

PICTURE STUDY.

We have received a question in connection with the paper read by Miss J. Williams at University College, London, and published in the April number of the *Parents' Review*.

"Is it necessary for the Picture Talk lesson to be taken by an art specialist, or can it be taken by a parent or teacher who has had no special art training?"

We cannot too often repeat that in Forms I. to IV. of the P.U.S., "Picture Study" does not come under the study of art; it does not need the help of an art specialist any more than making the acquaintance of birds and flowers in a neighbourhood needs a science specialist. Such relationships are better established by those who love nature, birds, flowers, pictures, for their own sakes alone and not for any laws of nature or art which they can be made to teach.

The following quotation from Miss Mason's *An Essay towards a Philosophy of Education* will reassure parents and teachers, and encourage them to continue the Picture Study lessons themselves.

"There must be knowledge and, in the first place, not the technical knowledge of how to produce, but some reverent knowledge of what has been produced; that is, children should learn pictures, line by line, group by group, by reading, not books, but pictures themselves. A friendly picture-dealer supplies us with half-a-dozen beautiful little reproductions of the work of some single artist, term by term. After a short story of the artist's life and a few sympathetic words about his trees or his skies, his river-paths or his figures, the little pictures are studied one at a time; that is, children learn, not merely to see a picture but to look at it, taking in every detail. Then the picture is turned over and the children tell what they have seen—a dog driving a flock of sheep along a road, but nobody with the dog. Ah, there is a boy lying down by the stream drinking. It is morning as you can see by the light, so the sheep are being driven to pasture, and so on; nothing is left out, the discarded plough, the crooked birch, the clouds beautiful in form and threatening rain, there is enough for half an hour's talk and memory in this little reproduction of a great picture and the children will know it wherever they see it, whether a signed proof, a copy in oils, or the original itself in one of our galleries. We hear of a small boy with his parents in the National Gallery; the boy, who

[p 419]

had wandered off on his own account, came running back with the news: 'Oh, Mummy, there's one of our Constables on that wall.' In this way children become acquainted with a hundred, or hundreds, of great artists during their school-life, and it is an intimacy which never forsakes them. . . . It will be noticed that the work done on these pictures is done by the children themselves. There is no talk about schools of painting, little about style; consideration of these matters comes in later life, but the first and most important thing is to know the pictures themselves. As in a worthy book we leave the author to tell his own tale, so do we trust a picture to tell its tale through the medium the artist gave it. In the region of art as elsewhere we shut out the middleman."