

CRITICISM FOR THE UNINITIATED.

FIRST ARTICLE.

WE have just been spending a few hours for the first time among the pictures of the Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy, and spending them very agreeably. A good picture is inferior in value to only a good book; and in one important respect at least bad ones are better than inferior books, seeing one can determine their true character at scarce any expense of time. There are no second and third pages to turn after perusing the first; and if there be nothing to strike or nothing to please, this negative quality of the piece, as fatal surely to a picture as to a book, is discovered at a cost proportioned to its value. The connoisseur, like the critic, has his rules of art and his vocabulary; but though some eyes are doubtlessly more practised than others, and some judgments better informed, I do not deem the art itself of very difficult attainment. To please is the grand end of the painter; and he can attain his object in only two different ways,—by either a close imitation of the objects he represents, or by the choice of objects interesting in themselves. Now, it needs no art whatever to decide whether or no he has succeeded in the first and simpler department,—the faithful representation of what he intended to delineate. The birds that pecked at the grapes of the ancient painter,—the countryman who attempted to scale the painted flight of stairs,—the artist who stretched his hand to draw aside the well-simulated curtain which seemed to half-conceal the work of his rival,—all these were equally skilful judges. Even the decision of the birds themselves was such a decision as no connoisseur would have dared dispute; and many an in-