

Lady Alma-Tadema's Pictures

fulness and richness, an extraordinary sense of the sumptuous colour of life, seemed to come to the tender lady who was about to quit it. That exquisite little picture called *The Dance*, with the slim pink-robed lady bowing to her cavalier as she waves aloft a scarlet feather, might in its pure joyousness have emanated from Watteau. Not that Lady Alma-Tadema was at any time influenced by the French school. Married when little more than a girl to a famous painter of Dutch birth, it was perhaps natural that she should have turned to the Low Countries for her inspiration. Yet her manual dexterity was clearly learnt at home. It was in the Regent's Park, at Townsend House, under the loving eye of a master famed for his draughtsmanship, that the beginner first found her

feet and began to paint her two little step-daughters, Laurence and Anna. These ladies figure in so many of Lady Alma-Tadema's initial attempts that the mention of their identity is perhaps a pardonable indiscretion. In *Grannie's Needle*, however, we detect a fresh model, and one who seems to have proved so satisfactory that she appears to have posed for the quaint little lady in the work called, *Put in the Corner*, and other themes. Another comparatively early composition is that entitled *Grace*, where a Dutch mother and child, the former bending over a table spread with white napery and silver, calls down a blessing on the mid-day meal.

These tentative works are by no means without their interest to the student. In them we see

a beginner's anxious endeavours to gain command of her tools. The pattern of the picture is carefully considered. The drawing is minute and painstaking. But the handling, a fault found in nearly all conscientious young students, is seen to be tight and formal. But little by little, we perceive the real artist emerging from her novitiate. The small moonlight sketch of the old Coliseum in Regent's Park has already a hint of the breadth to come in her later painting.

In the recent exhibition at the Fine Art Society's Rooms in New Bond Street few things were more interesting to Lady Tadema's admirers than the sketches there seen for the first time. Almost exclusively painted in oil, they not only showed the artist at work grappling with things at first hand, and face to face with nature, but marked, in a significant way, the progress in each succeeding essay. The lady's life,



"THE NEW BOOK"

BY LAURA T. ALMA-TADEMA

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