PUT UP A PICTURE IN YOUR ROOM.

BY LEIGH HUNT.

MAY we exhort such of our readers as have no pictures hanging in their rooms, to put one up immediately? We mean in their principal sitting-room—in all their rooms, if possible, but at all events in that one. No matter how costly, or the reverse, provided they *see something in it*, and it gives them a profitable or pleasant thought. Some may allege that they have "no taste for pictures;" but they have a taste for objects to be found in pictures—for trees, for landscapes, for human beauty, for scenes of life; or if not for all these, yet surely for some one of them; and it is highly useful for the human mind to give itself helps towards taking an interest in things apart from its immediate cares or desires. They serve to refresh us for their better conquest or endurance; to render sorrow unselfish; to remind us that we ourselves, or our own personal wishes, are not the only objects in the world; to instruct and elevate us, and put us in a fairer way of realizing the good opinions which we would all fain entertain of ourselves, and in some measure do; to make us compare notes with other individuals, and with nature at large, and correct our infirmities at their mirror by modesty and reflection—in short, even the admiration of a picture is a kind of religion or additional tie on our consciences, and *rebinding* of us (for such is the meaning of the word religion) to the greatness and goodness of nature.

Mr. Hazlitt has said somewhere, of the portrait of a beautiful female with a noble countenance, that it seems as if an unhandsome action would be impossible in its presence. It is not so much for restraint's sake as for the sake of diffusiveness of heart, or the going out of ourselves, that we would recommend pictures; but, among other advantages, this also, of reminding us of our duties, would doubtless be one; and if reminded with charity, the effect, though perhaps small in most instances, would still be something. We have read of a Catholic money-lender, who, when he was going to cheat a customer, always drew a veil over the portrait of his favorite Saint. Here was a favorite vice, far more influential than the favorite Saint; and yet we are of opinion that the money-lender was better for the Saint than he would have been without him. It left him faith in something; he was better for it in the intervals; he would have treated his daughter the better for it, or his servant, or his dog. There was a bit of heaven in his room—a sunbeam to shine into a corner of his heart—however he may have shut the window against it, when heaven was not to look on.

The companionship of anything greater or better than ourselves must do us good, unless we are destitute of all modesty or patience. And a picture is a companion, and the next thing to the presence of what it represents. We may live in the thick of a city, for instance, and can seldom go out, and "feed" ourselves

> With pleasure of the breathing fields;

but we can put up a picture of the fields before us, and, as we get used to it, we shall find it the next thing to seeing the fields at a distance. For every picture is a kind of window, which supplies us with a fine sight; and many a thick, unpierced wall thus lets us into the studies of the greatest men, and the most beautiful scenes of nature. By living with pictures we learn to "read" them—to see into every nook and corner of a landscape, and every feature of the mind; and it is impossible to be in the habit of these perusals, or even of being vaguely conscious of the presence of the good and beautiful, and considering them as belonging to us, or forming a part of our commonplaces, without being, at the very least, less subject to the disadvantages arising from having no such thoughts at all.

And it is so easy to square the picture to one's aspirations, or professions, or the powers of one's pocket—for, as to resolving to have no picture at all in one's room, unless we could have it costly, and finely painted, and finely framed, that would be a mistake so vulgar, that we trust no reader of any decent publication now-a-days could fall into it. The greatest knave or simpleton in England, provided he is rich, can procure one of the

finest paintings in the world to-morrow, and know nothing about it when he has got it; but to feel the beauties of a work of art, or to be capable of being led to feel them, is a gift which often falls to the lot of the poorest; and this is what Raphael or Titian desired in those who looked at their pictures. All the rest is taking the clothes for the man. Now it so happens that the cheapest engravings, though they cannot come up to the merits of the originals, often contain no mean portion or shadow of them; and when we speak of putting pictures up in a room, we use the word "picture" in the child's sense, meaning any kind of graphic representation, oil, water-color, copper-plate, drawing or wood-cut. And any one of these is worth putting up in your room, provided you have mind enough to get a pleasure from it. Even a frame is not necessary, if you cannot afford it. Better put up a rough, varnished engraving, than none at all; or pin or stick up any engraving whatsoever, at the hazard of its growing never so dirty. You will keep it as clean as you can, and for as long a time; and as for the rest, it is better to have a good memorandum before you, and get a fresh one when you are able, than to have none at all, or even to keep it clean in a portfolio. How should you like to keep your own heart in a portfolio, or lock your friend up in another room? We are no friends to portfolios except where they contain more prints than can be hung up. The more, in that case, the better.