice of painting is subordinated to the largest and the most difficult of all arts, namely, learning to see." To see is all important. To chisel, to paint, to carve, to develop and manipulate plates: these things are important, but first must be exercised the power to discover. And with respect to seeing, the painter and the photographer are on a level. Keen judgment touching the essential qualities, grace, dignity, and distinction may be possessed in common by the man with the camera and the man with the palette.

If the premise be admitted, the conclusion is inevitable. Given the power to apprehend that in nature which is distinguished or beautiful, and if to this be added the ability to eliminate the trivial and unimportant, there