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THE ROYAL ACADEMY

IV.

THERE is much to admire in Mr. Elmore's illustration of Bürger's poem of "Lenore." Indeed, Mr. Elmore [has long been recognised as one of the most accomplished members of the academic body; his works have been invariably characterised by sound drawing, forcible colour, and adroit composition. Still Bürger's poem, although freely translated by Sir Walter Scott, and, in later years, more faithfully if less poetically rendered by Mr. Albert Smith, has obtained no favour in this country commensurate with the extraordinary fame it has always enjoyed in the land of its birth. Ballads thrive best in their native soil, and the supernatural element is much bound by conditions of nationality. Moreover the legend of "Lenore" is of too phantomatic a character to lend itself very readily to pictorial uses. Its weird vagueness appealing strongly to the imagination loses something of its effect when endeavour is made to record on canvas and to endow with distinct form and palpability such frenzied figures and "false creations" of a "heat-oppressed brain." Yet Mr. Elmore has fairly encountered difficulties which could hardly in any case be wholly surmounted. The horse splashes and dashes along the sea shore at midnight; stars gleam coldly on high, and grey clouds wreath themselves into horribly fantastic forms; birds of prey hover near in flocks; the air is thick with spectres. The spell-bound trooper clutches to his breast the doomed maiden, while syren-like forms with spectral eyes and alluring gestures attend upon his progress and float beside him upon the surface of the waters. An ashen-hued atmosphere and gleams here and there of phosphoric light give elfish and ghostly character to the scene. The picture is full of poetical suggestiveness, although this is not perhaps of a nature quite akin to the poetry of Bürger, for the art of the work may be said to be rather Italian than Teutonic. The drawing is fully of knowledge, and the general execution careful and complete. "Judith and Holofernes," by the same painter, is ingeniously designed and very rich in colour. The treatment is broad and masterly, and the effect of lamp-light in the interior of a tent is skilfully rendered. The subject dramatically conceived and its tragic quality thoroughly appreciated is yet a little too trite to rouse any great enthusiasm. "Judith" has been, perhaps, too often painted; her heroic story may be safely permitted a period of repose. Our artists would do well to compile for themselves a sort of Index Expurgatorius—the entries in which should be understood to relate to subjects prohibited for little other reason than that their frequent reproduction has unfitted them for further appearance in the studios—for some time to come at any rate. A third picture by Mr. Elmore is of unpretending character. It is called "After the Siesta : Algiers," and possesses notable artistic traits.