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Patric Stevenson

ÆSTHETICS.



# ÆSTHETICS.

BY

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TRANSLATED BY

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## INTRODUCTION.



No science has suffered more from metaphysical dreaming than that of Æsthetics. From the doctrines of Plato to those of our present official teachers, art has been turned into an amalgam of transcendental mysteries and fancies, finding their final expression in that absolute conception of ideal Beauty which is the unchangeable and divine prototype of the real things around us.

We have done our best to bring about a reaction against ontology so chimerical.

Art is nothing but a natural result of man's organization, which is of such a nature that he derives particular pleasure from certain combinations of forms, lines, colours, movements, sounds, rhythms, and images. But these combinations only give him pleasure when they express the sentiments and emotions of the human soul struggling with the accidents of life, or in presence of scenes of nature. The plastic arts, being addressed to the eye, manifest these impressions by the direct and more or less complete representation of objects, forms, attitudes, and of the real or imaginary scenes that they call up. The other arts, which

are addressed to the ear, have for their domain, and also for their instruments, the infinite multiplicity of sounds.

The principles, upon which each of the two groups reposes, find their explanation, therefore, in the two sciences pertaining to the study of the organs of sight and hearing—namely, optics and acoustics. The explanation is far from being complete, for a large number of problems still remain unsolved; but from what we already know, we may be allowed to guess at future discoveries. And at least we can indicate the general directions with a great degree of certainty.

The explanation of the cerebral phenomena of what is commonly called the moral influence of art, is not so far advanced, and in most cases we are compelled to content ourselves with pure empiricism. Upon this point *Æsthetics* is perforce limited to the statement and registration of facts, and to their classification in the order most probable. So far, then, it ceases to be a science in the complete sense of the word.

However, we are able to deduce from the observation of these facts, a principle of the utmost importance; which is, that outside the material conditions that relate to optics and acoustics, that which dominates in a work of art and gives it its special character, is the personality of its author. Ontology disappears to give place to man. The realisation of the eternal and unchanging Beauty of Plato is cast aside. The value of the work of art rests entirely upon the degree of energy with which it manifests the intellectual character and æsthetic impressions of its author. The only rule imposed upon it, is the necessity for a

certain conformity with the mode of thinking and feeling of the public to which it appeals. Not that such conformity can itself add to or take from the intrinsic value of the work. It is easy to understand that, in theory, a poem may express sentiments or ideas which, although they are incomprehensible to the contemporaries of the author, are not on that account the less worthy of the admiration of some more enlightened period or country. But as a matter of fact, it is certain that such a want of harmony often causes a work to fall rapidly into oblivion.

Happily cases of this nature are very uncommon, and the danger is much less to be feared by the artist than by the thinker. It is very rare, we may even say impossible, for an artist to be much before his time. Without going so far as to admit, as some have done, that he must necessarily be a simple echo, an Æolian harp played upon by every breath of contemporary emotion—it is certain that for a multitude of reasons which we have not space to enumerate, the artist and the poet, above all men, live the life of those among whom they are placed; and consequently it is only in exceptional cases that they are exposed to the danger which we have indicated.

An artist of true feeling has but to abandon himself to his emotion and it will become contagious, and the praise that he deserves will be awarded to him. So long as he shall observe the positive rules that spring from the physiological necessities of our organs, and which alone are certain and definitive, he need never trouble himself about academic traditions and receipts. He is free, absolutely free in his own province, on the one condition of absolute

sincerity. He must seek only to express the ideas, sentiments, and emotions proper to himself, and must copy no one.

As there is no such thing as abstract art, *l'art en soi*, because absolute beauty is a chimera,<sup>1</sup> so neither is there any definitive and final system of Æsthetics. All the various formulas by which at various times it has been imprisoned—idealism, naturalism, realism, and such like, are nothing but different ways of looking at art, which is not entirely contained in any one of them. Each of them may recommend itself to certain individual or national temperaments; but it is absurd to force them upon natures to which they are repugnant. It is quite as ridiculous to condemn Flemish or Dutch art in the name of Greek sculpture, as to go through the reverse process, and to refuse all praise to Phidias because he is not Rembrandt. Courbet, too, is legitimate. We may be allowed to prefer one to the other, according to our natural attraction and affinities; but Æsthetics has no more right to exclude either the one or the other, than we have to import passion and partiality into a question of science.

Is this equal to saying, with certain philosophers, that the freedom of art is the freedom of indifference; that for it one system of direction is as good as another; and that it knows no law but the infinite variety of individual caprice? To answer this question in the affirmative, would be both an exaggeration and a mistake. The artist, as we have said

<sup>1</sup> We shall have to demonstrate that the principle of Beauty, absolute or relative, is quite insufficient to account for the complexity of artistic manifestations.

before, lives the life of his own time and country, and so he is naturally led by the inspirations therein existing. Now, in spite of all the changes in human civilization—it is obvious that science, so long retarded by the pursuit of insoluble problems and the ontology of the theologians, has at last transferred its investigation from things of heaven to things of earth. It has substituted the direct study of things, facts, and living beings, for the fantastic explanations of metaphysicians, and of ancient and modern mythology. After wasting century after century in seeking for answers to the enigmas that puzzled it in the actions of gods and imaginary entities, it was obliged, in order to explain the physical and moral world, to take direct account of nature and of man. Man became a perpetual subject of observation for his own sake; and to have given this new direction to the investigation of science, is surely one of the chief glories of the nineteenth century.

Art, also, becomes ever more and more inclined to extend itself in the same direction. It is gradually withdrawing itself further and further from mythology and metaphysics, to which it was faithful so long as civilization set it an example of fidelity. This fact accounts for the ever-growing predominance of expression and of the portrayal of the passions and sentiments, so marked a characteristic of contemporary art. It also explains why landscape painting—that is, the painting of human emotions in the presence of the works of nature—has, for the last forty years, occupied a position of daily increasing importance. The same thing, again, is the cause of the transformation that life and movement have wrought in contemporary sculpture,

making Carpeaux and Dalou the chief favourites of the public.

All this is as much as to say that art, always human in its point of departure, which is the manifestation of the ideas and emotions of mankind, became equally so in its subjects and in its final aim. Instead of representing the forms of the gods, or celebrating them in verse; instead of devoting itself to a symbolism that could never end in anything better than a dry subtlety: it applied itself, with visible effort, to re-enter the pure field of humanity, in which alone from that time it was able to awaken those sympathies without which neither talent nor genius are preserved from oblivion; and which, also, is the only one wherein the artist draws immediately upon the sincere and profound emotions that excite his own desire and power to create.

This movement has, of course, found an energetic and violent opponent in tradition, which, with us, possesses peculiar power on account of the organization of our academies and of our official teaching. This retrograde force exercises a most fatal influence over our art progress, especially as those of us who are subject to it, are, for the most part, unconscious of its existence. Young and without any philosophic education, these unconscious students find the schools and their surroundings impregnated with a multitude of academic prejudices, that taking hold of them, stereotype their ideas before they have ever thought in earnest about such things, or have formed any personal convictions. They unwittingly become enlisted from the very first in the official phalanx; and it is only the exceptionally independent and powerful intellects that are able

either to resist this pressure at the beginning, or to escape from it at a later period. Our aim, then, is to denounce as strongly as our opportunities permit, this crushing of the future under the past, of liberty under dogmatism. We refuse to be bound by the narrow and antiquated rules which frustrate every attempt at emancipation; we repudiate the haughty and contemptuous criticism that, under pretext of protecting "good taste and calm doctrines," succeeds in discouraging every attempt at independence—a defensive criticism, which is, as M. Cuvillier-Fleury termed it, nothing but the open tyranny of academic doctrine and jealous impotence.

Our intention is to defend and uphold in every possible way the thesis which M. Eugène Viollet-le-Duc has taken for the text of all his writings; namely, that without independence we can have neither art nor artists.

All the great art epochs have been epochs of liberty. In the time of Pericles as in that of Leo. X., in the France of the thirteenth century as in the Holland of the seventeenth, artists were able to work after their own fancies. No æsthetic dogmas confused their imaginations, no official corporations claimed any art dictatorship, or thought themselves responsible for the direction taken by the national taste.

In these great epochs, Art was truly national. Men's intellects, when left to follow their own devices, naturally worked out the particular kinds of art with which they had most sympathy; or rather they found them without search, by their own spontaneous movement, without other guide or rule than the instinctive preferences of the race as a whole.

This peculiar similarity between instincts when left to themselves, explains the close sympathy that subsists between the works produced by different men during the great periods of art; whilst, at the same time, freedom is made manifest by the characteristic whose place nothing else can supply—namely, individual originality.

Men whose lives belong to the same period are generally influenced by the same set of facts. The sources of inspiration afford but little variety. Sometimes a single idea or sentiment is impressed upon a whole generation. But each man interprets it after his own fashion, after the fulness of his own personal inspiration, and according to the measure of his own genius.

This is the source of the infinite variety in unity—variety of expression in unity of sentiment—which is the mark of certain periods. In fact, the artist is never more powerful or more inspired, than when he finds himself in perfect accord with the age in which he lives; and art is never greater, than when it marches with the ideas and sentiments that influence a whole condition of society.

Now this universality of art and of artistic sentiment, at a certain moment in their intellectual evolution among the great majority of nations, is of the most capital importance in the history of the manifestations of human intelligence. The Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Chinese, and Japanese, all possessed spontaneous forms of art, which, springing from the inmost feelings of the nation, have the appearance of being equally understood and appreciated by every individual of the race. Something of the same kind is to be



found in France during the Middle Ages, and in Italy during the period of the Renaissance.

That such a statement should be true of so many different races of mankind, cannot be attributed to mere chance. Chance is far too convenient an explanation; besides, it has the disadvantage of really explaining nothing. Chance is not even an hypothesis; it is a mere negation. There is no chance in history. Every event, small or great, is but part of a continuous chain. Some of the links may escape our notice, but, nevertheless, the chain exists.

Art, considered from a psychological point of view, is nothing but the spontaneous expression of certain conceptions of things, which follow logically from the combination of the moral and physical influences to which different races are subject, with the original or acquired tendencies and aptitudes of each separate race.

It is an interpretation of the sentiments to which this *mélange* gives birth; a more or less literal, or more or less ideal interpretation, according as the nations in question give the first place to the material reality of things or to the habits and predilections of the race. But, whatever the result of such mixture may be, it is certain that the two primitive elements, reality and personality, are never wanting—in spite of the contrary theories that would reduce art either to the condition of photographic plagiarism, or to mere conjectural restoration of so-called ideal types.

We need not here insist upon these considerations, because we have sufficiently developed them in the pages that follow. We will content ourselves with saying that every form of

art has some better *raison d'être* than mere accident ; a remark which applies even to periods of decadence.

When does an art cease to be national—that is, common to every individual of a race or country ? When does that universality of taste, which is the dominant characteristic, of the great art epochs, disappear?—a disappearance which is one of the chief marks of decadence.

It disappears, when art ceases to be the sincere and spontaneous expression of the general sentiments ; when, instead of directly interpreting the impressions and true emotions of all, or, at least, of the great majority, it attempts to give an analysis of its own methods of work, and makes such mere technical methods the ultimate aim of its labour—losing sight of the vital principle of art, sincerity and spontaneity of emotion.

Such a sign of decadence is fatal, by reason of the law that forbids the superior races of mankind to dwell too long upon any such spectacles. The moment must come when the sentiments or ideas that have inspired a form of civilization and an art, lose their useful effect and their fertile powers ; and when the intellect finds itself condemned for a time to mere imitation and reproduction.

It is no longer the anterior sentiment or idea itself that is imitated and reproduced ; it is its expression, the form by which it is interpreted, and which is thenceforth empty and inanimate.

But we soon grow weary of mere imitation, because it affords no food for our intellect. In order to stir up our languishing sensations, expression must be exaggerated as much as possible. Free rein is given to the most aban-

doned developments of individual caprice. Art becomes an exercise of the same kind and of the same value as the contortions of mountebanks, who care only to astonish the public with the exhibition of the suppleness of their joints.

The public may be divided into two unequal categories: the *dilettanti*, who pretend to derive some peculiar and subtle pleasure from such gymnastics, because they wish, above all things, to be considered superior to their neighbours; and those who are not *dilettanti*—that is to say, ninety-nine out of every hundred of the population—who, caring nothing for such subtleties, leave art to take care of itself, and disregard the efforts it makes to draw their attention by premeditated singularities.

If, under such conditions, we do come across a small number of artists who are skilful enough to find yet a few grains of gold in the exhausted mine; or who are so far in advance of their time as to have discovered some new source of poetry: these stand a good chance of never being noticed amid the general indifference.

These are but inevitable consequences. We have no right either to complain of, or to be surprised at them.

But the same law that condemns the progressive races of mankind to ever-recurring exhaustion of ideas and sentiments, in order that they may be continually replenished and corrected by others newer and more advanced—must, as the logical result of its application, cause dead forms of civilization to be followed by living ones; and, for similar reasons, must give birth to new forms of art appropriate to the new forms of civilization.

This, no doubt, is what would have taken place, were it not that, beside this law of progress, we find another absolutely contrary to it, that, fighting against it, in most cases reduces it to impotence. While part of a community is ever pushing on in its search for the best; the other part, under the influence of education, self-interest, habit, intellectual inertia and fear of the unknown, repudiates everything that is new.

Now the preponderance must belong, for a time at least, to those who represent the earlier civilization. They receive strength from every social, political or administrative item of organization. Accomplished facts, too—in judicial language, called “precedents,”—tell in their favour, while their opponents can rest only upon their aspirations, at first vague and incomplete, and always without the sanction that comes from experience. Against the intellectual forms of thought created by the glories of the past, they can only oppose the more or less uncertain glimmers of a problematic future. They are condemned to find themselves confronted with everything in our social systems which is established, fixed, an “institution.”

In France, and, it must be acknowledged, in every European country, modern education is founded almost entirely upon the imitation of the past; that is to say, so far as art is concerned. The instinct of progress has always had to fight against the organized forces of society, in the Universities as much as elsewhere. And, if we should feel any astonishment, it should be excited by the fact that this instinct possesses sufficient vitality to save it from complete annihilation by the numerous enemies ranged against it.

Among such enemies, the most powerful, beyond all contradiction, is the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*. The talented men who constitute this body, are all the more dangerous to the cause of art in that they so thoroughly believe that they render good service. This sincerity is the root of all their strength. If they openly proclaimed themselves enemies of progress, they would very soon be reduced to impotence. But no—they really do desire above all things the development of art; and they devote themselves heart and soul to the promotion of this end. But, unfortunately, they believe that such development is only rendered possible by the diligent study of the art of former days; and the reasoning upon which they found their opinions is of the most specious kind.

Where has Art ever been more brilliant than in the Greece of Pericles, or in Italy during the Renaissance? Nowhere; there can be but the one answer. Where, then, can we find better models than the masterpieces of those two favoured nations? Why should individual effort be wasted in looking for that which was found long ago? Study, then, without ceasing, the productions of these admirable geniuses who have never been surpassed; and, when you have made yourself acquainted with all their secrets, then you may be able to trust to your own powers, and produce masterpieces in your turn—if nature has given you brains enough!

In consequence of simple, easily understood arguments such as these, all the teaching of the *École des Beaux-Arts* is directed to the continual reiteration of what has been done by the artists of dead forms of

civilization, until its pupils become almost incapable to produce anything but more or less unsuccessful *pasticcios*.

The same reasoning governs the decisions of the juries at the competitions and the annual exhibitions. Crosses, prizes and medals are given to those artists who have most closely followed the orthodox models.

Again—under the influence of the same arguments, the administration only purchases such works as are got up in accordance with academic formulas, and gives commissions only to those men who are known to keep within the same rules; the rules of high art, of the “grand style,” which alone receive encouragement from any administration which would keep itself respectable.

These facts explain how Ingres has become the official prototype of artistic perfection for the France of the nineteenth century; and how M. Cabanel has become its apostle, and, at the same time, the chief judge of the artists and the born president of all the juries.

We see why young men who enter the school with the strongest instincts of independence and sincerity, rarely leave it otherwise than *cabanellised*—slaves to routine, emasculated, and lost to art. Instead of consulting their own sentiments, obeying their own impressions, following the spontaneous lead of their own tastes, preferences, and aptitudes, by which alone they might come to be artists or poets—they do all they can to stifle the voice of their own nature that they may hear that of their masters. They torture themselves in order to become convinced that progress consists in galvanizing ancient art; and that the only

possible originality is to be found in *pasticcios* after the Greeks or Italians.

This is the price they pay for the eulogiums of the juries, the favours of the administration, the commissions for the State, and the admiration of the *moutons* of Panurge! And when once they have chosen this path, they are kept tightly to it by a series of moral and pecuniary considerations that never permit them to recover their liberty.

This despotic influence of the State, and of the official world generally, over art, is very much to be deplored. But if sympathetic and earnest judges were to be found among the public, artists might turn to them for support to resist the terrible pressure from above.

But no; the public of to-day does not trouble itself about such matters; and why? Shall it be said it is so because it has become incapable of poetic feeling? Because art has no longer any place amid the contending interests of the time? Because science has killed admiration, and industry has destroyed imagination and sentiment? Certainly not. The public of the nineteenth century, which chooses to consider itself sceptical and *blasé*, is, like the public of every other time or country, open to every form of poetry, to every kind of sincere and truthful art; but it finds it impossible to feel any enthusiasm for the composite art which the authorised organs of official taste commend so loudly. It is quite willing to admire the Greeks and the Romans, in their proper time and place; but it does not see any good reason why French art should be entirely sacrificed to these ancients. And, great though its respect for the luminaries of the art Areopagus may be,

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it never carries this so far as to find in the facile adaptations of these gentlemen an equivalent for that art of which it has a dim foresight ; which would satisfy its latent aspirations ; and which would open up springs of emotion, the possession of which it does not now suspect.

Thus it is that the obstinate perseverance of academies and administrations in trying to resuscitate the dead, has had the natural consequence of destroying the living ; and that their efforts to persuade the public that they are the promoters of the only true art, have ended in falsifying the æsthetic sentiments of artists, and in obliterating, for the time, those of laymen.

Under present conditions these fatal results are inevitable. Societies that elect their own members, and corporate bodies, no matter how great the individual merit of the men who compose them, are inevitably hostile to progress, for the simple reason that every such society forms a collective and eclectic set of doctrines for its own use ; and these in time come to be looked upon as possessed of unchanging truth, exclude every kind of independence and originality, and oppose themselves in turn and with unshaken confidence, to all the revolts and manifestoes of individual genius.

Little improvement is possible so long as there exist bodies allowed to wield any kind of authority over matters of intellect.

No further proofs of this are necessary. Every man gifted with a true perception of artistic requirements, has been instant in protest against the despotism of academic classicism. Gustave Planche and Viollet-le-Duc have shown

that to its baneful influence are to be attributed the great majority of the evils that beset French art. All artists of unfettered mind have striven energetically against it. I can not do better than refer all who desire to acquire an accurate knowledge, so far as the future is concerned, of this vitally important question, to the works of these two writers, especially to those of the latter. I will here quote a page from Montalembert, which treats of this subject, and which is doubly interesting, both from the vivid indignation that has inspired it, and from the fact that the writer of it was himself an academician.

In an article upon the religious art of France, he places among those who are chiefly responsible for its debasement "the theorists and practicians of the classic tradition."

"Were I obliged," he says, "only to take account of the value, influence, and popularity of their works and doctrines, I should in truth, have no need to give more than a bare mention of their names. But, as they occupied nearly all the official posts and monopolised the influence of government; as they entrenched themselves in a citadel, from which they revenged themselves for the general reprobation poured out upon such of their number as ventured to do active work, by affecting to despise the talents of those who had cast off their yoke, and from which those who produced nothing did their best to prevent others from doing any more than themselves; and as, above all, they were able to control the state funds devoted to the education of art students:—no hesitation or half-heartedness must be shown in attacking their stronghold, in breaching a supremacy which is an insult to France, until public indignation and contempt shall be

raised to such a pitch that these relics of a former age be driven from the power they have abused. We have one consolation in the fact that, although they may still do mischief, ruin many hopeful careers, and destroy the seeds of many precious aspirations, their reign is inexorably drawing to a close. They will not be allowed much longer to wither the blossom of the future with their pernicious breath, or to warp the genius of youth worthy of a better fate. Publicity will bring these gambols of expiring classicism to an end; gambols which would be grotesque, were it not for their lamentable effects. The competitions for the prize of Rome will be their death. We shall not long submit to the tyranny of men who have gravely announced that the subjects for the competition in this year of Grace, 1837, are *Apollo guarding the flocks of Admetus* and *Marius brooding over the ruins of Carthage!*"

We need change nothing in this description except the date.

To sum up: there are but three ways open to art—the imitation of previous forms of art; the realistic imitation of actual things; the manifestation of individual impressions.

The first method is the academic method. It has for its more or less latent principle, the negation of progress and even of all intellectual change; and its practice consists in compelling young men of the nineteenth century to think and feel like those of the time of Pericles or Leo. X. Now, as this is impossible, it follows that the great majority of the artists who are subjected to such a system, find it much simpler to give up any attempt either to think or feel, and

to content themselves with the study of processes, the application of formulas, and the elaboration of *pasticcios*. Emotion, conviction, sincerity, spontaneity—everything in fact that constitutes true art, is eliminated at a blow. The natural and logical effect of university and academy teaching, except where it here and there finds itself confronted with invincible natures, is to form—not artists, but translators.

When hatred of such tyranny leads to the opposite extreme, realism is the result; but neither is this art, though it leads up to it. The realistic theory, when pushed to an extreme, reduces the artist to the condition of a mere copyist. The perfection at which he aims, is that of complete and absolute illusion. The perfect artist, from this point of view, would be he who sees everything in the same way as the ordinary run of people; and who shall succeed in depicting objects as faithfully as photography would do if it could reproduce colour as well as form. The final aim of such a theory would be to give man all the precision of machinery, and all its indifference.

Fortunately for the realistic theory, such perfection is impossible. Man puts something of his own nature into everything he does. However much he may try to render no more than the visible appearance of things, as it is seen by all the world, he always adds something which is not actually before his eyes, which comes from within himself, from his own personal emotions and impressions. This intervention is first manifested in his choice of subject; next in the arrangement and proportion of parts, by the importance given to some and withheld from others,

unconsciously it may be, and though the latter are no less real than the former.

Now, it is precisely by this latter characteristic, with its instinctive preferences and the peculiarities of impression which they convey to the auditor or spectator, that a work becomes a work of art. Any man can count the branches of a tree or the features of a landscape ; but an artist alone can render their effects and general expression. This is so because it is his peculiar nature to be more sensitive than other men to such effects and expressions ; he interprets them naturally when he gives them the particular colours that appeal to his own nature, temperament, and personality.

It is this that makes Courbet an artist, in spite of the adverse theory which he upholds. And this also is the reason that he can only be placed in the second rank, below Rousseau, Corot, Millet, and Jules Dupré. Whatever may have been the value of his practice—his personality, besides being very intermittent, was wanting in the vigorous accent that distinguished his great contemporaries.

Of these three forms of art—conventional, realistic, and personal—the latter alone really deserves the name. The first is the negation and absolute contradiction of art ; the second generally shows some artistic qualities, because it is almost impossible for the artist to disappear entirely behind reality. But the determinant and essential constituent of art, is the personality of the artist ; and this is as much as to say, that the first duty of the artist is to seek to interpret only those things which excite his own emotions.

We need not dwell any longer upon these ideas. We

have done enough to clearly point out our principles and our final aim. We address ourselves only to those who believe art to be a purely human affair, and that the source of all poetry is the soul of the poet. As for those who would substitute a farrago of recipes for the personality of the artist, and conventionality for sincerity—we can only look upon them as the worst enemies of art.





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#### ERRATA.

At folio 81, line 3, *for* "towards these powers; the," *read*, "with a power the."

At folio 104 (foot-note). Quotation commences at line 18, "Nevertheless, and in spite of all."

At folio 130, line 3, *for* "Mapillon," *read*, "Massillon."

At folio 185 (foot-note), line 3. *for* "Utility," *read*, "Use."

# ÆSTHETICS.

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## PART THE FIRST.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### ORIGIN AND GROUPING OF THE ARTS.

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§ 1. *Prehistoric Art—The instinct of the best—Analysis and generalisation—Language.*

ÆSTHETICS being, as has been said, the science of the beautiful in the arts, it would seem but natural to begin by explaining what beauty and art are respectively.

We shall not, however, do so, because we distrust *à priori* definitions, and because it seems to us more reasonable and scientific to search among facts, to see whether they are not able of themselves to afford us the definitions we want. Facts always come before theories; and we are convinced that only by going back to the first beginnings and following the development of things through the procession of time, can we arrive at an idea of them, at once fair, exact, and complete.

This somewhat slow method may be less favourable to eloquence; it lends itself reluctantly to the brilliant amplifications of which metaphysicians are so fond, when, with a stroke of their wings, they transport themselves to the ethereal regions where their imaginations love to soar. But to us it seems all the more necessary to use it in our inquiry, as, perhaps in the whole

range of metaphysics, there is no subject the literature of which can show so great an abuse of fine words, resounding periods,<sup>1</sup> and, above all, crude definitions.

When once we have discovered the origin of art among men, and have examined its method throughout the series of its various manifestations, we shall find it easy, first, to comprehend its exact role, its function and its aim; secondly, to draw up a definition, of which the whole subject of Æsthetics shall be no more than the development.

As far back as we can trace the history of humanity, there do we find art. It manifests itself in that still obscure period which precedes authentic history. By art man has from his first beginning chiefly distinguished himself from the crowd of inferior animals with which he seems to have so much in common on some sides of his nature. When as yet he possessed neither laws nor social institutions, even then he had art. In the dark caverns which formed his first habitations, because they alone

<sup>1</sup> This impulse is so irresistible that the very writers who most deprecate any approach to declamation, allow it to carry them away, from the moment that they enter upon this subject. That M. Cousin should declaim under the pretext of discussing Æsthetics causes us no surprise, declamation being the natural habit of his eloquence. It is remarkable, however, that Töppfer himself, in his *Réflexions et Menus Propos*, should be unable to keep clear of it, in spite of the obvious effort to be simple and unaffected. As soon as he attempts to define beauty, we find him mounted on the tripod and seized by the metaphysical delirium. "Philosophers," he says, "abandon themselves to their soaring imaginations, so far as to say that beauty in its ultimate essence, is God! Not only do I conceive this assertion to be of a mystic sublimity, I acquiesce in its truth, not perhaps by virtue of a reasoned certainty, but impelled by a probability so strong, as to admit neither doubt nor disproof. In fact, we must here leave the extreme limits of possible experience, to endeavour to come to some conclusion, as the result of a bold but not forced induction, from the partial effect to the cause, from the sunbeam to the sun, from the creature illuminated by one of innumerable rays to that Creator who is the Eternal Luminary itself" (Chap. x. Bk. vi.). And he is so enamoured of his fine phrases that he even repeats them a little farther on (Chap. xi. Bk. vii.), without reckoning many other equally magniloquent and empty passages, which he writes with a most diverting seriousness. It is true enough that all this is to be found also in Plato, and that "tall talk" of this description has gained for the *Science du Beau* of M. Leveque the unanimous suffrages of three academies.



could protect him against the attacks of beasts of prey, amid the piles of bones in which have been found the débris of species vanished from this earth perhaps a thousand centuries ago, we have discovered, among flint-formed arrows and knives, objects which could evidently only have been ornaments, necklets, bracelets, rings of stone and of bone—more or less roughly worked and fitted indeed, but enough to show that art is not, as has been asserted, the efflorescence of superior civilisations only.

Yes, those frightful savages, who lived dispersed in the holes and corners of the world, hideous, shapeless, more like apes than men though they were, already felt the sentiment of art. They strove after beauty; they adorned with their best their appalling females; they decorated their weapons of stone; they devised musical instruments; by means of gravers of flint they cut upon flat bones the leading features of many animals, with enough accuracy to enable us to this day to recognise their species.

Shall we say with Plato, that ever since then man has been pursuing an ideal, attempting to realise again types which he may have known in a previous state of existence? Such a hypothesis, in addition to the inconvenience of being very difficult of proof, accommodates itself but ill to the evidence of ascertained facts. As the memory of man is so constituted that its impressions are vivid in exact proportion to the nearness of their causes, the first men should certainly have been those most able to reproduce with accuracy the features of the pure ideals which they had not had time to forget. Logically, then, the art of primitive times ought to have been the most perfect of all forms of art, and in its achievements we ought to search for models most in accordance with an ideal type. But we know that all the discoveries made up to the present time categorically contradict the hypothesis which has served as the foundation for the romantic notion of the early perfection of the human race. He who was to be the future king of animals and of the world, began by being himself nothing but one of the meanest and most miserable of animals, possessing not the slightest resemblance to the fallen deity of the

legend. His intelligence was no more than equal to the work of preserving his life among the dangers that encompassed it, which included that of affording a meal for his future subjects. His highest industry was the fashioning of stones into the forms of knives, tomahawks, and axes, and his art was on a par with his industry.

The important point for us, however, is not the perfection of these arts and industries, it is enough that they had an existence. Rude though they were, their bare existence proves that man, mean, unformed, unintelligent, as we suppose him to have been, belonged to a race already superior to all others. The intellectual effort that enabled him to achieve these primitive results, contained within itself the germ of the long series of future developments. This fact, once firmly grasped, will rid us of all the hypotheses of more or less transcendental metaphysicians. Art, like everything similar, is no more than one of the spontaneous manifestations of that intellectual activity which is the special characteristic of man; and which, applying itself to the pursuit of different ends, has, by similar means, successively created every art, every industry, every branch of science.

Why then has so much activity been applied to this end rather than to another? It is easy enough to understand how the necessities of his life, the obligation to hold his own against enemies better armed by nature than himself, should have led man, first to invent, next to perfect his weapons of war. The instinct of self-preservation being inborn in him as in all other animals, he naturally was taught by it to exercise his wits in that direction, and he used his intellectual superiority to provide himself with instruments which the rest of creation had to do without.

In applying a similar reasoning to the origin of art, we are irresistibly impelled to the conclusion, that a taste for art is as natural to man as the instinct of self-preservation. If, in cave dwellings, we discover objects covered with ornament, either modelled or carved, it becomes at once evident that the savages

who were our ancestors, from that time preferred certain forms to others, and experienced a peculiar pleasure in their reproduction.

Man, like all other animals, is born intelligent, and, like them again, he employs that intelligence chiefly to satisfy his wants and to avoid pain. This is the mainspring and the aim of his activity. In this he has nothing to distinguish himself from other animate beings, and, of all the natural instincts, none has been more thoroughly investigated. It is equally found among brutes the most degraded and among the most intelligent animals. It is common to everything that breathes; and we may truly say that this instinct governs and explains, at least in their first causes, all the manifestations of life. Even the vegetable creation is subject to this law. It seems to seek for the conditions most favourable to its existence, and even to possess in some degree the power of displacement in order to attain them. A tree planted too near a wall, which deprives it of nourishment and air, throws itself forward in quest of surroundings more fitted to supply its wants.

The application of this universal law for the amelioration of vital conditions, naturally varies with the conditions of existence of different races and species.

The vegetable seeks after those conditions fitted to stimulate within it the development of the vegetative form of life. The animal, which encloses a more complex vital principle, and which finds itself *en rapport* with its surroundings through the intervention of a greater number of organs, has, in consequence, wants at once more numerous and more varied. Besides the mere instincts of self-preservation and reproduction, it is endowed, like man, with the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell; which senses enable their possessor to enjoy certain special gratifications, and at the same time subject it to the danger of particular forms of suffering.

The domain of what we call the moral life is also open to it; because, without discussing here those theories which attribute to animals, with mere differences of degree, almost all the human

faculties, it is certain that they are capable of nearly all the sentiments which we have been prone to look upon as the exclusive property of man. Observations recently made by eminent naturalists prove that even the sense of beauty is not entirely wanting among certain species of animals. Darwin has published a work on this subject, which, although we cannot admit the whole of his deductions, brings to light a vast array of facts to which due weight must be given.

The instinct for *the best*, or for progress, is found everywhere, and in this particular, man, as compared with other animals, has only a superiority of degree. Again, it would be fairer to say that such superiority exists less in the instinct itself, than in the means possessed for gratifying it. While animals, obliged to depend upon a dull and incomplete intelligence, of which memory seems to form the greater part, find themselves, by the total absence of means of transmission, almost completely enclosed within the narrow limits of individual experience, and consequently unable to extend the field of progress beyond the bounds of individual lives—man, better served by the constitution of his brain, untiringly adds to the accumulated knowledge, which each generation transmits to its successor increased by the fruits of its own thought and the sum of its discoveries. The one is condemned by its intellectual weakness, to continually recommence the same course of effort within but slightly varying limits. The other when he steps into this world, begins by making himself master of the inheritance left for him by his ancestors, who gradually built up for him those multitudinous experiences of all kinds of subjects, which constitute contemporary science; he finds himself, from the beginning, carried on by the very effect of the language which they teach him, from point to point in any career that he may elect to follow. That is, to minister to its desire for the best, to ameliorate its vital conditions, to at once augment the number of its joys and diminish its sorrows, each generation receives instruments perfect in proportion to the number of generations through which they have descended; without taking

any account of the fact that the instincts themselves have been going through an exactly parallel course of development and improvement.

Such is the action in man of that law of progression which has conducted him from the point where we saw him dwelling in his prehistoric caverns, to the state in which he exists to-day. To ascertain the course of this progress beyond the possibility of doubt, we need only compare its two extremities. The demonstration which results from the simple collation is so plain that we can hardly understand how anyone can be found to whom it is not obvious. The real difficulty, on the contrary, seems to us to be, how to explain the manner in which such a considerable transformation has been brought about. The ancients attributed it to the direct intervention of the deity. The myths of Prometheus and Orpheus were partly founded upon this idea. Our more complete knowledge of the original aptitudes of humanity, enables us to dismiss all explanations of the kind.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We may affirm that this law of progression is, in its own nature, absolutely spontaneous and inevitable ; but it is not direct, which fact has always furnished arguments to those who deny its existence. If the course of progress had been continuous and direct from its commencement, it would have been quite impossible to contest it. But both the original variety, and the subsequent intermixture of the different races of mankind, the divergence of their aptitudes, and the differences of the surroundings in which they have been developed, combine to throw a certain amount of obscurity upon the total result. Another cause of error is to be found in the very way in which the progress of ideas operates. No ideas can be absolute and final ; they must all go through a process of completion and renewal which never ends. The intellectual vigour and fertility which are provoked by each idea at some period of its development, by the gratification of more or less conscious aspirations—which in fact constitute the great epochs of history—are exhausted by the very effect of the progress achieved, and give place in turn to lassitude and sterility. Nevertheless it would seem that every stage of progress, in raising civilisation a degree, would excite in man new wants and aspirations, and consequently that the life of nations should display a constant and regular course of evolution towards final perfection. But a crowd of impediments, moral and material, social, political, and religious, too many to enumerate here, but whose successive destruction it is the special mission of science to ensure, oppose the regularity of development. From all this it follows that nations remain bound too long by ideas after their practical utility has been exhausted, and that they become deficient in the energy necessary

The real, deep-seated cause of progress is to be found in the superior faculty of analysis and generalisation which is possessed by man. It is this double capability which constitutes the chief difference between him and other animals. By analysis, he dissipates the clouds of doubt arising from the complex nature of deeds and things. He, so to say, dissects them, and makes himself master of their inmost details. He submits ideas to an operation analogous to that which enables a chemist to ascertain the constituents of bodies, and to determine the points of resemblance or difference which unite or separate them.

When he has thus decomposed facts and ideas into their first elements, he arranges these elements into classes, and then, in his turn, creates out of them new systems by the methods which specially recommend themselves to his nature, bringing out order from chance, simplicity from complexity; which operation is in fact nothing but science itself. Science, born of analysis and generalisation, remains perforce variable and progressive. As fast as analysis furnishes material for new generalisations, these, while adding to the sum of previously acquired results, displace and modify all their mutual relations; occasionally making havoc of previous conclusions and entailing new and higher generalisations, which, ranging themselves in opposition to prevailing beliefs, mark those critical epochs in civilisation which we call *revolutions*.

for the rapid creation or establishment of new and more prolific ideas, to form the bases of further development. Then, for such nations, begin sad ages of decay, causing their disappearance for periods of greater or less duration, sometimes even for ever, from the stage of the world, where their empty places are filled by other forms of civilisation, that is to say, by the expansion of other ideas.

These fatal and irremediable decadences were the rule in ancient times. We have good grounds for hoping that the future contains no more of them. A true conception of the laws of progress is alone sufficient to prevent nations from absolutely despairing of themselves. When the recuperative power of any form of civilisation begins to decline, another forthwith begins to develop and settle itself among the more intelligent classes of the community; and, though the passage from the one to the other be, even for a long period, fraught with danger, we may count almost certainly upon its final completion, and this confidence renders improbable in the future any repetition of such catastrophes as those of the great civilisations of antiquity.

It is clear that we can point to nothing of this kind during the times the history of which is unknown to us. We may confidently assert, however, that, if man have succeeded in freeing himself from the bondage of circumstances, and have gradually made himself master of the natural forces which seem to conspire against him, it is because he has possessed from the first the double faculty of analysis and generalisation ; that if he have raised himself far above other animals, of which many seem better armed than he, it is because, thanks to this same power, more or less latent in him, he has known how to discern, combine, dispose, and appropriate to his own use all means of resistance that were to be found within his reach. The difference between his cerebral formation and that of other living organisms, a difference almost imperceptible in its beginning, has sufficed, by the accumulation of the results acquired by its possession, to make man a being apart, and to open to his comprehension a field of knowledge to which it is impossible to assign a limit.

The most important result of this intellectual privilege has been the creation of language. From the moment when man acquired the power of separating ideas from things, of discriminating in successive events or objects the constituent elements of their natures, it was but to be expected that he should come to distinguish them by various appellations, just as he had already separated them in his mind by the various impressions caused upon the organs of his brain.

§ 2. *Imitation—Its part in the formation of written and spoken language—Rhythm.*

What we have said, however, would not suffice to explain the ulterior development of human civilisation, or to enable us to understand the place which the arts ought to occupy in it, were it not that man possesses in his instinct of imitation perhaps the most efficacious of all instruments for the realisation of the progress of which his cerebral construction renders him capable. Every one must have remarked the power of this instinct among

children, and those who have had to bring them up know what an important place it occupies among means of education. Without it, the bare communication of language would occupy an indefinite time. One could even believe that, deprived of such help, man would never have advanced farther than the expression of a small number of elementary feelings and ideas, and therefore would still have remained steeped in barbarism.

It is difficult to determine even approximately how much we are indebted to the instinct of imitation for the first creation of language. Some persons have considered that in *onomatopœia*, that is, in the direct imitation of noises, is to be found the universal source of all language. Such an idea is an obvious exaggeration; but, on the other hand, it is sure that many words which correspond to certain classes of facts, have among many races preserved forms which connect them with such an origin. The terms that denote thunder, tempest, the crackling of fire, the rippling of water, the swish of a thrown stone, etc., have, in a great number of dialects, preserved forms which recall the impressions made upon the ear by the things themselves. There are many animals whose names indicate the nature of their peculiar cries. From the number of such words that still exists, one may fairly infer that they were considerably more numerous in former times. It is even not impossible to suppose, that, in modifying themselves in obedience to more or less apparent connections between sound and different mental ideas, they may have sufficed for the construction of a vocabulary, almost sufficient for the wants of man in a certain early stage of his development. We find many such indications in our modern languages, where we may constantly notice the interchanging of terms referring to what at first sight seem very different ideas,—as for example in the case of sound and colour. A large number of the impressions which we realise through the eye, can be, and are, most frequently expressed by terms that seem to have been primarily invented to denote those appealing to the ear. Such substitutions and extensions must in the beginning have been easy and frequent, in proportion as



analysis of impressions was more vague. It is certain that the connections between the two orders of ideas are singularly striking. Painters know well how to give an impression of noise and tumult by certain combinations of colours, and how calm and tranquillity may be manifested by contrary arrangements. What is more extraordinary still, is the power which music possesses to express by sounds, the very negation of sound, silence.

It is by the use of connections not less surprising, and the interchange of analogous ideas, that a vocabulary of metaphysics has been formed. Words which originally denoted material, visible, and palpable realities, arrived, by a series of conventions, at transformations of their sense as complete as could well be imagined. No one dreams of denying these metamorphoses, because that would be to deny what is obvious; but we may find in them a phenomenon calculated to cause surprise from reasons quite apart from those which attend the progressive extension of terms that at first related to the sense of hearing alone, to the impressions of all the five senses. Among all our sensations, by whatever organ provoked, it is easy to discover some common or analogous traits, direct or indirect points of contact, which enable us to comprehend without much effort how language has succeeded in passing from one category into others; but between the transcendental world of metaphysics and the physical world of sensation, there is, at least in theory, an impassable abyss, since the conceptions of the one are literally a negation of those of the other. During the whole twenty-five centuries which have elapsed since they first took up their work, the most subtle and cunning metaphysicians have not been able to hit upon a plausible and probable explanation of the connection between spirit and matter—in their language, of the mutual influence upon each other of our moral and physical natures. The very mode of action of God upon the world, has ever been and to this day remains a source of great perplexity in consequence of the insolubility of this problem. All this, however, has not prevented these very metaphysicians from creating an entire language, more or less adapted to their ethereal

conceptions. They dip into the common reservoir of the language of sense, and put the meanings of words through a process of evaporation analogous to that to which their ideas have already had to submit.

We shall not stop to ascertain the miracles which that wonderful instrument, *metaphor*, has in like manner performed. We all know how far its power of transformation can reach. These remarks might be multiplied to infinity ; but we have said enough to give a glimpse of the fact that the theory which connects, in part at least, the origin of language with the imitation of sounds and noises, may not be so completely erroneous as has been sometimes thought. We must repeat, on the other hand, that while we altogether incline to admit the influence of imitation for a fixed and determined portion of existing vocabularies, we do not believe that its share should be so much amplified as to make us recognise in it, as some have done, not only one, but the unique source of language.

The truth is, that the cerebral constitution of man explains the birth of language, or to speak more exactly, of articulate words. From the first, as we have already said, language would have been impossible, if the human intelligence had not possessed the power to analyse its impressions and to discern their elements. Moreover, the observations of modern science have proved to us that the brain of man possesses a special organ of language in a very small division of the cerebral hemispheres, particularly in the left hemisphere. M. Broca has ascertained that this organ is situated upon the superior edge of the Fissure of Sylvius opposite the Island of Reil, and occupies the posterior half, probably the posterior third only of the third frontal convolution.

When the part in question is wounded, a man is still able to comprehend the meaning of words, which proves that this organ is not to be confounded with that of analysis ; but he is unable to speak.

We must, however, assert that the chief effect of this discovery is to make us acquainted with the physiological origin of the pos-

sibility of articulate language ; the presence of this special organ teaches us why man alone possesses the faculty of speech. But this is not the question which occupies us. Our business is to find out how this faculty was put in motion, how it became practically efficient. From this point of view imitation of sounds no doubt played a considerable part. It, in all probability, furnished the point of departure from which the organ took its first activity. We see the proof of this in the total inability of those born deaf, to create an articulate language for themselves. If man, for the invention of such a form of language, required nothing but the faculty of analysis, and the cerebral organs which render possible the expression of ideas by the production of sounds, how comes it that the totally deaf man is to this day deprived of all power to express his thoughts by any language other than that of gesture ? It is easy enough to understand that the deaf mute should be unable, without the use of his ears, to learn the language spoken around him which he never hears. But if the first men were able, with infinitely less perfect organs of brain, to form an articulate language for themselves, without being greatly aided by their natural instinct for the imitation of the sounds which they were continually hearing—how are we to understand that, in these times of ours, the descendants of these very men are quite unable to create a language in a similar way, for no better reason than that they are deprived of that sense of hearing, which is, it is pretended, so unnecessary for the formation of language ? But if, on the contrary, the possession of this sense was, as we believe, the determinant cause of language, if men set themselves to produce sounds because they heard them on every side—how are we to believe that the sounds uttered by them, in an age when the instinct of imitation must have had extraordinary power, were not more or less closely copied from those that fell upon the ear ? Again, of all the arts there is none which acts more strongly upon the sensibilities of man than music, none which arouses sensations at once so lively and complete. Animals even feel its influence, as every one can testify. Sound possesses a peculiar vibratory

power which never fails to communicate itself to every physical organism in its neighbourhood, producing by such vibration an infinite variety of sensations, of sentiments, and even of ideas, whose logical connexions with the physical impressions from which they spring, almost elude our powers of comprehension. There is nothing very astonishing in the fact that sounds and noises perceived by primitive man produced analogous effects upon him, and that he was, in the beginning, led to denote by appellations more or less imitated from these sounds and noises, impressions very different from those originally caused by them.

Imitation betrays itself in the languages of antiquity by other equally obvious traces. The imitative poetic manner, which makes use of the material devices of rhythm and of sonorousness to give an idea of action and of spectacle, holds an important place in ancient literature. We know, too, that it would not be difficult to discover instances of the same practice in our own classic authors, and in the music of modern times.

From this point of view, we might make an interesting study of the principle which regulates, not the formation of words only, but even their consecutive arrangement in the dead languages. Everybody knows the differences that exist in this respect between French, for instance, and Greek and Latin, to take account only of the dialects with which we are most familiar. Modern grammar imposes upon us a rigid and almost immutable disposal by rules almost purely grammatical. We have thought fit to call this order a logical order, which seems to imply that the order preferred by the ancients was illogical. And, in fact, there are many persons, including a great number of University men, who imagine that the Greeks and Latins sowed, if we may use the expression, their words at hap-hazard, leaving to their readers or auditors the task of putting them back in their proper places. Such people are ready to believe that it is for no other reason than to render possible this work of recomposition, that the words have been provided with regular terminations to answer the same purpose as numbering.

The construction of phrases in ancient languages is of course perfectly regular ; it is imitative construction. Its general law is to reproduce the very movement of things ; its order is chronological. The words follow step by step the development of the action, or of the spectacle as it unfolds itself before the eyes. The only thing which throws some slight confusion on this fact, is the more or less unconscious intervention of the personality of the poet or the scribe, who frequently substitutes, without either wishing it or even knowing it, the order of his individual sensations for the chronological order of events. He replaces objective by subjective imitation. In the deeds or visions which he describes, some parts will be found that have impressed him more vividly than others. These parts naturally and spontaneously present themselves first to his imagination. To them he gives the place of honour, to them he subordinates other points of his description, exactly as these hold a minor place in the ensemble of his impressions. This intervention of man is inevitable. Through it, he becomes a poet ; by it, are indicated his individual feelings and the peculiar bent of his genius. An undeviating respect for the chronological arrangement would destroy the work of art, leaving nothing but the *procès-verbal*.

We need not here insist upon this important statement, in which is hidden the whole theory of art. We are content for the present to grasp the established fact, that the influence of imitation, objective or subjective, is to be found even in the rule which prescribes the order of words in a sentence.

The art of writing was equally imitative in principle, if not among all peoples at least among those of the greatest antiquity. Abel Remusat, in his *Recherches sur l'origine et la formation de la langue Chinoise*, relates that Fore-hi, whom many writers consider the founder of the Chinese empire, invented the *Roua*, short broken lines, which were the elements from which have sprung the written characters still employed in China. Their various combinations could denote anything or everything, by certain strokes, recalling either immediately or by analogy, the form or use of objects, and

the origin or some other essential characteristic of ideas. A few examples will facilitate comprehension.

In Chinese one stroke means 1, two strokes mean 2, and so on, like Roman numbers. A dot over a line means *above*; under a line, it means *below*. One line cut into two equal parts by another, signifies *the middle*. Three figures of men placed in file, mean *to follow*. Two figures of women face to face, mean *dispute*. The sun behind a tree, means *the east*; a bird upon its nest, *the west*. The image of a dog has served, as radix, for the names of most of the carnivora, some forms of particular feature being indicated afterwards. The bull is the foundation for the names of the greater ruminants; the ram, of the numerous family of goats, antelopes, etc.; the image of the pig, of almost all the pachyderms; of the rat, of all rodents. The figure which means a shell, again, is the root of all the words that refer to ideas of wealth, exchange, commerce, etc., proving that the Chinese, like so many other nations, used shells for their first money.<sup>1</sup>

These figurative signs are employed, sometimes independently and isolatedly; sometimes they are complex, to render a more or less complex idea. Thus a representation of water and of an eye in juxtaposition, indicates *tears*; a door and ear express the idea of *listening*; the sun and moon indicate *splendour*. Chinese written signs "originate from a true system of imagery; we still occasionally come across them in their primitive forms upon a few monuments, and we may even now trace with much accuracy the regular course of their transformations through successive ages." In fact, "there was a time when these characters and images directly awakened—thanks to the accuracy of imitation—the idea which they were meant to express, but little by little, these artless and faithful characters lost their original form; and in the signs

<sup>1</sup> As examples of metaphysical transformation, the Chinese word *lo*, tissue, net, became in Tonquinese the written sign of the preposition *la*, which means *in*; *yang*, worm, signifies *care, disquietude*. A Chinaman meeting another, calls out: *Wonyang*, Have you any worries? Father Cibot, by confusing this word with another, *yang*, meaning *sheep*, thought that the Chinese said: "Have you the sheep, the lamb?" from which he concluded that they were awaiting the Messiah.

which are now used to convey the ideas of dog, the sun, the moon, mountain, it is not easy at first to discover the ancient forms which evoked these diverse ideas in a more direct fashion."<sup>1</sup>

The ancient Mexican, Annamite, and Egyptian characters, were equally figurative. They only replaced images by phonetic signs in times comparatively near our day. This undeniable influence of imitation upon the primitive forms of written character, does not permit us to doubt the existence of a similar influence upon the formation of spoken language. The objections that have been put forward against such an hypothesis, are founded upon an easily-understood delusion. It is forgotten that languages, in the form in which they offer themselves for our study, are the result of an intellectual activity which has lasted for perhaps a thousand centuries before coming to us, and that in such an immense period of time, they have perforce undergone an infinite series of modifications, which have effaced most of their original features, and have ended by making them irrecongnisable.

Let us suppose that all ancient records of imitative written characters had perished, who would ever have dreamed of searching in the letters of our modern alphabets for traces of direct imitation of natural objects? Assuredly no one. And yet the fact has now been conclusively demonstrated. When we reflect that writing, complicated as it was, was formerly the exclusive privilege of a few, at the time when spoken language was used by all, we shall understand how this latter must have reduced itself, and become transformed much more rapidly than written character. We must add that spoken languages must have been practised long before the invention of writing, and, besides, that the forms of sounds could never have been so precise and defined as those of lines, for whose preservation the most accurate of our organs, that of sight, was constantly on the watch. Finally, we should not forget that the articulation of primitive man must have

<sup>1</sup> The Science of Language, by Abel Hovelacque (Library of Contemporary Science, Vol. 1), London, Chapman & Hall.

been like that of children—soft, vague, and irresolute. It is not astonishing, then, that even at the epoch when the Egyptians were still engraving their hieroglyphics upon stone, most of the words of their spoken language had already put on that conventional form which now hinders us from tracing them directly to their origin; a form which written character in its turn was so soon to assume.

A very important characteristic of ancient languages was rhythm. The more or less regular recurrence of intonations and of similar cadences, constitutes for children and savages the most agreeable form of music. The more the rhythm is accented the better they are pleased; they love not only its sound but its movement also. An infant knows no sweeter sensation than when the nurse rocks its cradle to an accompaniment of one of the monotonous airs whose rhythm accords so well with the regularity of the movement. Savages who remain quite unmoved by the music, to us so inspiring, of Mozart and Beethoven, find a peculiar charm in the rude rhythm of the cymbals and the big drum, and are unable to listen to it without keeping time by dance and gesture. The most civilised nations cannot escape from this tyranny of rhythm. Who does not know how great an effect the trumpets and drums have in exciting the élan of soldiers? Animals are no less affected than men. Rhythm seems, indeed, to contain some general law, possessing power over almost all living things. One might say that rhythm is the dance of sound, as dancing is the rhythm of movement. The farther we go back into the past, the more marked and dominant is it found in language. It is certain that at one period of the development of humanity, rhythm constituted the only music known, and that it was even intertwined with language itself.

These considerations, which we have been compelled to give at some length, bring us back by a series of converging deductions to a conclusion which we have already hinted at above; that is to say, that art, far from being an artificial product of refined and perverted civilisation, is to be found in the very cradle of



humanity, and that it marks the first manifestations of man's cerebral activity.

The existence, which at first strikes us as so strange, of the ornaments and designs discovered amid the vestiges of the truly rudimentary civilisation of the stone age, can cause us no further surprise, as it is in perfect accord with the observations of science as to the primitive development of man. It is, moreover, now generally acknowledged that poetry preceded prose, and existed alone even up to historic times. The works of the more remote epochs were always in verse, the Vedas, the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Works and Days, and the Psalms. And we know, on the testimony of early writers themselves, that, in Greece, the most ancient treatises upon morality, upon jurisprudence, upon physical science, even, were also in verse, as well as the works of those natural philosophers who first attempted to explain the creation of the world and the cosmic phenomena, otherwise than by the caprices of the gods and goddesses of an anthropomorphic polytheism. The prevalence of written prose dates at most from less than a thousand years before our era, while poetic rhythm maintained itself in spoken language long after that time. These facts accord perfectly with the primitive character of human intelligence, showing it to be completely governed by the form of objects, by a but slightly modified sensibility, and by the direct impressions of things. The two groups of cerebral operations which the entologic and fantastic psychology of official spiritualism has succeeded in dividing into distinct faculties, were originally produced in the period of extreme confusion, when feeling and sense first began to lose their complete authority. We see man, at this point in his course of evolution, in a moral condition which afforded him but few ideas to express, and ever gave full play to the organs the preponderance of which produced the poet or the artist. Poetry and art, as we find them among the cave men, are very far removed from the condition in which they existed in those later years, when humanity had attained the pitch of development of the Greece of the fifth or third century

before Christ, or of Western Europe after the long and dark period of incubation of the middle ages. None the less truly can we say of man that, ever since the first days, that which took the lead in the manifestation of his cerebral activity, was the germ of precisely the same faculty as that which, in the development and progress towards truth of succeeding ages, was to constitute art, strictly speaking.

We shall now attempt to follow and explain this development. We have examined the characteristics of language and writing in ancient times, and are able to say that the arts, in a more or less latent state, were contained in them. They were then at least in a potential condition. We shall see how they emerged from this obscurity.

§ 3. *The principal forms of Art grow, by a process of continuous duplication, from written and spoken Language.*

Man, like other animals, possessed from his commencement two means of expression to make known the feelings of grief and of joy; namely, cry and gesture. He had then the faculty of production of sounds and of forms, the material and elementary conditions of all the arts. But that by which he was distinguished from other animals was, first, his faculty, at least potential, of varying and diversifying these forms and sounds to an infinite extent: secondly, his desire to imitate, with voice and gesture, the noises and movements which he heard and saw. He is a born mimic; and we know that even if imitation should not hold the absolute and almost unique preponderance in the theory of the arts attributed to it by some systems, still it is a necessary condition of a great many artistic manifestations.

Besides the variety of intonation, more or less expressive and lifelike, spoken language was doubtless at first accompanied by a kind of mimicry which acted as a perpetual commentary—discourse being addressed to the eye as well as to the ear. Such an accompaniment is so natural that we still retain it among our modern habits. In rhetoric it possesses very considerable

importance ; in the speech of children gesture and mimicry long hold the place of words.

As we have already explained, the same characteristic is to be found in primeval writing. To convey the idea of objects, men began by giving images of them. This figurative written character, necessarily very ancient, has, as one of its never failing features, an extreme complexity. All analysis is wanting in it, except so much as suffices for the distinction of objects. Such a mode of writing should be looked upon as conclusive evidence of the nature of any languages which could be expressed by it. Each object was denoted by a phonetic sign more or less imitative : these signs were arranged in sentences, as in the ancient hieroglyphic monuments. Thought, always concrete, expressed itself by emitting the signs in speech, as well as in writing, in the exact order in which they were disposed in the memory. The auditor or reader determined the connection of the ideas as well as he could, without other data than the succession of the terms, that is, of the images.

Nevertheless, he generally succeeded, because the amount of precision possessed by such a language exactly coincided with that of contemporary intelligenec. What causes us some difficulty is the infinite number of possible connections, which the analysis of our impressions has taught us to discover between things, as well as the nearly inexhaustible multitude of the different points of view from which we are able to consider every object or even part of an object. We do not know where to stop, and often the explanations which in the present state of our cerebral constitution, seem to us the most natural, are exactly those which could never have been foreseen by the unsophisticated authors of the enigmas that puzzle us. Our intellects, in modifying themselves, have concurrently changed all other things. The causes of doubt, which make hieroglyphics so difficult for us to decipher, did not exist for the ancients. Their minds, themselves vague and confused, were satisfied with what was vague and confused. Also, in the primitive form of languages, the general connection of mere

succession was enough for all purposes. Other connections were not indicated in the representative signs of things, because they were not perceived *between* objects, but were thought to form part of the objects themselves.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This conception, which has set an indelible mark upon language, is the foundation of Aristotle's doctrine of ideas. According to him, all things exist with natures and individual characteristics of their own. These characters are communicated from the things to man, as life is communicated from God to the world. The impression which I receive in the presence of an object is a part of the object; the idea which I conceive in looking at it is derived from it and belongs to it. A sight that frightens me does not produce this effect in virtue of a certain predisposition of my temperament, which, indeed, may be quite different. It is the sight itself that is terrifying. The aspect is part of its individual nature, nor will it cease to be terrifying when it is no longer seen by any one. The terror which I feel is but a species of contagion spreading from the object to me. Thus it was that, according to ancient belief, the sight of a crime polluted all bystanders and rendered them, too, criminals. The crime is in the act, not in the agent, and the criminality is communicated from the act to the agent, whether he is a voluntary one or not. It was in virtue of such a belief that the crime of one man, even when committed in ignorance, as in the case of the myth of *Œdipus*, was thought to enfold in the same culpability, not only himself, but his family, his city, and his native country. It was thought necessary that some subsequent act of a contrary nature should by its beneficent influence annul the dire consequences of the first. Hence arose purifications and expiations. This was the foundation of all the religious and moral doctrines of antiquity.

According to Aristotle, the mutual relations of generalisation and universality are comprised in each individual, and in virtue of them the individual merits the attention of the philosopher and artist, of which he would otherwise be quite unworthy. This is as much as to say that the human intellect is reduced to play a purely passive part. All the philosophers agree on this point. According to Plato it is the ideal, the divine types of things which domineer over us; according to Aristotle it is the things themselves. Whether we grant that the intellect takes its impression of things from their prototypes, or receives it as a species of contagion from the things themselves, in either case the intellect is no more than a mirror to reflect images in whose manufacture it has had no share. It gives but a reflection of objects and ideas, whose character, to it, is essentially change. By similar reasoning we must consider an idea to be immutable and irresistible; and, as it is impersonal, it is therefore universal and eternal. Every man placed in any given situation, would receive the same impression, the same idea, and come to the same judgment, as such impression, idea, and judgment are not the outcome of different intellects, but simply the repeated echo of the same thing. Hence arises the necessity for uniformity, imposed upon all intellects under the name of *common sense*, as if it were a law, the number of suffrages which it receives being deemed a proof of its truth. From this comes the

The desire for precision and lucidity is always in exact proportion to the development of the intellect, and it is by this sign that we are chiefly able to recognise and measure the different steps through which human evolution has to pass. It is in consequence of this evolution that a time arrives when language and descriptive writing can no longer satisfy the wants of the intellect. Certain ideas begin by a purely intellectual activity to take abstract and generalised forms, and by so doing render themselves incapable of a purely imitative representation. At the same time an intellectual movement is taking place, the results of which, in appearance contradictory, enforce new distinctions. The power of analysis, gradually developing itself by the multiplicity of experiences and sensations, makes the eye more exacting as to accuracy in the imitation of objects, and complicates imitative writing, once concise enough, with a confusing mass of detail. Meanwhile, this analysis begins to distinguish the mutual relations of objects, and also the peculiarities of each, and so connections of things, which direct imitation is powerless to represent. So that on the one hand it increases the difficulties of imitative expression by completing the perception of physical character; on the other, it obscures and overwhelms these very characteristics with a crowd of purely intellectual conceptions. We must then divine new modes of expression more *en rapport* with the new state of intelligence; that is to say, modes where the purely objective element plays a minor part, and which are able to accommodate themselves with more docility and suppleness to all the requirements of thought.

Conventional signs only were able to meet the necessity. They

contempt for the minority which could only deny its enlightenment by a hateful pandering to dishonesty; also every form of intolerance in religion, in politics, in morals, in literature, and even in art. The universal tyranny of academic dogma, the anathemas launched against any one attempting to free himself from its trammels, are to be explained by similar reasons. All innovators, no matter in what pursuit, have been the victims of this strange doctrine. Delacroix, the greatest genius among modern painters, would not have been so long slighted and abused but that he refused to submit his individuality to the decisions of official mediocrities, who chanced to be placed in the position of his judges.

were found without trouble, they rather offered and forced themselves upon us, long, no doubt, before the progress of intellectual analysis had rendered them absolutely indispensable.

The growing frequency of the employment of signs, and the progressive influence of the idea upon the imitative sign, caused the abridgment of the latter. It lost, little by little, its purely representative value, and ended in being reduced to an unrecognisable symbol, which had the advantage of readily lending itself to all the modifications of meaning which it was desired to impose upon it. From the moment that the object, primarily represented, was lost sight of, it became possible, thanks to a series of easily understood modifications and eliminations, which acted spontaneously, to arrive at the conception of the phonetic symbol, and next at the alphabet, a combination of letters which, instead of recalling objects to the eye, only presents them to the memory by arrangements, the laws of which need not here detain us. It is hardly necessary to say that this transformation in written character was subsequent to an analogous modification in spoken language; but it would seem difficult to admit that the interval between these two reforms could have extended over several centuries.

Once that language and writing were reduced to combinations of conventional sounds and symbols, abstract and general ideas quickly demanded a mode of expression of their own. Again, by opposition, concrete and personal impressions constituted the proper domain of poetry and the arts. Rhythm and the figurative symbol were abandoned in ordinary speech and writing, the proper office of which from that time was to express those intellectual results to which neither rhythm nor imagery could add anything.

This divorce between poetry and prose acquired ever increasing emphasis, both in the thoughts of man and in his means of expressing them. The domain of prose extends itself to all that relates to everyday facts, and to that infinite multitude of sensations to which constant habit renders us indifferent, but which may be called the tramway of our current existence. Prose was reserved too for the expression of the ideas which, though born

of sensation, undergo in the brain a series of transformations, that renders them more or less incapable of imitative representation. We need not, however, think that such forms of language proceeded from a new creation, or derived their construction from elements other than those which had already served for the direct representations. Words taken by themselves remain attached by their origin to visible entities. In analysing the terms which already appear consecrated to the expression of purely intellectual operations, it is easy in most cases to discover at their root the physical conceptions in which they had their birth. But their indicative power has been more and more attenuated and exhausted by the length of time during which they have been applied to the expression of ideas. Again, these latter, in progressively detaching themselves from their perceptible point of departure, have carried their word signs with them in the movement, and have ended by substituting their stamp for that of facts themselves. So much so, that it now frequently requires an effort of intellect and careful study to discover the first under the second. It is a task analogous to that of deciphering Greek and Latin manuscripts in palimpsests from beneath the handwriting of the monks of the middle ages. But this intellectual activity, while performing its part in the mind of man, and among the means of expression which he possesses, has never been able to suppress the emotional development of his nature. He has remained as capable of feeling and of passion as ever he was. We might even venture to say that feeling and passion have with him grown in power and excitability as much as intellectual life has increased in intensity, and as the progress of analysis has taught him to seize a greater number of points of harmony between himself and his surroundings. The sensibility of children is apt to deceive us. They are very impressionable upon certain narrow sides of their characters, but they have no depth. The very instability of their emotions, and the facility with which they rush from one sentiment to another, clearly show that in them nearly everything is but surface deep. A trifle excites them, a trifle calms them.

Their mental convulsions are but storms in a glass of water. The readiness with which they allow themselves to be carried away in any direction springs rather from want of equilibrium, than from depth of impulse. Again, the child is only moved by that which acts directly upon him. He is completely and peculiarly the slave of an artless egotism, which it would be absurd to call a fault, as it is the necessary effect of his physical and intellectual feebleness, but which does not any the less decidedly limit the scope of his sensibility.

Man, on the contrary, when he arrives at the normal development of his moral and physical nature, acquires the power of embracing a much more extensive horizon. It follows that in addition to the feelings and passions which spring from his constitution, and which are more especially instincts (as, for example, all which relate to self-preservation and the propagation of his species), and those which arise from his surroundings and habits (such as love of family, of country, of humanity), passion itself must be placed among the sciences, from which he demands the satisfaction, not only of the intellectual wants that, at a point in his development, become perhaps his most salient characteristic, but also of his desire for the best in everything; the latter being the supreme disposer of his activity, and, in fact, his point of departure and the cause of all progress in every branch of human knowledge. Man was without all this during the period when, like a child, he lived enclosed in the narrow circle of an unconscious egotism. The instinct of self-preservation was almost his only guide, and it restricted him to a monotonous round of never-varying emotions. Love itself was without poetry; and the family affections, so powerful over civilised man, only began to give him a new source of feeling, as a result of intellectual activity.

Thus, then, the effort that served to disengage the purely logical and intellectual faculties from their early confusion, was no less beneficial to the other powers of man. As those faculties became distinct they acquired precision. While the language of the former was achieving its freedom from the imitative forms,



which had become only an embarrassment to it, that of the latter inherited the abandoned signs, and fitted them gradually to its own use. Instead of being attenuated, they became complete and accurate, and little by little they grew in reality and *vraisemblance*. Their alphabet was made up of all forms, all colours, every attitude of the body, every accidental disposition of light, every combination of sound, all lines or rhythms that could either procure pleasure for the eye and ear, or express a meaning to the intellect. So the mere perfection of imitation often seems to become a chief cause of the æsthetic pleasure that some human works give us ; although, as a fact, imitation is neither the cause nor the aim of art.

It is, however, the medium ; which is enough to account for its continual progress in accuracy, completeness, and minuteness, in proportion as man's intellect, polished by incessant observation and analysis, successively discovered, in the nature of things, a crowd of elements which had long escaped him, especially in the infinite and ever changing domain of light. So, by the progress of time which, in developing the various means of man's activity, accentuated his natural aptitudes and distinguished them one from another, art has gradually disengaged itself from the surroundings which were not of it.

The written and spoken language of the primitive times when such distinctions did not exist, were each duplicated to satisfy the requirements of this progressive modification. Intellectual operations, which above all need subtle and easily handled instruments, created, for their special use, arrangements of more or less conventional signs, written and spoken, which constitute alphabets and prose. The impressions of sensational life, on the other hand, find expression through those symbols and categories in which convention plays a minor part, whose main characteristic is the power to excite feelings and sentiments by the exhibition of images or sounds acting more or less directly upon the senses. This power is the distinguishing characteristic of art.

The arts which, following the course of intellectual analysis,

have evidently disengaged themselves spontaneously from the spoken and written language of primitive ages, with which they were once intimately mingled, are in one class, music and poetry, in the other, sculpture and painting. These two groups are naturally defined: by their means of expression—the former acting upon the ear, the latter upon the eye; by the difference in their derivations—the one from spoken, the other from written, language; by the diversity of the intellectual wants to which they especially respond—movement or order, whose æsthetic manifestations are, respectively, rhythm and proportion; and, finally, by their relations to the ideas of time—succession or simultaneity.

These characteristics might be multiplied, but we shall content ourselves by pointing out the most salient. Without attaching more importance to these distinctions than they deserve, we believe that they may be found very useful; as in every classification, they compel precision in enumerating certain special traits, the confusion of which might cause great inconvenience.

We have still to mention two arts which are now of very unequal importance, though the ancients gave them almost equal rank. Their origin cannot be directly traced to either forms of language; and we may at first sight find some difficulty in fitting either of them into the foregoing classification. The dance, for instance, so evidently appealing to the eye through the gestures and attitudes of which it consists, is also attached to the arts proper to the ear, by the rhythm which governs and directs its movements. It would seem quite as difficult to disengage any language from architecture, which lends itself but little to any theory that would consider it a purely symbolic art.

But both these arts show such analogies with one or other of our two groups, that we can have no hesitation with which to class them. The dance chiefly calls up ideas of movement, of rhythm, of succession, while architecture is more directly connected with those of order, proportion, and simultaneousness. We must, however, not omit to say that rhythm, more palpable, indeed, and more marked in those arts which appeal to the ear, is not their

exclusive property. By an easily understood extension of meaning, its peculiar modes of expression are often applied to the arts of sight; forms have their rhythm just as movements and attitudes, which are in fact no more than forms, are equally subject to the laws of proportion. Movement, which at first sight seems peculiar to music and dancing, is far from being irreconcilable with the apparent immobility of sculpture and painting. Architecture, on the other hand, if not derived from written language, goes back naturally to a common origin with it, linear composition and design being common to both.

Finally then, subject to the modified exceptions which we have instanced, we may arrange all under the following classification.

<i>Hearing.</i>		
Spoken Language	}	Poetry, Music,—Dancing.
Movement		
Rhythm		
Succession		
 <i>Sight.</i>		
Written Language	}	Sculpture, Painting,—Architecture.
Order		
Proportion		
Simultaneousness		

#### § 4. *Résumé.*—*Art essentially subjective.*

We think we have now clearly shown that art, far from being the artificial result of a fortuitous combination of circumstances, which might never have happened at all, is a spontaneous product, the immediate and necessary outcome of human activity. It is an indication of a want of comprehension of its great importance, to attempt to refer it to a special manifestation of some particular and more or less restricted faculty. In reality it is nothing less than the direct expression of man's nature in its most simple and human aspect. Art, we may truly say, came before thought itself.

Before he ever attempted to understand or explain the conditions of the world in which he lived, man, open to pleasure through his eyes and ears, sought in combinations of forms, sounds, movements, shadow and light, for certain special enjoyments. Traces of these early aspirations are extant in the recently discovered works of a time when his intellectual activity must have been confined within very narrow scope.

It is a very remarkable fact that, from the first day of his existence, mere imitation did not satisfy him. Side by side with the dead bones upon which we can to this day recognize figures of animals more or less rudely imitated, have been found bracelets, necklets, and other ornaments, the design of which proves voluntary and personal search after imaginary forms. Weapons of stone, to be used either in warfare or the chase, exhibit a variety of forms, and occasionally an elegance of shape and decoration, which, adding nothing to their utility for attack or defence, must have proceeded from a purely Æsthetic motive.

The art of the cave-dwellers, then, was already personal, and, though they made use of imitation, they were no slaves to it. The fact is very important, and it would, in all probability, be confirmed by the other artistic manifestations of the same epoch, could we acquire information as to the contemporary forms of dancing, music, and poetry.

When man, by the exercise of his cerebral faculties, became capable of thought, and transferred to a new purpose the means of expression, that so far had only served him to make known his animal feelings and his natural wants, the rôle of art did not become less important. On the contrary, such a duplication of human activity gave it a new impulse, creating in it, as the effect of opposition, a more precise knowledge of the constituent elements of art, and of each of the arts separately. Primitive confusion gave place to a series of distinct creations, which sprung equally from personal emotion, and from the necessity of affording it gratification by some ever spontaneous expression, more or less immediate, according to the intrinsic character of the emotion and

the greater or less complexity and exteriority of its means of making itself known.

Singing and dancing reduced to cry and gesture, are but the interpretation of joy, triumph, and similar emotions. Expression by means of sculpture and painting is less direct, because the process is exterior and more complex; the emotions, too, which these interpret are much less simple. Dances and songs themselves become very complicated, when to the indication of natural emotion is added, or substituted, artistic refinement of movement or attitude, or the portrayal of any complex idea. The skilful diversity of our opera ballets, the development of passion or character in epic and dramatic poetry, although contained in embryo in the cry or gesture by which a child can express its feelings, evidently result from a series of combinations for which it would be absurd to search among the products of prehistoric arts. They imply a development which is only rendered possible by the intervention of the spirit of analysis and reflection.

That which is true of dancing and singing—which include music and poetry—applies still more strongly to sculpture, architecture, and painting. The mere existence of these arts, even in their simplest forms, is enough to prove that in every age man has found peculiar pleasure in certain combinations of line and colour. But in what state would these arts have been to-day, had not the development of our purely intellectual faculties enlarged, in every sense, the field of our activity and multiplied to infinity the source of our emotions?

We shall not consider in detail all the arguments which we could adduce to support our contention. What we have said is enough to make it understood that, from the beginning, all arts, even those which seem slaves to mere imitation, were essentially manifestations of the personality of man, spontaneous effects of the instinct that drives all living things to express their emotions by exterior signs, and to seek the augmentation of their pleasures—the instinct which, in man particularly, finds gratification through the inexhaustible faculty of combination and

appropriation, whose infinite multiplicity constitutes his superiority over all other animals.

It is easy to understand how the evolution of this personality and of the faculty which is its distinctive attribute, carries with it a corresponding development of art, as of other things. Hence we are able to draw a novel conclusion, which we must next notice:—As art was one of the earliest manifestations of human activity; as it was from its beginning the spontaneous expression of the pleasure felt by man in viewing certain forms and lines and in hearing certain sounds, even before the exercise and growth of his intellectual faculties had rendered him capable of conceiving and combining ideas; as, in fact, we can definitely ascertain that such exercise and growth did no more, even in the earliest times, than impart a new impulse to his art faculties—we can see no reason to suppose that, so long as such progress continues, analogous effects will cease to flow from it.

In a word, if it be true, as we believe, that art is but the awakened expression of the individuality of man, it would seem difficult to understand how, except from causes either accidental or exterior to art itself, that personality, in becoming complete, strong, and perfect, in acquiring an increased store of self knowledge, should lose by the same process such power of expression as it possessed when it was still vague and undefined, when its own nature and emotions were but little known and understood.

## CHAPTER II.

## SOURCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ÆSTHETIC PLEASURE.

§ 1. *Physiological Conditions : Sensations caused by the vibration of sonorous and luminous molecules—Growth of cerebral activity.*

WE know that from a very remote antiquity, which the most timid estimates put at three or four thousand years ago, man has ever possessed an æsthetic feeling sufficiently pronounced to mark his preference for certain combinations of lines, shapes, colours, movements, and sounds. These preferences became gradually distinct and manifest in proportion as man became conscious of his own sensations. They found, for their interpretation, successive processes each more perfect than the last, which, as they grouped themselves into categories, constituted in turn each of the arts as we see them to day.

We must try to discover the rule that determines such preferences.

If we were to ask a drunkard why he likes two glasses of wine better than one, or why he prefers good wine to bad or indifferent, he would answer at once that two pleasures are better than one, and that he likes good wine on account of the pleasure it gives him to drink it.

Whence comes the sensation of pleasure? It comes from the excitation of the sensory nerves, from the putting in motion of their special activity ; it is in fact a more or less localised stimulation of life. This stimulation can be imparted to the organs of the moral and intellectual, as well as to those of the physical life.

The pleasure felt by the student in adding to the number of his ideas and perceptions, and in the exercise of those cerebral organs whose play constitutes intellectual life; that which the artist experiences in fostering the intensity and number of his æsthetic sensations; cannot be distinguished, physiologically, from that of the drunkard or gourmet, except by the difference of the organs brought into play.

The physiological distinction and locality of these organs or nervous centres are not yet established with absolute certainty, on account of the difficulties in the way of experiment; but we may say that the investigation is already far enough advanced to preclude any further hesitation as to its method. The results which have been obtained all point so exactly in the same direction, that, in embarking on such an inquiry as the present, we need have no fear of self deception. We now know as a scientific fact that every faculty considered distinct by psychologists has its own particular organ in the brain. The complexity and multiplicity of these organs are such that no man can foresee how far the work of localisation may ultimately extend.

The organ of hearing, for example, is composed of an infinite number of filaments which terminate in the bony hollow of the labyrinth, where they are dipped in a peculiar liquid. These fibres may be counted by help of the microscope, and amount to three thousand in number; that is to say, the nerve keyboard of the ear possesses no less than three thousand notes, while that of man's devising has only eighty-four. We can easily see what power and subtlety of analysis such an organ must possess; and how, with a little practice, it becomes an easy matter for it to distinguish, not only the notes themselves, but the whole crowd of harmonies which constitute the differences of tone, and accessory notes caused by the juxtaposition of different sounds. This dust composed of sonorous molecules, is perceptible to the ear just as, to the eye, are the multitudinous and luminous atoms which tumble and toss in a sunbeam, when it penetrates through some small opening into a darkened room.



But, notwithstanding its audacity, modern orchestration cannot put in movement three thousand different sonorous molecules. We might think that any such attempt could only result in a disagreeable confusion. But who would dare to affirm that, with sufficient training, the ear of man could not be rendered capable of enduring even such a concert as this? When once we have ascertained that this organ possesses no less than three thousand auditory fibres, there is nothing that can logically negative the hope, that we may some day discover means to strike all these fibres simultaneously, each with its own special and distinct vibrations, and so produce an impression of intensity proportioned to our powers of hearing. We see, then, what a field is still left open to the art of the musician.<sup>1</sup>

It is nearly certain that the sensation of light, like that of sound, is produced by a luminous wave, which causes the fibres of the optic nerve to vibrate in unison with it, just as the sonorous wave acts upon those of the auditory nerve. Consequently, sensations are simple or complex according as they are the result of one or of many simultaneous vibrations. We may conclude, then, that the first causes of sensation have been traced to the movements of luminous or sonorous molecules.

By the light of this scientific fact we are enabled to explain certain phenomena, as, for instance, the intensity of sensations.

It is admitted that the source of pleasure lies in the excitation of those organs whose activity constitutes what is called vital power. This is as much as to say that pleasure essentially consists in an increase of vital activity. It is then easy to understand that the more numerous the fibres which vibrate

<sup>1</sup> The ear is able to receive a sound caused by 38,000 vibrations. But the highest note ever employed is the high D of the piccolo, which is the result of 4,752 vibrations in the second. We see then the difference between what is possible and what has been done. It is true that a rapidity of 38,000 vibrations to the second produces a noise which rends the ear, and is, therefore, anything rather than musical. But still we cannot conclude that, because, at present, our orchestras do not exceed 4,752 vibrations, they will never do so. Of all our organs, the ear is perhaps the most supple and trainable.

simultaneously, the more vivid will be the resulting sensations; on condition always that the vibrations are in sufficient concord to prevent their destroying or neutralising each other. Sonorous or luminous waves meeting under certain conditions produce silence or shadow. Such dissonances produce what is called in music *battements*, which irritate the auditory nerves just as intermittent light fatigues the eye.

On the other hand, if the movements of the excited molecules are confused, of unequal duration and intensity, they only cause *noise*. What we mean by *sound* is only possible when these movements are rhythmic and continuous for some appreciable time. Consequently, if we admit that a line, a form, a colour, a movement, a sound with its fundamentals and harmonics, can cause a certain number of the fibres of the optic or auditory nerves to vibrate in concord, and can therefore provide a pleasure for us,<sup>1</sup> we are naturally brought to the conclusion, that the intensity of these sensations grows with the number of fibres put into simultaneous motion, and with the volume or rapidity of their vibrations.

It is not at all necessary, however, that all simultaneous vibrations should be identical. It is sufficient to cause intensity of sensation, that unison exists among a certain number of them, so as to form groups. If these groups do not mutually destroy each other, but are superimposed and organised, they give us double pleasure by adding variety in the vibrating groups to the intensity of the vibrations.

We have then the three fundamental conditions of pleasure: intensity, variety, and concord of vibrations, that is to say, of the elements constituting sensation.

These observations are equally just when applied to the arts appealing to sight, as when referred to music and the dance.

<sup>1</sup> Absolute silence is positive pain to the ear; I mean the silence which exists in depths of a mine where no work is going on, or on the summit of high snowy mountains devoid of vegetation, where the air is perfectly calm. It is the imperious craving for activity that causes hallucinations of the ear, as the darkness of night makes us see visions.

§ 2. *Psychologic conditions : Logical unity—Diversity—Opposition—Repetition—The straight line—The curve—Oblique lines—Horizontal lines.*

Poetry is the only art that may seem to be in some degree an exception, on account of the faculty which it alone possesses to directly express sentiments and ideas. It is clear that, by reason of the musical part of its nature, by its rhythm, its melody, and its intonation, it again comes under the general category, and proceeds like the other arts, by vibrations. But it has not so far been determined with sufficient scientific precision, which of the nervous fibres produce, by their vibration, our sentiments and ideas, to enable us definitely to localise poetic means of action. We can only say for certain that their final determination does not appear to be beyond the power of contemporary science.

But, as we need not attempt any detailed examination of the special organs of each artistic group—it being sufficient for our purpose to ascertain that their action results from a series of nervous vibrations—we shall not establish a separate category for poetry, as we are convinced that such a distinction would have no foundation in fact.

The harmonious concord of vibrations, which is one of the essential conditions of æsthetic pleasure, should find an auxiliary in the final unity of motive that gives birth to a work of art. Upon this principle rest all the rules of composition. Just as, for the satisfaction of the eye, a picture or a statue requires the presence of some general pervading idea to fuse its lines and colours into an harmonious whole, so does the logic of the intellect require for its satisfaction, the power to unite into a single group the diversity of the thoughts expressed by the different parts of a work. A poem or picture which is without unity offends the intellect as a wrong note offends the ear, as the juxtaposition of discordant colours offends the eye. Whatever other merits a work may possess, such a fault suffices to break its impression, to make it

intermittent, and to prevent its attainment of that intensity which constitutes æsthetic pleasure.

We have seen what influence different arrangements and combinations can exercise upon that pleasure. Opposition and repetition are no less powerful. The uniformity or even the slow gradation of impressions, fit for the expression of certain sentiments of lasting grief or of solemn majesty, would have in most cases the certain effect of benumbing and lulling all sensibility to sleep. Opposition, on the other hand, provokes sharp attention and keeps the mind on the *qui vive* by contrasting impressions. To give an example. The Shakspearian drama, by combining opposing characters and sentiments with the logical sequence of events, succeeds in producing incomparably powerful effects, effects to which the regular and uniform progression of classic tragedy was never equal. So also in music, similar results follow from the skilful use of discord ; and in painting from the contrast of light and shade, from diverse and opposing attitudes and physiognomies. Repetition also, which has been called the most powerful of the figures of rhetoric, is often a most efficacious means of impulsion in a determined direction. Molière frequently makes use of it. We all know the effect produced upon an audience by the words "*Sans dot !*" "*Le pauvre homme.*" "*Je ne dis pas cela.*" In Victor Hugo's famous play "*L'Expiação,*" the repetition of the words "*Il neigeait !*" has the effect of a funeral knell, and concentrates the impression into an absorbing unity. In architecture, the repetition of similar forms, combined with the opposition of voids and solids, points and determines with singular power the special character of an edifice. In national ballads and popular songs, the refrain plays a principal part. Rhyme, in French verse, and rhythm in the music and poetry of all times, are also important examples of repetition.

These principles applied to form, colour, sound, and movement result in vigorous accentuation, by deliberate or instinctive exaggeration, of the special impression of each movement, sound, colour, or form.

Pythagoras considered the straight line to be the emblem of eternity, because it never undergoes any change in form, and because it presents itself to our intellect as capable of infinite extension, without our being aware of any logical reason to prevent such prolongation. The curve, on the other hand, suggests the idea of something finite, because its ideal development would necessarily bring it to the circle. Hence comes the following deduction: that the combination of these two lines, symbolic of the union of the finite with the infinite, is the line of beauty *par excellence*, as we meet with it in the works of human hands and brains.

Such fantastic symbolism, so pleasing to classic imagination, has now no interest but for metaphysicians. It is true that a straight line, when sufficiently prolonged and especially when it is vertical, gives rise to an idea of grandeur, because then it seems to be more or less lost in the clouds, and is not easily grasped or measured by the eye. We may observe also that it marks the idea of unity; and this is so true that among all races and nations the figure that signifies *one* is a straight line. In alphabets, the most shrill, the most singular of vowels, is expressed by the same sign. Something more than chance determined the choice; the points of resemblance were suggested by an impression which, though latent, was none the less real. It is but natural that mankind should take no count of the motives for its preferences; especially in those times when psychological analysis had not yet created a habit of self-examination, or refined, by use, their instruments of observation. But, in former days, just as much as now, such preferences were only put into action with some definite, though more or less unconscious reason for their choice.

If the straight line be the universal mark of unity, is it, as has been often said, because there is but one straight line? When it is attempted to reason out the very spontaneous impressions which arise from the sight of a simple straight line, I repudiate, frankly, all explanations which suppose any anterior process of reasoning. I thoroughly believe, moreover, that the idea of unity connected with that of a straight line, is an impression springing entirely

from the unity of the vibrations communicated to the optic nerve. I have remarked that a single note, sounded for any length of time, produces upon the ear an impression precisely similar to that which a straight line causes upon the eye. Wherefore we soon get tired of straight lines, just as we do of a single note.

The curve, on the other hand, soothes and pleases us by the variety of its impressions, and by the easy gradation which permits of an almost unconscious passage from one impression to another; just as the gentle progression of melody has a peculiar charm for the ear, especially when it relieves that organ of the tension caused by any single note.<sup>1</sup>

The exaggeration and uniformity of curves are much less wearying to us than an abuse of the straight line. The rococo style, as practised in the last century by Meissonier, repels us by the trickiness, tameness, and affectation of its contortions; but it is distinctly less fatiguing than the stiff and angular style of the Empire.

The serpentine line, so extolled by Hogarth, unites, we may say, the two elements of variety and unity: it combines rigidity and softness, and produces a superior harmony which is, in fact, what is called grace.

<sup>1</sup> To thoroughly comprehend all these inquiries it is necessary to consider them entirely as questions of physiology, and to realize that the organs of sight and hearing are of no different nature or constitution from those of locomotion, of prehension, of taste, or of smell. Any attitude persisted in for long, causes fatigue; every physical effort must be followed either by repose or by a counter-acting effort. Condemn a man to the continual presence of but one smell or taste, and, however agreeable it may be at first, it will soon become repugnant to him. Make him keep his fist clenched or his leg bent for a short time, and it will soon become nothing less than torment. All who have practised mountaineering to any extent must have noticed how much less fatigued they feel at the end of a hard day, notwithstanding the steep ascents, than at the end of a long march on the flat. Why? Because the varying steepness of the slopes brings different muscles successively into play, so that each of them can break its toil by intervals of rest of greater or less duration. The muscles that are required for the effort of climbing are quite separate from those which work during a descent. This variety is one of the charms of mountaineering. The necessity for a similar diversity in æsthetic pleasure is to be explained by similar physiological reasons.

We must observe that this "line of beauty," as it has been called, joins to its other advantages that of being the line of life *par excellence*. All living things, whether animal or vegetable, display more or less the serpentine line; when it is not in their shape, it is to be found in their movements. So then, it not only affords to our impressionability an occasion for agreeable activity, which we can prolong without fatigue, but also adds the charm due to that sympathetic attraction which we feel for every manifestation of life.

We need not believe, however, that the serpentine line contains in itself, as has been often averred, every element of beauty. If such an assertion were true, nothing would be more beautiful than a snake gliding through the grass. But this line, notwithstanding its complexity, does not exhaust our sensibility. Its effect does not even attain its full intensity until it finds a kind of impetus by combination with other and different lines and forms, as in a beautiful female statue,<sup>1</sup> especially when this forms a part of a group whose ensemble offers lines of greater severity.

Our habit of observing the human figure has a good deal to do with the significance which we attach to this or that disposition of line. Thus we notice that in smiling, the corners of the mouth are raised, the nostrils dilate, and the skin, wrinkling itself at the temples, draws up the corners of the eyes; while exactly opposite effects are produced by sorrow. The result is that oblique lines produce upon us impressions analogous to those noted in these two cases. Obliquity from below upwards symbolizes for us expansion, gaiety, voluptuousness, inconstancy; obliquity from above downwards expresses concentration, and the ideas connected with sorrow, meditation, coldness, and haughtiness. Consequently, as we can easily understand, the purely horizontal line becomes for

<sup>1</sup> We may give as an example the beautiful figure of *Youth* executed by M. Chapu for the monument to Henri Regnault. The straight lines of the monument itself, behind *Youth*, count for something in the effect produced by the graceful curves of that statue. To this line was due the success of *La Source*, by Ingres, notwithstanding the faults that may be found in the work. It is without those oppositions which add so much to the beauty of the *Youth*.

us a symbol of calmness, and equilibrium, of duration and of wisdom.

We find confirmation of these remarks in architecture. The great horizontal lines formed by regular layers of worked stone, as in the huge temples of Egypt, give an impression of solidity, of duration to eternity. Nothing, on the other hand, can be gayer than the pagodas of the Chinese, with their roofs curled upwards at the extremities ; a graceful combination of the curve and the oblique. This form is to be found also in the shape of their shoes, and of their head-dresses, and, stranger still, in the features of their faces. Again, nothing can be more doleful than the immense roofs of the countries of snow and ice, whose sides descend nearly to the ground by two dull and rigid lines, forming an acute angle, and stretching out from the side-walls as if to enclose and smother the houses which they protect. This mode of construction still prevails in northern climes. A century ago no other was employed in the villages. The houses, which were nothing but a ground floor, disappeared beneath the thick and heavy thatched roofs, the projection of which kept out the day and gave them the appearance of being covered by an extinguisher.

It is easily understood how the deliberate and clearly meant predominance of one or the other of these lines can determine, with great precision, what impression a work of art shall produce, while their skilful combination can soften or modify it to the taste of the artist. But there is as much danger in exaggeration in the one direction as in the other. If the too frequent repetition of similar lines repels by its monotony, the abuse of contrasting lines ends in a neutralisation of one impression by another ; that is to say, in a total want of meaning.

An analysis, like that which we have just attempted of lines, might also be made of sounds, colours, movements, etc. Such a task, however, would soon become wearisome from the repetitions which it would necessitate. Besides we should be teaching nothing. Every one knows that the signification of sounds, colours, movements varies to infinity. If we have paused too



long over the expressive power of lines, it is just because their value as a means of expression, and their manifold effects upon the cerebral organs are generally much less understood than those of the other signs through which our motions and characteristics find manifestation. Every one knows the expressive power of music. What man is there who, when he sees groups of dancers, male and female,—and we must not forget that in the full sense of the word, the dance includes both the bounds and abandoned leaps of the bacchantes and the solemn movements of the Panathenæic procession,—does not perceive the general character of the movements in which they indulge? The sensations awakened by colour are no less lively and distinct. A child, ignorant of the æsthetic significance of lines, is won at once by the brilliant variety of coloured prints.

§ 3. *Life—Expression in Greek art—Choice of subject in works of art—Morality in art.*

There is another thing that strikes and interests our intellect still more than all the combinations of lines, sounds, movements, colours, etc., and that is life, which comprehends and surpasses them all; life, which is the final and most complete expression of unity enlivened by variety, adding to them, activity and progressive development; without counting its other advantage, an immense one, that it represents something that interests us by inspiring us with instinctive sympathy. Life in repose, as in antique sculpture, attracts and charms us. Life in action, not only in a single person, but in a number of men more or less considerable, and of grouped or contrasted movements in an ensemble whose linear and logical unity is achieved by the unity of colour and of lighting which envelops them; the life, in fact, that can give us either the progression of poetry or the simultaneity of painting: this is what represents to us the perfection of art, because here it shines with a power of expressive harmony beyond which our imaginations cannot go.

We may see that in art, to speak literally, everything is a

medium of some expression, in the art of antiquity as in that of modern times. It may not perhaps be superfluous to note this fact, and to give an exact definition of the meaning of the term, which colloquial language tends to restrict to a much too narrow signification. Every line, straight or curved, vertical or horizontal, oblique or perpendicular, carries with it an impression, and consequently a particular impression. This fact does not prevent our hearing it repeated every day that the unique aim of antique art was abstract beauty, while that of modern art is, above all, expression.

Must we then conclude that the lines which give an impression of beauty are, from that very fact, wanting in expression? This we can hardly believe.

To begin with, the fact upon which such a distinction is founded, is far from being strictly true. Ancient art, even in sculpture, did not aim exclusively at the representation of abstract beauty. The Greeks have left us a great number of works whose more or less unflinching realism has nothing in common with such idealistic theories as those of Plato. The fact is, that in the succeeding centuries, that which we call classical taste has made a selection; the result being that an opinion, which is, to say the least, exaggerated, has become universal, that the Greeks felt an exclusive preference for abstract beauty—that is, for lines representing nothing but accuracy of proportion and a quasi-geometrical perfection of form.

It is indeed true that in antique works, life is, in a way, more latent, more vague than in modern art. The lines which express it, more especially in physiognomies, are less accentuated, their expression therefore is less precise and lively. Even in the statues where flesh is most vividly rendered, as in those of the Parthenon, the heads retain that relative impassibility which contrasts so strongly with the psychological tendencies of modern art. The development at which painting, the most expressive of all the arts appealing to sight, has arrived, has accustomed us for some centuries past to look for a vigorous expression even in sculpture.

We expect to find the characteristics of physical and moral life more clearly and powerfully worked out than in Greek statues. We must have something particular, something more personal in every work. Generalisation no longer satisfies us, just because our literature and the art of our academies have carried it to the point of abuse, into insignificance, into the extinction of all life; and also, because the very development of our moral and intellectual activity has made us capable and even greedy of more numerous and more intense sensations.

Now, it is precisely by the number and intensity of its impressions that we can measure an æsthetic pleasure, and consequently the value of the work from which it is derived.

But criticism applied to ancient art becomes more than ever true when we concern ourselves with the personal genius and emotions of an artist as expressed by his work; when we seek in the work that moral impress which we may call the stamp of the individual temperament of its author. Doubtless there would be some exaggeration in calling Greek art impersonal—the exaggeration becomes glaring when we remember Æschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes, etc.—but nevertheless its principles were general rather than individual; the mark it bears is chiefly the mark of race, and its perfection, almost always accurate, free from transport or violence, becomes in the long run a little monotonous. Rightly or wrongly we must have more variety than can be got out of the collection of chefs-d'œuvre, which classic taste has gathered together; we require originality, less perfect may be, but more telling, more piquant, in a word, more exciting. From this point of view, choice of subject is far from being as indifferent a matter as a certain number of critics pretend to believe. Such choice enables us at least to estimate the intellectual power of the artist; a fact of some importance, if it be true, as we believe, that the value of a work depends a good deal on what it tells us of the personality of its author.

A well painted basket of oysters is doubtless far superior, from the æsthetic pleasure point of view, to a great historical event

badly rendered, just for the same reason that a poem upon gastronomy may easily be more valuable than an epic. But it is none the less true that to depict a basket of oysters demands an assemblage of qualities infinitely less considerable than to paint a Sistine chapel; and that one may be a Berchoux, without believing oneself able to write an Iliad, an Æneid, or a Faust.

The critics may say that they are concerned with the work and not with the man: the two things are inseparable; and if the work be vile, so is the author, at least at the moment when he produced the poem or picture criticised.

Subject has importance of another kind. When it is obscure, ill conceived, ill defined, it tends greatly to break up the endeavour of the artist, to prevent him from concentrating himself upon the essential points; above all, it disorganises the requirements of taste, and troubles the spectator's sense of logic, making him incapable of grasping the meaning of the work so completely as he might do under more favourable conditions.

When, on the other hand, the subject is very precise and clear, to be comprehended at a glance, its logical unity singularly helps the æsthetic unity of the work. Not only does it strengthen and concentrate the idea of the artist, it guides that of the spectator, and unites with the harmony of forms and colour to collect into one group the various centres of impression caused by multiplicity of detail. We might then, did we wish it, carry subtlety to the length of saying that from an æsthetic standpoint the subject forms no integral part of a work, any more than the confining band forms part of the sheaf which it holds together. But still we must acknowledge that without subject we should obtain only vague and broken impressions, just as without a band our corn-stalks would be scattered by the wind.

We must observe also that the importance of subject varies greatly in different arts. We should not know what to make of a poem which made no attempt to appeal to our intelligence, in which sonorous versification took the place of ideas. A purely ornamental building, without pretence to any sort of utility, would

be almost as great a shock to our sense of logic, and would have much difficulty in obtaining the status of a work of art. An isolated column, or triumphal arch, is only enduring when it forms part of a decorative whole. In a potato field or upon a high road either would very surely seem ridiculous.

In this respect the other arts have more freedom. It is quite a regular thing, in music and painting, for the logical subject to be reduced to a mere pretext ; it is very frequently found to be so. A painter in contemplating any spectacle or idea, may often be charmed only by its harmonies of line and colour. The historic, moral, or intellectual significance of an event, may trouble him but little, provided it affords him an opportunity to express a purely pictorial impression. We may say the same of music. We may listen with pleasure to a symphony the effect of which is a purely musical one, resulting from the arrangement of the notes of which it is composed.

The view of painting and music here indicated can boast the support of considerable authorities and important examples. Paul Veronese and Rossini have given free rein, in many of their works, to their genius and love for colour and melody, seeking nothing but the immediate gratification of eye and ear. We might add many names to theirs without much trouble. We must even acknowledge that, by a fair and natural reaction from the reasoning and literary form of criticism, which has been too prevalent with us since the time of Diderot, and which, in searching for somewhat extrinsic beauties of subject and composition, has too often forgotten the really artistic merits of a work of art, we have come to feel a sort of proud disdain of all kinds of art that necessitate the intervention of our reasoning and reflective powers. The painter glories in a contempt of all elements which are not strictly pictorial. Form or colour ; nothing else is of any account.

It is a mistake, or at least a fatal exaggeration. It has ruined many painters who, by virtue of this fine theory, came to the conclusion that genius consisted in a disregard of reason. Reason,

thought they, is not a specially artistic faculty, and therefore it must be right to listen to the counsels of fancy alone. This error, however, is a true idea carried too far.

Painting is not qualified, any more than music, to express all the various ideas that pass through the brain of man. Art indeed, we may say, is a language, as it serves to give outward manifestation of sentiments and thoughts which, without it, would have to go without interpretation; but each art has its own peculiar processes, and therefore its limits, beyond which it cannot go without losing its individuality. Choice of subject, then, is perforce subordinated to the customs of these processes. As painting essentially consists of the due employment of form and colour, it is but natural that subjects should present themselves to the mind of a painter as vehicles of form and colour. We may even say that the fact of any man's being a painter results from his possession of an intellect apt to look upon all things under the influence of these qualities the power of which over his imagination is so great.

Must we, however, say that even under such an aspect we may not have something further? Must these forms and colours be so destitute of thoughts that other men can discover none in them? We must guard ourselves against the exaggeration implied by such a notion.

In spite of a few illustrious exceptions, those for instance which we have already mentioned, who were able to compensate for their absence of ideas by their prodigious technical powers, it is none the less true that the doctrine, which makes art the sole aim of art effort, when applied to painting and music, produces results inferior to those achieved by the intervention of the intellect. The explanation of such inferiority may be deduced from what we have already said.

If it be true that the value of a work is to be measured by the variety and intensity of the impressions that it creates, subject to the fundamental and essential condition that these impressions must be bound together and in a way fused into a supreme and unifying harmony, we may understand how a work,

in which the gratification of our æsthetic feelings and of our intellect is simultaneous, procures for us a more lively, more entire, and certainly a more profound pleasure, than a work possessing no such double merit.

We may apply the same remarks to the dance and to sculpture, though in a less degree. A statue may be complete when representing a perfect form; we have, strictly speaking, no right to demand more of it. Again, a succession of graceful attitudes and movements, such as we see displayed in our opera ballets, suffices to please our eye; and we concern ourselves but little with the idea which controls and explains these movements and attitudes.

Is it not true, however, that we are conscious of an additional pleasure, when the charm of character is combined with that of grace and perfect form? Our enjoyment in the contemplation of the Moses or the Penseroso would have been much less complete than it is, had Michael Angelo failed, in these statues, to combine with just proportions and varied attitudes, those inmost traits which determine their personality, and reflect the peculiar genius of their author.

Choice of subject is, then, of some importance, whatever may be said to the contrary. It helps to satisfy our æsthetic desire, and the artists who affect to despise it, as an element of success, commit an error which often works them harm.

The morality of a subject has its weight also, and for exactly similar reasons. Baseness of thought and sentiment naturally repels us, while we are attracted and interested by generosity of heart and largeness of soul.

This last observation is especially true of the theatre. There human sympathies play the chief parts. In every play there must be at least one person upon whom the interest of the spectator can be fixed. Whatever may be, in other respects, the æsthetic value of the piece, the failure of this single condition will render its success difficult if not impossible. This sympathy refuses to submit to the guidance of logical rules. All men who have

written on the subject of rhetoric are agreed upon this point : that the first care of the orator must be to gain the sympathies of his audience, without which, were he a hundred times right, he would run a great chance of failing to convince their minds. And yet it is to our intellects that an orator must mainly address himself. It would seem that he need only trouble himself to reason closely, and to bring forward formal and decisive proofs, to refute the arguments of his opponent. But it is not so. All that will avail him nothing, if he has failed to conciliate the favour of his auditors.

This marvellous power of sympathy could not be overlooked without danger, in the practice of the arts which excite our sensibility rather than our intellectual powers. In spite of all the theoretic objections which we might array against its admission into the domain of form, colour, sound, and reasoning, its intervention is actual and inevitable, and we must take account of it, or submit to the certain consequences of refusal. Say, if you choose, that sympathy has nothing to do with painting, that true connoisseurs do not allow any such feeling to affect their decisions—we reply that the very men who appear most completely freed from its influence, continue, more or less, to be ruled by it, even though unknown to themselves. Between two pictures, otherwise of equal merit, they prefer that which soothes and refreshes their souls by appealing to some purely human sentiment ; and, the personality of its author being one of the elements of value in a work of art, they will give their verdict in favour of the canvas whose superior moral tone more closely attracts their feelings.

In man and the works of man, sympathy counts for everything. Abstract distinctions may be good in theory ; in practice they are for the most part false, especially when they have to do with things that touch the soul as closely as the arts do.

It must not be supposed, however, that we consider *morality* to form any part of *Æsthetics*. Theoretically *Æsthetics* has no more to do with “ the good ” than with “ the beautiful ; ” and the cardinal error in all the theories that have been more or less



imitated from Plato, is the confusion between these ideas and those which properly belong to art. They are in reality quite different conceptions, as we shall explain further on, when we come to define what we mean by art, and what by Æsthetics. What we wish to say now is this,—that, when to its special artistic attraction a work adds that which arises from the universal sympathy felt for what is good and beautiful, it has an infinitely better chance to attract and charm the public, which is always more ready to discern the moral worth of an action, or the physical beauty of a figure, than the purely æsthetic value of a statue or a picture. What we have said about the sources and nature of æsthetic pleasure, applies to poetry just as much as to the other arts, notwithstanding its narrower means of communication with our intelligence. Poetry works upon our nervous sensibility through the musical part of its nature, though with less intensity than music itself. In its more strictly poetic aspect, it develops before our imagination a series of figures and scenes, the effect of which may sometimes be more enthralling than even that of painting.

*Summary.—Æsthetic pleasure essentially admirative.*

We may say then that the pleasures of the ear and of the eye consist, like every other pleasure, in a momentary exaggeration of cerebral activity, caused by an accelerated vibration of the nerve fibres. Such acceleration is the result of a variety of conditions a certain number of which we have noticed.

It is of some importance, however, that we should call express attention to certain differences which distinguish these pleasures from those of smell, taste, and touch.

The principle governing the differences is the fact that, in most cases, the enjoyments of the palate, of smell or of touch, are closely confined within themselves. Whenever they are accompanied by sentiments and ideas, it is because they are connected by the power of memory to anterior impressions of some other kind.

On the other hand, the sensations of hearing and sight are intimately connected with, and spring spontaneously from, the centres where sentiments and ideas are elaborated. It is this particular character of the organs of the eye and ear that has constituted them, by speech and writing, the indispensable aids to human development, and the depositaries of its successive acquisitions. But, though it has been possible so to use this property of these two organs, as to conventionally extend their domain over nearly all the manifestations of the cerebral activity of man: it is not the less true that there are certain sensations and ideas that are their peculiar province, which may be called the æsthetic sentiments. Notions of order, harmony, proportion, fitness, variety, unity, spirit, rise spontaneously from the sensations which we owe to the eye and the ear. And if later, these notions are more or less unconsciously transformed into ideas that become, in their turn, rules of artistic production; it is entirely due to the work of analysis, which discovers and distinguishes these abstract elements in the complexity of primitive impressions.

Now these are precisely the elements that constitute æsthetic sensation, and it is because they are contained in it that that sensation gives us so great pleasure. When they are wanting we experience nothing but suffering.

Every work that produces in us an impression in which these elements are found, seems beautiful to us; and that, in proportion to the extent of their co-existence. Should they all exist in one work, in complete measure and with the greatest imaginable harmony, that work would be perfect. Under such conditions the pleasure created for us by its beauty would be duplicated by that other sentiment which is, more properly speaking, æsthetic pleasure; namely, sympathetic admiration of the superior faculties that enable an artist to carry out such a work.

It is the spontaneous intervention of the artist's personality in the complex multiplicity of sentiments of which æsthetic enjoyment is composed, which makes so many people believe that its

source is to be found in imitation. Because the majority of poetic works breathe the spirit of reality, people imagine that the admiration they feel is due to the fidelity of the imitation ; whereas it is in fact the artistic power of the imitator that strikes and attracts them. Suppose we take the trouble to analyse the remarks and criticisms of the crowds who visit the museums on holidays—we must acknowledge that in spite of the style of their observations, what they at bottom admire or censure, is not the greater or less accuracy of reproduction, but the degree of talent which they are led to attribute to the authors of the works before them. They challenge the work indeed, but behind it they see perhaps unconsciously the worker. The picture or statue is but the starting point and first cause of their emotion. If the expression of their feeling goes no farther, it is because they do not know how to analyse their impressions ; and besides, they are governed by the habits and language of superficial criticism. But still it is the personality of the artist that is at stake ; by it they are affected ; their admiration may be always summarised in the words “ What genius it must have required to execute such a work as this ! ”

The influence of this personality is so predominant that it sometimes takes the place of everything else. Thus a work full of carelessness and other faults often extorts our admiration solely by the personality of its author which shines through it with powerful originality, and by the energy with which it manifests the character and constitution of an individual impression. While, on the other hand, we have nothing but contemptuous deference to offer to those honest but mediocre works, where correctness of drawing, skilful composition, and exact harmony of colour replace the absent personality. We must feel the hand and individual genius of the artist. In art, retiring modesty is too often synonymous with imbecility. The artist, who feels acutely, expresses his emotion in the vivid colours in which it is painted in his imagination. This seal of origin, strange though it may appear, is always the most powerful recommendation to connoisseurs. They

find in the impression that results from it, a peculiar and penetrating zest to which they are curiously sensible.

In one word, æsthetic pleasure is admirative. Its enjoyment results from that stimulation of cerebral energy and activity produced in us by intensity or multiplicity of impressions or harmonious impulses, which carry us ever nearer to what we conceive to be the ideal limit of possible perfection, in the category in which any particular work of art under consideration may be placed.

This sentiment of admiration is partly explained by the approximation to a perfection which must ever remain for us an ideal ; but, above all, by the sympathetic surprise that we feel at the evidence of various merit given by the artist whose personality is reflected in his work. The more numerous, varied, intense, and harmonious our impressions are, the more complete and profound will be the enjoyment derived from them.

We shall pursue this analysis of æsthetic pleasure no further. Its sequel will be found in the observations which we shall offer on the subject of taste and artistic genius.

## CHAPTER III.

## TASTE.

§ 1. *The diverse and variable character of taste—The positive elements of appreciation.*

If it be true that æsthetic pleasure is the result of particular vibrations communicated under well understood conditions to the fibres of two special organs, the ear and the eye, whose function it is to transmit to the nervous centre the impressions received from lines, shapes, colours, sounds and movements—we must conclude that such pleasure is of no arbitrary character, but should act equally and similarly upon all the spectators of the same sight, and auditors of the same sound.

But this logical conclusion is in absolute contradiction to the generally accepted opinion, and, as we must confess, to the direct observation of facts. It is certain that if there be one thing in the world more variable and more a subject of controversy than another, it is the judgment passed upon works of art.

Even the most authoritative critics are, more often than not, found opposed to each other; and when by rare chance it does happen that contemporary verdicts are unanimous, the fact gives no assurance that posterity will not reverse them.

What is more changeable than fashion? And yet what is fashion but the manifestation of æsthetic feeling by means of dress? We must remember, too, that these variations and differences are not to be measured by shades. A work praised by one set of critics, is considered execrable by another, and an interval of a few months

suffices to turn a charming fashion into a ridiculous one. Here we have a very serious difficulty the solution of which is forced upon us before we go any farther; for otherwise we should find the theory which we are developing very gravely compromised; or rather, and which would be worse, that any science of Æsthetics would become impossible. How can we construct a scientific doctrine upon an utterly unstable foundation? How generalise from facts, which not only vary with different individuals, but lack consistency even in one and the same intellect? Who has not noticed that his own sentiments undergo considerable modification without any change in the circumstances, and that his feeling in some cases passes from admiration to contempt.

Have we here, then, one of those irreducible contradictions upon which pessimists reckon, when they declare that pure chance is the guide of human judgment? or is it that the variations of taste are the logical and legitimate consequences of special circumstances to which we have not paid sufficient attention? This doubt we shall endeavour to clear up.

The variability and diversity of taste are constant. If we had nothing to oppose to the fact but the conjectures of a more or less hypothetical science, we could not hesitate for a moment; we should have to give up the discussion. But this is far from being the case. The theory of vibrations upon which our argument rests, is founded, in its turn, upon facts furnished by direct observation, scientifically demonstrated.

The correspondence, for instance, between the vibrations of the strings of a violin and those of the fibres of the auditory nerve has long been known. The recent experiences of Mr. Helmholtz have resulted in a confirmation of this theory, which it would be impossible to gainsay. We now know as an ascertained scientific fact, that sound is produced by the setting in motion of material molecules which strike the drum of the ear in more or less regular but intricate undulations, much as the liquid molecules beat in ever-widening circles upon the bank when a stone is cast into a sheet of water.

The sound produced by the blow increases in sharpness as the vibrations increase in number and diminish in volume ; its weight, on the other hand, is in direct proportion to the amplitude of the undulations and in inverse proportion to their number.

The existence of these sonorous molecules is clearly demonstrated by the *Résonnateur* of Mr. Helmholtz ; for that ingenious instrument enables us to isolate and follow them one by one through the series of their evolutions. By its help, this clever experimentalist has succeeded in solving a question that has long engaged the attention of musicians and physicists—the question of tone. Many people are still under the impression that a note is a unique sound, the value of which is absolute, and determined by the number of vibrations that are required to produce it. But it is obvious that such a theory is not satisfactory ; because if all the musical power of a note were comprised in this single numerical value, the variety of instruments in an orchestra would be entirely useless. It would be enough to bring together a certain number of similar instruments and make them take different parts.

The falsity of this conclusion, however, is obvious even to those whose sense of music is but slight. We can hardly say, indeed, that the choice of tones is less important than the distribution of notes. Of this fact, which could neither be got rid of nor accounted for, Mr. Helmholtz, by the aid of his *Résonnateur*, has furnished a most simple and complete explanation. The power which his instrument gives him of isolating every sound, has allowed him to ascertain that every note emitted either by the human voice or by any sort of instrument, pure though it may seem to the ear, is in reality a concert ; an ensemble of partial notes of a different intensity and not even in complete concord. A vibrating string is divided by knots into segments of unequal length, but in constant connection with each other, producing, on vibration, the swells which physicists call *ventres*.

Each of these segments, according to its length, emits its particular note. So, then, the fundamental note, which alone

obtained recognition until lately, is found to be accompanied by a varying number of harmonics. These may sometimes amount to as many as sixteen; and as all sounds result from vibrations, they all have their harmonics, whatever the instrument by which they may have been produced. But the sounds most rich in harmonics are those created by stringed instruments.

Now the diversity of *timbre* or tone arises from the difference in the number of these harmonics.

We are not yet able to explain with an equal precision the impressions caused by line and colour. In this respect we are still in that stage of progress in which the cognate science of sound was a few years ago, before the wonderful discovery of Mr. Helmholtz. We may hope, however, that as music has already discovered her Christopher Columbus, so painting will find hers. And we may be sure that, in the search after some explanation of the phenomena of light, Science has for some time now been travelling along the same road which has already led her to the happy discovery of the rules that govern the sensations of the ear.

Henceforth we know that the sensations of the eye are equally caused by vibrations; although we have not yet succeeded in distinguishing, with equal certainty, the probably multiplex elements which constitute the apparently unique sensation caused by the perception of a form or a colour. Still we may be allowed to reason in the matter of painting as in that of music, and to draw our æsthetic conclusions from the facts already established by science, as we have been attempting to do.

The theory of complementary colours gives us absolutely decisive confirmation of the connection which we have elsewhere demonstrated to exist between the sensations of the ear and those of the eye. It is beyond doubt that we might distribute colours like notes in perfectly distinct scales; and that each of these colour-notes has, just as each sonorous note has, its cortège of harmonics, and consequently its peculiar tone. This tone, of which we have a very delicate perception, although we are as yet unable to determine its essence, plays an important part in



the arts which appeal to vision. Just as there are singers who attract or repel us entirely by the tone or *timbre* of their voice, so there are systems of colour that appear to us raw or sympathetic, without our being, as yet, able to give any better reason for our impression than the fact of its existence.

Throughout this part of the subject we may bring to the aid of our principle so many direct scientific proofs, and so many probabilities but little removed from certainties, that we cannot doubt its final confirmation.

Another branch of our argument has to be considered which scarcely seems more open to contention: it is derived from what has been already said; and is concerned with the opposition, repetition, congruity, the too great multiplicity or the insufficiency of vibrations. It is all a matter of pure reason. If the physiological principle be true—and its truth has been scientifically demonstrated—it is difficult to see how logical deductions from it can be false. We need not dwell upon this here.

Let us, however, attempt to explain the existence of that variability of taste which seems to tell against our theory.

§ 2. *Causes of the diversity and variability of taste—Education—Prejudice—Antagonism of ancients and moderns—Fashion.*

To begin with, we have an important fact, namely, that the nervous fibres are very far from possessing an equal amount of excitability in all men. The variations may be very considerable. Side by side with gourmets whose papillæ analyse and distinguish with marvellous certainty the most delicate subtleties of flavour, we find men absolutely indifferent to them. So, at a concert, some are able to follow and grasp all the parts of a numerous orchestra in their minutest details, however complicated they may be, whilst others sit incapable of recognizing with any precision, the differences of tone, and even of the most dissimilar notes. The eye of the sculptor or painter perceives with extraordinary quickness, impressions arising from the choice and composition of form and colours; yet there are many people

who cannot understand why a canvas of Titian or Veronese should be preferred to an illumination of Epinal.

Between these two extremes there exists an infinite number of modifications, arising from a corresponding number of differences in the perceptive power of the organs themselves; which differences are caused either by natural infirmity or by the atrophy which results from deficient exercise.<sup>1</sup> We must also carefully consider the influence which intellectual habits and preoccupation exercise over our judgments.

The history of the human mind is replete with facts which exclude all doubt as to the importance of this consideration. The famous antagonism of the 16th century between ancients and moderns, is, from this point of view, worthy of curious study. On both sides were found men of science and taste, who extolled or condemned the same works with equal vigour, and who invoked, as foundations for their respective theses, arguments equally false and ridiculous. Neither party troubled itself to fairly establish a sure basis for its theories of good or bad. The combatants, thinking of nothing but how to ensure the victory of their respective theses (often adopted for reasons which had nothing to do with æsthetics) rapidly arrived at the most grotesque exaggerations. According to one side, antiquity was the golden age of humanity; it had given us nothing but incomparable chefs-

<sup>1</sup> Science, upon these interesting points, is still without sufficient means of verification. The study of cerebral physiology has been until now very much hampered by the prejudice which sees in the practice of autopsy a kind of profanation of the dead. Those savants who desire to examine the conditions of intellectual activity are reduced to the dissection of subjects from the hospitals, whose cerebral organs, in consequence of their occupations during life, are in general but slightly developed, and whose unknown past can furnish no useful guide to lead research. An association, formed in Paris in 1876, under the name of the *Société d'Autopsie Mutuelle*, seeks to supply this want. Each member engages by document, in the form of a will, to bequeath his cranium to the society, and also authorises them to proceed, immediately upon his death, to the autopsy of his body. Such an institution cannot fail to furnish very useful data to anthropologists; and what is not without importance, may conduce to the health of posterity, by putting it on its guard against morbid and hereditary influences.

d'œuvre : according to the other, all admiration of antique work was a mere prejudice, to be met at all hazards and ruthlessly demolished. The condemnation by the one party of a defect sufficed to erect it into a virtue with the other. Thus we came to that conventional imitation of antique forms which remained the orthodox ideal of literature until the resurrection of romanticism. The French Academy, as well as every one closely or remotely connected with it, was so convinced of the perfection of classic style, that it never troubled to examine the causes of its belief. Its banner consisted of but one word. It is difficult to recall the works of all these fanatical partisans of classicism, without being utterly astonished to perceive that they themselves were much farther from the true spirit of the antique, than the very men whom they anathematized as enemies of their idol. Those classics of 1830! We may indeed say that their god was an unknown god. It sufficed, to elicit their chorus of admiration, that any detestable work should conform to those laws which they named the rules of Aristotle, though that philosopher never wrote a word on the subject. So it was, too, with the plastic arts. The reforms of L. David, which responded indeed to a want of the time, became more and more mechanical by the action of a few rules and processes which were the very negation of art, and which, under pretext of resuscitating antique taste, gave us nothing but a hateful and foolish parody of its beauties. That absurd clique, itself incapable of producing a work of art, erected its feebleness into a principle, and pretended to impose the limits of its own imbecility upon the fruitful ardour of a younger school. It was not hindered, however, from admiring the Italian Renaissance, and believing itself the successor of Da Vinci, of Raphael, and of Michael Angelo; whose glory it pretended to protect against profanation by the barbarians who refused to bring the high art of antiquity and of the 16th century into disrepute by an idolatry which was nothing less than a slander.

Admitting even that their translations were not acts of treason, yet these pretended champions of antique taste should have remem-

bered that the innovators of the 16th century were great artists, precisely because they were not constrained to reproduce to infinity the works of a past age ; and that the best way to rival them would certainly be to leave off copying them. This, however, is a fact which they have never understood.

The result was that, in place of estimating works of art by their intrinsic merit, they were continually seeking after the principles and formulæ upon which they were conceived and executed. Each party extols and condemns according to conformity or departure from arbitrary rules. In fact, taste was subordinated to the considerations of a purely logical theory, we might even say etiquette.

All the arts have gone through similar crises. We may instance the quarrel of the Pessimists and the Gluckists, and more recently that between Spontini and Weber. A few years ago, we saw one of the chief works of Wagner hissed into temporary death at the opera. Let an artist bring a new idea or a new method into his work, the dilettanti open against him in chorus, and deny him all merit. Prejudice is always against him who refuses to bow his head before it ; and often the men whose taste is the most subtle and delicate, are deficient in the strength required to defy this tyranny of a preconceived idea. The first idea of so-called dilettanti is to revolt against all innovation which disconcerts their habits or their systems ; but these revolts are impotent to withstand the progress of taste.

Reasonable and truly artistic innovation always ends by triumphing over ill-considered opposition. The moment is sure to arrive when discussion reestablishes justice. Reflection and custom render us capable of comprehension and sympathy ; and the works which we at first most violently repudiate, finally obtain the rank denied to them. It is but a momentary perturbation ; and is explained by the effort necessary to reestablish the concord of our ideas after every innovation—just as a breath of wind passing across a stream causes it for a moment to lose its transparency.

Fashion behaves in a somewhat similar manner. Nearly all its transformations seem to us at first strange and bizarre. But

when once we are accustomed to a mode of dress, the costumes of the preceding year strike us as absurd; and so they remain, till that day when, by an almost regular system of rotation or revolution, they again emerge from neglect, and become once more "*la mode*." Out of these changes which seem so capricious, we can, however, extract a kind of general law that explains them and places the question of taste almost beyond rules.

We may remark that taste, in matters of fashion, proceeds, not by revolution strictly speaking, but rather by oscillation on this or that side of a centre from which it never entirely breaks away; like the pendulum, which without ever stopping, is always passing to and fro between the same points. This oscillation does not occur among less civilized nations whose imagination is not so exacting. Among the stationary people of the East costume changes as little as everything else. Look, on the other hand, at the active and versatile races of Western Europe, ever in quest of new sensations and new ideas. With them fashions follow and replace each other with infinite rapidity. Without mentioning the accidental and extrinsic influences, which it would take too long to explain—it is certain that the desire for novelty suffices, in default of progress, to account for the perpetual modifications of female costume among the races whose social organization is such, that certain classes of women have nothing to think of but pleasure and the cares of the toilet. Rendered incapable from their early infancy, by the education they have received and the examples they see around them, of all serious thought and any science and personal love of art, they fritter away in fantastic devices that æsthetic instinct with which nature has gifted them, without even troubling themselves to consider whether their beauty is enhanced or not by such *bizarceries*. Man, who imagines in his folly that woman beautifies herself mainly for his pleasure, is under a strange delusion. In reality the sex always think themselves fair enough to attract man's glances, and a desire for beauty is, nearly always, nothing more than a pretext for indulging their instincts. From the facility with which they quit

the most agreeable fashions for others truly horrible, or even indecent, at the bidding of some fashionable *Lais* desirous of exhibiting her beauties, it is easy to see what a small space æsthetic feeling occupies in their thoughts. In the great majority of cases, they change not to discover "the best," but merely for the sake of change; a fashion which has lasted six months seems to them insipid and odious. The frequency of these changes has become, with most, a mere question of vanity and a basis for foolish emulation; because, if they do not wish to die of ennui, they must have something to occupy their leisure, and, as they cannot interest themselves either in subjects requiring study or reflection, or in those which do not immediately touch their comforts, they have no resource but religion and coquetry. True it is, that in all this capricious license stimulated by vanity and the want of something to do, some nations still preserve traces of an exceptionally pure taste; and we can only regret that so great a gift of nature should be so ill employed and spoiled by a cloud of ideas and desires totally inimical to art. But we must not think that the changes of fashion, other than those caused by the changes of æsthetic sentiment, can furnish an argument for them who pretend that taste is purely individual, and cannot be brought within the grasp of rules.

Taste to be considered a reality, need not show equal development with all men, any more than wit, than genius, or any other human faculty.

Because a man has not a sufficiently delicate and practised palate to distinguish good wine from indifferent, may we then conclude that there is no such difference? Because his memory may be bad, and may not allow him to retain more than a small number of facts, may we then conclude that no man could retain a greater number, and define the limit of power of the possessed faculty of memory, by the infirmity of one individual? No one would admit such reasoning.

It is upon such an argument however that they who contest the reality of taste base their opinions.

§ 3. *Definition of taste.—Taste of the Greeks.—Education of taste.*

What is taste, in a word, but the capability more or less developed, to feel æsthetic pleasure? Now, that this faculty does exist nobody can deny, as without it there would be no such thing as art. We may even say that taste, as thus defined, is possessed by all men; for it would be difficult to discover any one absolutely insensible to every form of art. Some like poetry, some like painting, the man who cares nothing for architecture is held enthralled by music; absolute indifference we can scarcely conceive. Differences, then, are brought down to a simple question of degree. As we have already seen, all pleasure can be traced to an excitation of the nervous fibres, which are common to us all, but more or less easily excited in different individuals. But if it be true that we have no common standard of sensations—it is equally beyond doubt that those who are less gifted in this respect, cannot legitimately make use of such inferiority to contest or deny the superior power of others.

The excitability, however, of our nervous fibres is not altogether sufficient. To enable us to feel real æsthetic pleasure, we must experience a sentiment of sympathetic admiration of the artist whose talent or genius has produced a work capable of affording us so lively a satisfaction. Such admiration could not be intelligent without a more or less clear knowledge of the difficulties that had to be surmounted and the conditions that had to be fulfilled; consequently our admiration is more or less enlightened, in proportion as our artistic knowledge itself is more or less complete and precise, and permits us to measure with justice the value of the work and the merit of its author.

When the critic is truly competent—that is to say, when he has received from nature a sensibility that causes him to experience a lively pleasure in the presence of works of art, and when to this gift of nature he adds accurate knowledge of the true theoretical and practical conditions of each art—he possesses a double supe-

riority, natural and acquired, over ordinary people ; and this, in fact, constitutes taste in its most complete expression.

I know well that this conclusion may be contested in the name of another theory which would reduce taste to be no more than intuition and æsthetic sentiment, making it a kind of mysterious power of divination. We shall totally reject any such explanation until we have met with an art critic capable of pronouncing infallible judgments without having previously studied, directly or indirectly, the laws by which æsthetics are bound. We hear, it is true, of nations—the Athenians, for instance—among whom simple sailors who had never opened a book on the subject have, on occasion, given evidence of a taste superior to that of the savants of our day. Possibly they have ; we admit it, but there is nothing mysterious in it.

The Athenians, like other nations, began with very imperfect art. They possessed, indeed, a natural gift which exercise and transmission might increase, but which nature only could grant in the first instance ; a peculiar excitability of the senses of hearing and seeing which made them lovers of works of art. Add to such characteristics of race a measured and well-balanced intellect, a delicate and never idle imagination, yet kept within just bounds—and we shall understand how it was that artists were always numerous in Athens. Reflect, also, that this natural taste for æsthetic pleasure transformed all the objects and spectacles of their daily life into works of art. Their earthenware vases were ornamented with graceful paintings, recalling the scenes of that never-ending poem, their mythology ; their public places were peopled with the statues of gods or of heroes ; upon the Agora, all men could assist at the daily debates, political or judicial, where illustrious orators tried hard for the prize of eloquence ; in the theatre were to be found *Æschylus*, *Sophocles*, *Euripides*, and *Aristophanes* ; at their banquets they had singers who repeated for their edification the finest passages of *Homer* and *Hesiod* to the accompaniment of the cithara : finally, in their *gymnasia* and in the public baths which they so constantly



frequented, they had ever before their eyes the living models of the most beautiful statues which the world has ever possessed.

These continually recurring influences constituted the most powerful of all modes for directly educating taste, penetrating into the depths of man's nature, and laying complete hold on him, transformed ideas into sentiments. Children brought up among similar surroundings become unconsciously steeped in knowledge and habits of mind which less privileged societies have with so much trouble to themselves to learn from books. They possessed the knowledge which is always necessary to the foundation of judgment. The only difference is, that knowledge obtained day by day by constant communion with chefs-d'œuvre, so impregnated their intelligences as to form an integral part of them ; and so they escaped that self-consciousness which too often develops into pedantry. But though unconscious, their knowledge was none the less real ; and in guiding and enlightening their critical power, it brought the Athenians that reputation as arbiters of taste which they have so well deserved.

Taste is composed, then, of two "pièces maitresses," as old Balzac would say, whose juxtaposition is necessary for its constitution : a lively natural sensibility to the impressions of the eye and the ear, and a profound feeling of the æsthetic conditions of every object—which last can only be acquired in one of two ways ; by the practice of art itself, or by the careful comparison of a large number of dissimilar works. We may say that, of these conditions, the chief one is the agreement of the idea with the thing, and of the form with the idea.

The importance of this logical connection is most easily felt in architecture. The point has been put very clearly by M. Viollet-le-Duc in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture*, in the article upon taste : "No architectural form," he says, "which cannot be given as the legitimate consequence of an idea, a want, a necessity, can be looked upon as a work of art. There may be taste displayed in the execution of a column, but that does not give the colonnade, of which it forms part, any claim to be considered a

work of taste as a whole ; to deserve that character, the colonnade must be fitted for its place and must have a *raison d'être*. . . . The idea has too long been common that sufficient evidence of taste is given by the adoption of certain avowedly beautiful types without swerving from them. Such a method, upheld by the *École des Beaux-Arts* in all that belongs to architecture, has induced us to accept a few common formulæ as the expression of good taste ; to exclude variety and invention ; and to place beyond the pale of taste, all those artists who attempt to express new wants by novel forms, or to apply old forms in a novel manner. . . . Stone, wood, iron, are the substances with which the architect builds, the materials fitted for the wants of the present day. To express his ideas he gives to these materials forms which neither are, nor could be, due to chance—they grow out of the necessities of the construction ; out of those wants, in fact, for the satisfaction of which the artist is employed ; and are governed by the impression which he wishes to produce upon the public. It is a kind of language addressed to the eyes. How can we admit that this language does not correspond to the idea, whether in ensemble or in detail ? How can we admit that a language composed of members without any mutual relation could be understood ? . . . We have become prone to consider taste as a matter of detail, a fugitive and hardly appreciable attraction, vague and not to be defined, which our architects have long ceased to look upon as the consequence of immutable principles. Taste is become but the slave of fashion ; and it so happens that artists whose good taste was universally acknowledged in 1780, had, twenty years afterwards, lost their reputation."

If we thus understand taste, we are reduced to a simple question of decoration. We exclude it from the general conception, leaving it no place but in the details. Nothing can be more false or dangerous than such an idea, not in architecture only, but in all the arts. Such an error and its dangers are most easily perceptible in architecture—because the art of construction is some-

what more positive, and responds to more definite wants than any other ; because, too, its very character confines the fancy of the artist within more precise and recognisable limits. But the principle set up by M. Viollet-le-Duc is not on this account less general. Reason has a good deal to do with taste. We may, in truth, say that the latter consists in the faculty possessed by a true artist, to seize by a kind of intuition, the fitting relation of things, whether in works as a whole, or in their details.

In the critic, this intuition is replaced or perfected by a faculty of analysis which alone is capable of giving reasons for the judgments passed by taste. We may have in a simple work different parts of unequal merit ; that is to say, with unequal power to touch our sensibility.

Subtlety of taste consists in an ability to distinguish the particular shades which make up the total impression ; in being able to measure in the general excitement of the nerve centres, the vibratory power imparted to each separate fibre. This faculty constitutes art criticism. Its decisions are complete and certain in proportion as it is able to push this subtlety of analysis to its extreme ; just as the power of a chemical reagent is measured by the number of elements which it can isolate in the analysis of a substance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We have already hinted some of the accidents which bring into matters of taste habits of thought and theoretical preoccupation. We need not forget that such influences always exist to a certain extent, even in the most unprejudiced of critics. Besides, every one has, either by temperament or education, determined preferences in one way or another. No one is able to combine in himself all the various manifestations of art ; naturally, therefore, each man penetrates most deeply in his analysis of those impressions which may be either most familiar or most agreeable to himself. It is then, for numberless reasons, absolutely impossible that the decision of taste can ever attain to the undoubted certainty belonging to the judgments of pure logic. In the first case, the complete elements of varied nature exist to trouble and confuse the mind ; while in the second, our labour is always devoted to the demonstration of a simple relation.

## CHAPTER IV.

## GENIUS.

THE great characteristic of genius is creative power. This power makes the great distinction between it and artistic taste. All other conditions may be nearly identical. The artist, like the critic, is endowed with a peculiar excitability that renders him more than usually open to the pleasures of the eye and the ear; like the critic, again, he must be acquainted with the logical conditions that govern the production of works of art. But the marks of artistic genius are—an imperious necessity for the external manifestation of emotion by immediately expressive forms and symbols, and the faculty to discover such symbols and forms by a kind of spontaneous intuition, into which reflection and calculation only enter for the purpose of ulterior development.

These two facts are explained by the manner in which æsthetic emotion is caused. While with the critic it is divided and analysed into its various elements, with the artist it remains synthetic and concrete. Impressions, instead of being successive, are produced at once, and by a single *coup*, which is powerful because it directly offers a maximum of intensity; heating and inflaming our imaginations just as the shock of a bullet upon an iron target causes a development of heat enough to make it red-hot. This complex impression, before being analysed, is to be entirely referred to the fundamental and dominant characteristic of the temperament which receives it. It becomes tinged, we may say, with a single colour. The impelling forces which it contains, and which, for the critic, are decomposed into a variable number of divergent direc-

tions, are condensed with the artist into one single idea, whose energy thus becomes singularly augmented.<sup>1</sup>

This is not all. Analysis denounces exteriority. The critic, who tracks one by one the multiplex and successive impressions which he derives from the work he is judging, is never able to forget the distinction between object and subject. His judgment must of necessity be the result of reason. The artist, whom the impression invades and, so to speak, envelops in a single wave, sees and feels nothing else. Not only does he fail to distinguish its divers elements, but he does not even distinguish himself from it. He is truly possessed; and the only thing which can free him from his pain is the ultimate delivery of the work of art.<sup>2</sup>

Genius, said Buffon, is but long-continued patience. Newton, when they asked him how he had managed to find out the law of gravitation, answered: "By continually thinking about it." Buffon and Newton were right. Invincible patience in the pursuit of a single end, and persistent meditation upon one subject, add to reason a power which it would never have attained without such concentration. But this concentration of the intellectual energies upon a single point, is only possible when two necessary conditions are present: first, the natural possession of an intellectual constitution capable of allowing itself to be so entirely penetrated and absorbed by one idea, that no room remains for any foreign pre-occupation; secondly, that it should not be forcibly applied to any object without taking account of individual aptitudes and preferences. These conditions alone rendered the continued patience of Buffon and the persistent reflection of Newton possible. The definition of genius as these two great men understood it, is logically brought down, then, to what we have said

<sup>1</sup> With all masters in all schools, the first attack is ever the best—except with Rembrandt, that rare genius, who, tranquil to begin with, becomes warmed and inflamed as he works; at first a glimmering light, at the end a burning fire. (*Salons de W. Burger* (Salon de 1861), vol. i. p. 49).

<sup>2</sup> Plato says that the love of the beautiful alone fertilizes the artist. It would be more correct to compare the conception of the artist, to that of woman who can only be relieved by childbirth.

above. And whether genius concerns itself with science or with art, the difference is but in the direction which the concentrative power constituting it may spontaneously take.

This possession manifests itself, however, by a great number of exterior signs. The biographies of nearly all men who have been absorbed by a single idea, abound in all kinds of anecdotes with regard to their originality, their mania, and their distractions. This is a natural and perfectly logical result of the very preoccupation in which they lived. Many of them have been accounted fools until the day when they were crowned with success. We may believe that among those to whom has been denied the final reward, several have missed it by not living either a few years longer, or in a centre better suited to the nature of their genius.

It is no doubt owing to its *bizarceries*, that genius has been sometimes called a nervous disorder; a consoling definition for those who believe that health consists essentially in the absolute equilibrium of all the faculties, whose ideal is to be like all the world. In truth, it is certain enough that genius means the exaggeration of sensibility and activity in some nervous centre; but this is far from being a disease. The fixed ideas of insanity and monomania to which some would like to assimilate it, are always accompanied by a lesion of the corresponding organ of the brain, and are invariably characterised by their alliance with the interest and personality of the subject. Genius, on the other hand, manifests itself physiologically by a more or less abnormal development of certain cerebral organs; in which, however, there is nothing morbid. And, even though its preoccupations may be purely selfish, like those of a Cæsar or a Napoleon, they can, and do, more frequently concern themselves with matters of more general interest and of a more elevated kind. By this latter characteristic the genius of Aristotle, Galileo, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Leibnitz, Corneille, Molière, Newton, Voltaire, Goethe, and others was strongly marked.

Men of genius, by virtue of their intellectual superiority, often escape from the dominion of the mean and base passions of

egotism and vanity, and are naturally transported into higher regions; but, as we must not forget, this result does not always follow. In fact, genius, considered in itself, is but superior perceptive power, coming from exaggerated excitability and elasticity in the nervous centres.

The study of artistic genius need go no further. The very vivacity of a sensation, as we have said, suppresses analysis, details are merged in a total impression, which has the character of spontaneously exaggerating the dominant note, and attenuating even to annihilation all that do not conduce to this general effect.

By this, the personality of the artist is distinguished; for we must thoroughly understand that this dominant note exists in a much greater degree in the artist than in the object. Every one, says the proverb, sees his own side of a subject; the same subject can produce very different impressions, according to the point of view from which it is considered. These differences, unimportant in the case of commonplace men, are very strikingly marked in the works of great artists. The same scenes reproduced by Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Titian, Rubens, and Rembrandt, assume such different aspects, that the identity of the theme disappears in the difference of conception and execution. Suppose the same subjects treated by Shakespeare and Racine, by Goethe and Corneille, by Molière and Aristophanes, by Beethoven and Rossini—do you not think it would be easy to discern the distinctive features of their personality in their works? Mediocrity, on the other hand, is recognised by vulgarity of character. As the impression created by artists of genius who throw their whole souls into anything they do, is lively and profound—so, that created by men who are without the faculty of absorbing themselves in their work, is commonplace and superficial. It is for this reason that so little resemblance exists between the works of the greatest men, while mediocrities resemble one another so much that it is hard to distinguish between them.

Hence we can perceive how false and erroneous is the theory which argues that:—"The aim of art is to manifest the essence of

things, to develop their chief characteristics by a systematic modification of their analogies."<sup>3</sup> The truth is that the artist cares very little indeed about the essence of things. He simply interprets his personal impression, without troubling himself about anything else. M. Taine substitutes logic for imagination; he confuses art with science, coolly suppressing the former for the sake of the latter. The essence of a thing, its primal character, "that from which all others are derived by fixed connections," is necessarily unique. If the manifestation of this simple quality really were the aim of art, the greatest artists would be those who have best succeeded in placing it before us, and the identity of aim would have the necessary effect of causing corresponding similarity in their works. Artists of genius would be those with most resemblance, one with another; while mediocre men would be chiefly remarkable for their profound differences.

The absolute contrary is the truth. The artist, in place of applying himself to the manifestation of the essence or dominant characteristic of things, expresses spontaneously and unconsciously the essence or characteristic of his own personality; and the greater his genius, the greater energy and individuality will such manifestation display. This fact enables us to declare that a work is always an exact measure of the value of its author—at least at the moment of its production, and with regard to those qualities whose concurrence it demands. Mediocre artists all resemble each other more or less, because they do not get beyond the sphere of the elementary impressions which are common to all.

The peculiar excitability and almost exclusive preoccupation caused by a dominant impression and characterizing artistic genius, explain both the superiority of genius over taste, inasmuch that it consists mainly in creative power; and its possible

<sup>3</sup> Taine, *Philosophie de l'Art*, pp. 51-64. This error is so much the more grave because art and science represent, almost of necessity, the two most opposite forms of intellect. Objectivity is the essential characteristic of the scientific intellect. Art is the direct expression of subjectivity, even at the very time when it believes itself most faithful to pure realism.



inferiority if viewed in regard to the correct application of the laws of pure logic.

Such inferiority however is in no way a necessary consequence. The rapid intuitions of genius often excel in logic the most methodical arguments of the makers of syllogisms. Calculators who are so fond of seizing their compasses to measure the exaggerations and errors in design of Michael Angelo, of Rubens, or of Delacroix, forget that these pretended faults are mostly necessary to the general impression of a work, and are absolutely required both for the sake of harmony, and to produce effects which, were the so-called imperfections to be corrected away, would disappear. In every art, some measure of convention must be allowed. Each has its special optical laws, which vulgar logic may condemn, but for which it would be utterly unable to find a substitute.

Again, we must not imagine that genius can only exist in a sort of perpetual fever. It is particularly characterized by a more or less steady predisposition to emotion, to enthusiasm, even to what we may call inspiration. But though this excitability is almost constant, yet its excitation is intermittent; and in the intervals, reflection takes the upper hand and re-establishes equilibrium. Poets have generally abused their genius, inspiration, and enthusiasm. It would be imprudent to take them at their word. They have felt some mysterious influence, enabling them, as they believe, to unveil the future, and to master by intuition sciences which they have never learned. The Hebrew prophet, and the *vates* of antiquity, seriously believed themselves directly inspired by God, and in honest faith preached in his name. This kind of hallucination is still common with Orientals and the negroes of Africa. We all know of the exertions of the dancing and howling dervishes. There exist in Italy, and even in the interior of France, dances of similar kind, which cause a flow of blood to the head and produce actual intoxication, exalting all the faculties to raving point. The bacchantes of old were an instance of the same thing. We now know what caused the prophetic delirium of the Pythia of Delphi. Ignorance has ever attributed all things which to it seem out of

the common, to supernatural influences; forgetting that it is equally incapable of explaining the cause of the most ordinary events. But custom disguises these latter obscurities. Ignorance believes that it understands common things, only because it never thinks to seek an explanation.

We may say, then, that genius is neither more nor less mysterious than anything else. In all times it has been remarked that emotion and passion, in concentrating intellectual effort upon a definite point, communicate a power which could not otherwise be achieved. This phenomenon does not surprise us, simply because we are accustomed to it. Now, what we call genius is nothing but this same phenomenon—passion acting upon an organization at once more impressionable and more powerful than that of ordinary men. The genius does not go out of the beaten track; we can only say that he represents a better finished work and more than usually perfect reproduction of the universal model. He is the logical result of a specially happy arrangement of the choicest and the most harmonious materials. He affords an example of superiority, not of kind but of degree.

Now, this degree may vary considerably. We cannot say where genius commences and where it ends. But we must not therefore confound it with talent. The latter mainly consists of an acquired superiority, while genius is more innate and spontaneous. Talent doubtless presupposes high natural qualities, perfected by more or less patient and sustained application; but also it would be absurd to pretend that genius excludes reflection and attention. We can hardly conceive the exercise of talent without the intervention of the will and the reasoning powers; whilst genius, without disdain, has less imperative need of them. Its more instinctive and intuitive impulses sweep on and rule their possessor by the very freedom of their action; while the impulses of talent often seem embarrassed and weighted by the impedimenta of experience and study, upon which they are compelled to depend. A man who is nothing extraordinary may acquire talent, if nature has given him the faculty of energetic and constant application, and

fortune has added a worthy guide. Genius may perfect its processes, its methods, its theories; it may be transformed, but it can never be acquired. It is a gratuitous gift which may result, indeed, from the accumulation of effort hereditarily transmitted, but which eludes any direct or personal attempt to grasp it.

Finally, that my readers may have a definite idea of what I conceive to be the difference between talent and genius, I will say that Homer, Æschylus, Demosthenes, Plautus, Lucretius, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Rabelais, Molière, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, Rubens, Rembrandt, Beethoven, Mozart, and Rossini, in spite of the considerable differences both in degree and in character which divide them, had genius; while Hesiod, Sophocles, Euripides, Æschines, Terence, Cicero, Virgil, Racine, Schiller, La Bruyère, Regnard, Raphael, Velasquez, Murillo, and Meyerbeer hardly rose above the level of talent.

I am far, however, from saying that all the works of the latter are inferior to all those of the former. To say so would be an indefensible exaggeration. Sophocles, Virgil, and Raphael have produced works fit to rank with the greatest. But even in the works in which they reached the summit of their talent, we do not find that indescribable combination of what is genial, spontaneous and instinctive, which is stamped with a sincerity so simple upon all the productions of genius. They too often display a distinction between the man and his work. With the one we cannot help figuring to ourselves the artist meditating upon and striving after effects, calculating methods, adjusting, combining, correcting phrases, lines, colours; with the other we find a concord so invariable of all these elements, an assimilation so complete of the man with his work, that all is fused into a unique impression giving us a luminous insight into the inmost personality of the artist. His work is but himself in his highest expression. All trace of effort vanishes. We might say that the different parts arrange themselves spontaneously, by a kind of natural affinity, in the truest proportions and most fitting positions. Hence the

simple grandeur of the impression which we generally receive from the productions of genius.

Must we say then that genius can dispense with hard work, study, and meditation? Leonardo da Vinci spent four years over *La Joconde*, and the *Last Supper* cost him still greater labour. It is true that Rubens gave himself no such trouble. But in reality such a matter is not a question of time at all. It is rather one of method. Gustave Planche explains this very neatly in his essay upon the *Chasse au Tigre* of Barrye. "Ignoramuses," he writes, "are very fond of saying, whenever they have the chance, that inspiration can never co-exist with accuracy of detail: such a maxim recommends itself to idle habits. . . . But what need is there of pressing the point? Has it not been long proved that the boldest art can very well be reconciled with the most profound science? Those who sustain the opposite theory have good reasons for persisting in their opinion, or rather in their assertion. When they have begun to work before having completely mastered all the details of their profession, they find it easy to accuse science of sterility. But if they would only consider works sanctified by long unbroken admiration, which have resisted every caprice of fashion, they would understand that science, far from being an embarrassment to the play of fancy, renders it freer and stronger, affording it more apt and numerous means of expression. . . . Nothing is left incomplete, everything is unflinchingly rendered and life-like. The author has divided his task into two parts: after having freely thrown together the scene which he has conceived, and having arranged with due judgment his lines and his grouping, he gives to its execution as much patience as he has exercised in its invention. This is the only way to produce works worthy of attention. Whenever, in fact, an attempt is made to simultaneously accentuate these two parts of the work, to invent and model at one and the same time, it is almost impossible to hit the mark. Although this truth is so evident as to be hardly worth mentioning, it may be useful to bring it forward; because a great many artists, who, without possessing any very eminent

powers might, nevertheless, manage to produce works of some value if they would but consent to divide their task, condemn themselves to perpetual mediocrity by wishing to achieve both at a single *coup*. They sketch at the same time as they invent, and their courage fails to interpret their conceptions in a more accurate form. Frightened by the slowness of their work, they content themselves with an incomplete truth; or starting in a still worse direction, they neglect all invention as superfluous and copy servilely, I would even say mechanically, sometimes the living model which they have before them, sometimes fragments brought from Rome or Athens. Free invention, patient execution, that is the rule of all masters worthy of the name. In genre, as in monumental sculpture, there is but one road to success; it is to frankly accept these two conditions and to strive without intermission to realize boldly conceived ideas in pure and well understood forms."

More than one self-reliant genius, as Gustave Planche confesses, has disregarded these rules; but not the less for that they are incontestably necessary in most cases.

## CHAPTER V.

WHAT IS ART ?

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§ I. *Glance at the historic development of each of the arts.*

Art, as we have seen, was born with man ; it is found in nearly all his acts and thoughts. It is so natural and even necessary to him, that it rules the formation of his ideas, and determines the cadence of his language. At the epoch, when the only industry consisted in the shaping of flints into arrow-heads, knives, and tomahawks, man already possessed an art, which indirectly made manifestation of itself in his manner of cutting these stones, and in the forms which he gave to his arms ; and directly, by the execution of various ornaments, and also by designs complete enough to enable us still to recognize their models. Music was no more strange to him than the arts of design. Instruments found in his cave dwellings prove the fact. As for poetry and the dance, we can only form conjectures. These, however, acquire substantial probability, when we reflect that among savage tribes, who have never been gifted by nature as the white race has been from its beginning, these two forms of art always exist in some degree, even when the arts of design have remained in a purely elementary state.

Spontaneous art, which is but the unconscious manifestation of a natural and innate aptitude, is found at the very commencement of historic times. The oldest Vedic hymns, by which Arian shepherds camped on the banks of the Indus, invoked the gods

of their luminous heaven to guard them against the demons of the night, have as their chief characteristic the expression of the sentiments of fear or of hope <sup>with a power</sup> ~~towards these powers~~; the more remarkable because their collective poems are free from any pre-occupation with deliberate and laboured art. They show neither study nor effort. Their poetry springs from the simple sincerity of the emotion which it breathes. Absolutely subjective by the character of its sentiments, it is often objective enough by the form under which these find interpretation. This form is descriptive, and is perfectly adapted to those poems which deal with astronomic or meteorologic phenomena. But these descriptions develop spontaneously into animated and living dramas, by the simple fact that such phenomena seemed to the Arian but the manifestations of hostile or benevolent forces. For him, heaven and earth, the light, sun, moon, winds, dawn, night, clouds, fire, libations, sacrifice, hymns themselves, are all divinities; that is, active and deliberate beings, whose power, free from all law and far above that of man's creation, menaces him with all evil, or assures him every good, according as he has succeeded or not in gaining their protection and disarming their hostility. From these anthropomorphic ideas springs a cloud of legends, the meaning of which has grown ever more and more obscure. These celestial dramas in time became transformed into heroic tales, whose nature modified itself from generation to generation, and finally resulted in the production of the great epics of antiquity.

These collective outpourings of a race naturally bear its characteristics and express its sentiments. It is impersonal art, in so far as it belongs to no one poet in particular; it is in fact national art.

After this arose a new art, or rather, a new form of art, which is the art of modern times. It became self-conscious, and is chiefly to be distinguished from previous forms of art by this characteristic. The personality of the artist asserts itself more and more, and sometimes goes so far as to become the negation of art, until

it arrives at a pitch of impertinent vanity which substitutes for the sincere and spontaneous expression of feeling, the interested prejudices of the poet anxious for success.

The naive and instinctive art of early days ended by giving place to a reflective and considered art, which, too limited to give itself free rein because its emotion was either superficial or fictitious, fell from one degree of decadence to another to the final depths of academicism. But poetry could never die. To obtain new life it had but to drink fresh draughts at the fountain of truth; and so to periods of debasement have ever succeeded splendid epochs of revival. The period of De Musset, and of Hugo, follows that of Luce de Lancival and Delille.

The great personal form of poetry arose from the development of the spirit of analysis, which, however, also contained the seeds of death. From the moment that man began to examine his own nature, he applied himself to never ceasing investigation; and the satisfaction of his own curiosity, began to obtain the mastery over artistic interest. In consequence of the exclusive spiritualism of so-called philosophic doctrines, which tended more and more to separate moral phenomena from their physiological causes, and to isolate them in an imaginary world of their own—psychologic theories progressively invade the whole domain of poetry, and end by reducing its creations to inanimate phantoms, to pure abstractions which have no reality outside the ethereal spheres haunted by metaphysicians. Such psychological exaggeration could not long endure. It might be strictly adapted to a super-refined state of society, accustomed to an artificial atmosphere and eager for aristocratic subtleties, like that which marked the end of the 17th century. But from the day that literature, instead of confining itself to the special class of which it had been the mirror, began to address the world at large, a transformation became necessary, in order to bring it into conformity with the sentiments and taste of its new public. This change is taking place in spite of the efforts of the fetish worshippers of the past, who try hard to keep it bound in the fetters of a tradition unintelligible to most men.



Art for the multitude must be sincere and life-like, true and tangible. This necessity explains the prodigious development which the theatre has undergone in our day. We must not let the names of Corneille, Racine, or Molière delude us on this point. In our time only has the theatre become part of public manners. We must say the same of fiction in literature.

These two branches of art are undergoing a process of change which grows more marked every day, as they become more popular. To the aristocratic romances and dramas of the 17th century, have gradually succeeded others appealing to the tastes of the middle classes; while social and political movements have been taking a similar direction. Our dramatists and novel writers now go upon a really human system, appealing to society as a whole. Their field is enlarged simultaneously with their human sympathies. Their processes, too, are transformed. Description and pedantic dissection give place to action. Characters are delineated by their acts, making poetry follow the example of real life. This is veritably a new art rising amid the startled clamours of the lover of classic literature. It is easy to see that its future is henceforth assured, and that the tyranny of academic convention is about to be subjected to new and profound discredit.

The dance began by being the simple and spontaneous effect of that desire for physical exertion which results from certain emotions of the soul. It became an art by the effect of rhythm, which regulated the cadence of its movements in accordance with a more or less slow or lively measure, and enabled it to interpret the principal occupations of life by gestures and attitudes. There were war dances, dances of religion, dances at harvest and at vintage. It even got so far as to imitate the movements of the stars, and the chief scenes of the great cosmic and heroic legends. Hence the spontaneous dancing of the earliest times ended by becoming essentially a spectacle, as in the theatre of the Greeks and the opera of modern Europe.

Music springs from an analogous source. Its first germ is to be found in the spontaneous cry of joy or pain, love or anger,

enlarged and diversified by rhythm, and subjected to rules of combination and harmony enforced by the ear. Its domain grows as observation teaches us to recognize the connections that exist between sounds and the emotions of the human soul. The song of primitive times, which as the expression of a unique and well-defined sentiment was slender and monotonous, grew till it gave birth to modern melody, with all the variety and subtlety of intonation that cause the soul to pass through a succession of unexpected modifications. Then, as psychologic analysis progressed and the ear became accustomed to multiplicity and diversity of sounds, harmony was added to melody, bringing the effect of simultaneity of tones and notes, to reinforce that of their succession. Finally, the simultaneity of different tones was united with that of different notes, so that we may well ask what limit is to be placed upon the comprehension of the ear.

The arts that appeal to the eye follow a similar course. Sculpture, the direct embodiment of complete forms with their dimensions, appears to have been the earliest, even before drawing. Arms, instruments, ornaments of carved stone must be classed as sculpture. The cave-dwellers sought after elegance of form and variety of aspect; such search, too, was so spontaneous that it is difficult to allot any share in it to imitation. Imitation only came in later. Then began attempts to reproduce the forms of vegetables, animals and man. These imitations, more or less rough at first, became gradually complete as the eye acquired experience, and the tools, perfection. The oldest monuments that remain to us of Egyptian and Assyrian sculpture are remarkable for the intelligent choice of characteristic traits, often excelling, in this point, those of later epochs. The Greeks, passionate lovers of the beauty of living and especially of human forms, never troubled themselves to reproduce them in all their aspects. The former, having no other aim but imitation, copied with a fidelity and accuracy which prove realism not to be so modern a discovery as we sometimes imagine; the latter, seeking in sculpture the interpretation of their religious or heroic legends, were logically

driven to find a type like their epic and dramatic poets ; not on account of an *à priori* theory, as metaphysicians would have us believe, but simply because their aim was to represent the quality or special attribute of any divinity whose statue they had to produce. The gods of Phidias and Polycletus are majestic and impassive, yet the serene immobility of visage and attitude does not prevent the bodies from being full of life. Their flesh palpitates, the blood courses in their veins, all the appearances of life are so marvellously rendered, that one is tempted to assure oneself, by touch, that they are but marble. The generation that succeeded these great artists was distinguished by a decided leaning towards the expression of human sentiments ; as in tragedy, this tendency becomes rapidly accentuated. Some have seen in it the commencement of decadence. We believe this erroneous idea to be explained by the obstinate self-will of those who judge everything from the platonic ideal point of view.

Modern sculpture can bear no comparison with that of Greece in perfection of form. We will explain why, later. But the latter has another kind of superiority ; expression of character and intensity of moral life.

It is impossible to trace the origin of painting with any certainty. However, the carving of certain prehistoric objects is sufficient proof that man, from the first, has been always sensitive to the beauties of varied colour and the play of light. The pleasure experienced by the most savage tribes in the contemplation of certain colours, their habits of tattooing and tinting the skin, teeth, and hair, conclusively demonstrate such a taste to have been instinctive. We may then conclude, without over-much hardihood, that painting is a scarcely less ancient art than sculpture ; although, for reasons easily to be imagined, no equally ancient remains of its productions have come down to us. The point, however, is not of great importance to our definition of art. Painting rests upon so complete a structure of convention, and its processes necessitate so great a multiplicity of information, that it is easy enough to understand why it arrived comparatively late at relative perfection.

We have many reasons for believing that, at the culminating point of Greek art, painting was little else than painted sculpture.

To-day we see a very different state of things. Painting, though it is but a convention, has become, of all the arts, that which is most able to grapple with reality. It is a creation which has emerged piece by piece from the human brain, and which is now found to be the most perfect mirror of facts and objects, and the most complete expressive medium for the interpretation of the feelings which rise in the soul of man in presence of the phenomena of nature. Its whole history is explained by this double character. On the one hand, we have those who, seeing nothing but its imitative power and enchanted by its marvellous effects, would confine its functions to the literal reproduction of visible facts, and in the result eliminating emotion, poetry, and all that is human from arts, would leave nothing but execution. On the other hand, are those who, struck by its power of expression, have gradually brought themselves to consider it a mere supplement of written or spoken language; and have therefore been led to impose upon it those simplifications, abbreviations, and conventional shifts, which use and necessity have, at one time or other, introduced into every kind of language.

The greatest painters are those who have best resisted these two temptations, and have united the double characteristic of their art in supreme harmony. At present the public, after frequent oscillations between the two extremes, is equally tired of the ideal abstractions of the academic schools, and of the artificial enthusiasms of the romanticists; it has returned to the search for truth and demands sincerity.

We discover in the painting of our day, the same signs of strife which we have already noticed in poetry, and which are the root of all contemporary thought. Everywhere and in every pursuit, truth has become a *sine quâ non*. Painting, in obedience to this tendency, has entered more thoroughly than ever before, into the study of nature and reality; searching there for new

and powerful means of expression, appropriate to the requirements of modern intellect.

Architecture is now one of the arts, but in its commencement it was merely a fact. The first man who thought of digging himself an underground hovel or of constructing a hut, certainly never thought of producing a work of art. He obeyed a desire with which no æsthetic feeling had any concern, just as when he shaped his first hatchet of flint.

Architecture, then, arose from a purely physical want. But from the simple fact that the rudest hut presented to the eye a collection of lines and surfaces, it might have been foreseen that the innate sentiment of art would end by manifesting its preferences, and would give to those lines and surfaces such form and arrangements as would be most pleasing to the sight.

Such preferences found natural opportunities for their exercise in the construction of dwellings destined for gods or princes. Temples and palaces, to be worthy of their inhabitants, had to be distinguished from the huts of the commonalty by size, magnificence, and decorative character. Here we have the germ of all that has followed. Construction and decoration, subordinated to the nature of the materials and the destined purpose of edifices, have produced of themselves the various styles of architecture, as estimated by their general features. Then, by a logical course of concentration and assimilation, analogous to that which has been remarked in the formation of the great legends and epics of antiquity, each of these styles has been completed in everything that could assist the interpretation of the idea which might be regarded as the centre and kernel of the whole combination. This combination is at first, as in the epic poem and in music, only a progressive harmony of signs more or less interpretive of ideas and sentiments—with this difference: the signs made use of and combined in the epic and in music are words and notes, while in architecture, just as in sculpture and painting, they are lines, forms, and colours. We might even say that architecture is no more than an extension of sculpture. The analogy between them

becomes striking when we remember the subterranean temples of India, carved, as they stand, from the single and solid rock. There is this difference, however: sculpture imitates the most common forms of nature, while the architectural model exists, as a whole, nowhere but in the brain of its author.

The more obvious characteristic of each of the arts being now determined, we can at last attempt a general definition of art.

§ 2. *General definition of art—Mutual relation and analysis of the different arts.*

We have seen that art, far from being the blossom and fruit of civilization, is rather, its germ. It began to give evidence of its existence so soon as man became self-conscious, and is to be found clearly defined in his very earliest works.

By its psychologic origin it is bound up with the constituent principles of humanity. The salient and essential characteristic of man is his incessant cerebral activity, which is propagated and developed by countless acts and works of varied kind. The aim and rule of this activity is the search after *the best*; that is to say, the more and more complete satisfaction of physical and moral wants. This instinct, common to all animals, is seconded in man by an exceptionally well-developed faculty to adapt the means to the end.

The effort to satisfy physical wants has given birth to all the industries that defend, preserve, and smooth the path of life; the effort to satisfy the moral wants—of which one of the most important is the gratification of our cerebral activity itself—has created the arts, long before it could give them power sufficient for the conscious elaboration of ideas. The life of sentiment preceded the manifestations of intellectual life by many centuries.

The gratification, *in esse* or *in posse*, of either real or imaginary wants, is the cause of happiness, joy, pleasure, and of all the feelings connected with them; the contrary is marked by grief, sadness, fear etc.: but in both cases there is emotion, whether grave or gay, and it is the nature of such emotion to give more or less

lively evidence of its existence by means of exterior signs. When expressed by gesture and rhythmic movement, such motion produces the dance; when by rhythmic notes, music; when by rhythmic words, poetry.

As in another aspect man is essentially sympathetic and his joy or pain is often caused as much by the good or evil fortunes of others as by his own; as, besides, he possesses in a very high degree the faculty of combining series of fictitious facts, and of representing them in colours even more lively than those of reality: it results that the domain of art is of infinite extent for him. For the causes of emotion are multiplied for every man—not only by the number of similar beings who live around him and are attached to him by the more or less closely knit bonds of affection, alliance, similitude of situation or community of ideas and interests; but, also, by the never-ending multitude of beings and events that are able to originate or direct the imaginings of poets.

To these elements of emotion and moral enjoyment, must be added the combinations of lines, of forms and of colours, the dispositions and opposition of light and shade, etc. The instinctive search after this kind of emotion or pleasure, the special organ of which is the eye, has given birth to what are called the arts of design—sculpture, painting and architecture.

We may say then, by way of general definition, that art is the manifestation of emotion, obtaining external interpretation, now by expressive arrangements of line, form or colour, now by a series of gestures, sounds, or words governed by particular rhythmical cadence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thoré, in his *Salon de 1847*, speaking of Delacroix, gives a definition very like our own. "Poetry, to speak generally, is the faculty of feeling internally the essence of life (?), and art is the faculty of expressing the same thing in external form. Artists, *littérateurs*, painters, sculptors, musicians, really invent only the form to be taken by the poetic sentiment breathed into them by nature or by life. . . . Nature is the supreme artist who in her universal gallery offers to a favoured few the principles of all perfection; the object is to develop some sort of individuality, to give a second creation, with its own distinct and original signifi-

If our definition is exact, we must conclude, from it, that the merit of a work of art, whatever it may be, can be finally measured by the power with which it manifests or interprets the emotion that was its determining cause, and that, for a like reason, must constitute its innermost and supreme unity. We have here a point to which we must return when we have explained the theoretical consequences of the definition which we have given. At present we wish to make it complete and accurate, by showing some of the points of connection which bind the different arts together.

The domain of poetry is almost without limits, because it embraces all the feelings without exception, and because most ideas are equally accessible to it. Moreover, thanks to the peculiar constitution of man's imagination, it is enabled in a certain measure to exercise the functions of each and every art. Not only can it communicate to us impressions of line, form, and colour, in describing a spectacle or object with sufficient relief to create almost optical illusion; but, by variety of rhythm and intonation, by choice, arrangement, and harmony of the words employed, it possesses sufficient musical power to charm the ear, apart from the thought or feeling expressed.

Nor is this all. By arrangement and proportion of parts, by relief, by intonation and expression of verses, by variety and precision in phrase, and by contrasting images, it is possible to excite in an auditor general impressions only to be described by terms borrowed

tion. Art, being the form or image of a thought, or, if you will, the human interpretation of the appearances presented by nature, should be as human as possible. The more the artist has transformed external reality, the more of himself has he put into his work, the more has he raised his representation towards the ideal concealed in the heart of every man, and the farther has he penetrated into the world of poetry. On the other hand, if he has added nothing to the common physiognomy of nature, has he produced an industrial, but not an artistic work. Such work would be worthy only of a mechanic. To copy nature, as most people mean it, is folly. Take your dark room and your daguerreotype." We need not pause to consider the phraseology, which is out of date. In the main, the ideas are true.



from the arts which appeal to the eye. Truly we may say of a great poem, that its versification recalls architecture by making a similar impression upon the intellect; that in strength and vigour of contour it may be compared to sculpture: while in colour it equals the works of the greatest painters.

The power of music, being mainly concerned with the concord between rhythm and sound and the auditory fibres which they put in motion, is also bound up with the other arts by singular analogies, whose nature science is now just beginning to understand. Thanks, then, to the mutual relations of the numbers which constitute notes, which have at last been accurately determined, music may be called an architecture of sound, in the same sense in which architecture may be said to be the music of space—and in both an equal respect for necessary proportion and harmony must be observed. Again, it is by the connection between sonorous and luminous vibrations that we account for the resemblance that exists between sensations of sound and colour. Language had long established and consecrated these resemblances, before science had explained their cause.<sup>1</sup>

The *battements* caused by discords with their intermittent silences, fatigue and irritate the auditory nerves precisely in the

<sup>1</sup> Light is produced by the atomic vibrations of the ether which transmits it, just as sound is produced by molecular vibration of the air. Sonorous vibrations are *longitudinal*; luminous ones are transverse. This fact is proved by the phenomenon of polarization. We cannot calculate directly the length of luminous waves, but we have succeeded in doing so indirectly, but accurately, by their effects. Diversity of colour is caused by the varying lengths of these waves. They diminish gradually from red to violet. The length of wave which produces red, the middle of the prismatic colour, is 620 millionths of a millimetre. The colour of light depends upon the number of luminous waves that strike upon the retina in a second; the sharpness of sound depends upon the number of sonorous waves that strike the tympanum in the same space of time—514 trillions of shocks make red; 751 trillions, violet, and so on. The parallelism of optic and acoustic phenomena has been established by the labours of Thomas Young and Augustin Fresnel. Recent experiences and, notably, the essays upon *les interférences*, have placed these results beyond question. We can do no more than mention them here, referring those who may wish for more detailed information, to the work upon light of Professor Tyndall.

same manner and for the same reason as the oscillations of a lamp worry and tease the eye by intermitting light and shade—compelling the optic nerves to continuously accommodate themselves to over-abrupt variations. We are equally fatigued by loud sounds or even colours; though in a different way, viz., by the continuation of an exaggerated effort or too lively sensation. If we employ instruments which only give out fundamental sounds, we produce spiritless, or, so to speak, neutral-tinted music; colour, on the other hand, is obtained by the free vibration of chords, emitting a fundamental with its accompanying harmonics, and causing the multitudinous fibres of the auditory apparatus to vibrate and simultaneously communicate a large number of concordant sensations.

But music, if it were content to invariably ascend and descend the scale of sonorous vibrations by insensible gradation, would soon become wearisome, enervating, and somniferous. The continuity of a movement without variety of change of meaning, would have, in music, just the same artistic value as the infinite prolongation of a straight line in painting, or of a blank wall in architecture. Uniformity and monotony are in direct and absolute contradiction to artistic effect, the essential characteristics of which are, indeed, variety of movement and exaltation of brain activity—in a word, intensified vital action.

The first duty of music, which is the result of sound movement, is, therefore, to vary its movements just as the motions and attitudes of the body are varied in dancing. Looked at from this point of view, we might call music the dance of sounds.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. Helmholtz has just succeeded in demonstrating that this is something more than a mere metaphor. This physicist, passing his observations upon the fertile principles of modern dynamics, which sees in the world nothing but force and movement, has proved by the aid of certain ingenious instruments that sound is simply a peculiar kind of molecular movement. It is produced whenever the constituent molecules of a solid, liquid, or gaseous body leave their places and enter into vibration. The molecule drawn by such vibration to a greater or less distance from its original place, really executes a dance, and produces a sound the intensity or shrillness of which is proportionate to the amplitude of its movement or the rapidity of its vibrations.

This similitude, which is ever present, was more striking when the fugue style of composition was in vogue. "This melodious theme," says M. Laugel, "which goes through constant series of repetitions, at varying heights, voices succeeding each other, mingling with, and alternately dominating over each other, phrases unfolding themselves in tumultuous succession, advancing and retiring in rhythmic order, gradually entangling and as gradually disengaging themselves, gave rise to a kind of continuous and unbroken playing, whose peculiar and agreeable movements infallibly suggested the idea of groups advancing to produce their assigned effect, and then gradually disappearing."

Notes are the raw material of musicians, as stones, of architects, or colours, of painters. Melody, which is caused by the succession alone of notes, arranges these materials as after a design, easily recognised and determined by the intellect to which it appeals; and harmony, which consists of the concord between notes or groups of notes, imparts a sensation similar to that resulting from the colouring of a picture.

The visual arts confine themselves less strictly to the sensations produced on the eye by combinations of form, line, and colour. Doubtless such impressions remain the dominant ones, as is but natural, seeing that they are the *raison d'être* of the said arts. Any sculptor, architect, or painter, who would despise proportion, correctness, or harmony, would cease to deserve the name of artist; just as would a poet who wrote verse that would not scan, or a musician who neglected the laws of harmony. The antecedent condition of these arts is an eye peculiarly sensitive to the pleasures which spring from the mere sight of things. The next condition is, a special faculty to give to these visible appearances all the eloquence of which they are capable, and thus outwardly to manifest the impressions that they have caused upon the soul of the artist.

The painter is, before all, a man who, having received from nature the gift of extraordinary sensibility in his optic nerves, enjoys life mainly through the eye; just as the pleasures of the

gourmet all arise from the exceptional irritability or development of his nerve tufts and buccal papillæ. He finds a charm in combinations of line, form, and colour, which nothing else can give in equal degree. This attraction determines his vocation, and is the source of all his emotions. To obey his unconquerable desire for the external manifestation of his feelings, he applies himself to the reproduction, in ideal or realistic form, of the combinations of shape and colour which entrance his soul.

To the fundamental note, resulting from the vibration of the optic nerves, must, however, as in other cases, be added the *methods* of accompanying harmonies. The direct impression received by the eye is combined with a crowd of secondary impressions, the more or less simultaneous appearance of which is to be explained by the constitution of the human brain; their number and importance increasing in direct proportion with its intellectual power and development. There is, between the purely artistic faculties, and those which cannot be so considered, a scarcely conceivable multitude of harmonies or discords, constituting a corresponding multitude of actual and potential artists of different degrees of merit. Thus sculpture, painting, and architecture, afford an illimitable power for the expression or suggestion of a more or less considerable number of feelings, or even of ideas. The domain of sculpture, without being so narrow and confined as the exclusive cultivators of classic art would have it, cannot be made to embrace so much as that of architecture; which is more varied in its methods, and able to press all beautiful shapes into its service. Still less can its scope be compared to that of painting, which is, by far, the most expressive of the arts which appeal to the eye.

We see, then, how difficult it is to make good any absolute wall of division between the different arts. Notwithstanding their varied modes of procedure, they are for ever making little raids upon each other, because each have the same point of departure and ultimate aim—man, the common centre round which they all revolve, and whose complex nature is to some extent reflected in everything that emanates from him.

## CHAPTER VI.

## DEFINITION OF ÆSTHETICS.

*Beauty—Its insufficiency to explain art—The imitation theory not more acceptable—Definition.*

WE have defined art, and we must now attempt to explain what we mean by the word Æsthetics. Define your terms, is the advice of Voltaire, who, after having passed all his life in various branches of polemics, knew by personal experience how impossible it is to have any serious discussion unless both parties to it thoroughly agree, from the first, as to the exact meaning of the words to be employed. This precaution, useful in every case, is more than ever necessary when we attack questions that have been thrown into confusion by metaphysicians. We may place æsthetics in the very first rank of subjects so obscured—What is æsthetics? Etymologically, the term comes from a Greek word signifying sensation or perception. Æsthetics, then, should be that science which treats of sensations and perceptions. All of them, or only some particular ones? The word alone does not tell us.

In the former case, we should have a complete system of philosophy; because there is hardly a circumstance of humanity which, philosophically speaking, cannot be referred either to a sensation or a perception. In the latter case, the term is wanting in precision; because it does not tell us with which perceptions or sensations it is concerned. The word, in fine, is ill-made. But it has passed into use, and we must put up with it for want of a better.

Æsthetics has been defined as the "Science of the Beautiful," which may seem, at the first glance, intellectually sufficient; but a moment's reflection will show that the definition would gain by itself being defined.

The science of the beautiful be it, but then, what is beauty?

This abstract term has an air of Platonic entity which, like everything touched by metaphysical philosophy, refuses to submit to analysis. From ancient days down to our own, almost all the æsthetic doctrines founded upon the "beauty" theory, have considered it as something abstract, divine, with an absolute and distinct reality quite apart from man. The small number of metaphysicians who have held a different view has exercised a very restricted influence over art, to which we need not refer here.

Plato, Winckelmann and the academic school of our own day, consider abstract beauty to be one of the attributes of divine perfection; a thing absolute, one and indivisible, consequently unique and universal; unchanged and unchangeable, dominating all peoples and all art in all times.

To apply their theory, beauty is the essential form of all creatures before they took actual bodily shape; it is, in fact, the prototype of creation such as it must have presented itself in the brain of the Divine Creator, before the degradation consequent on its material realisation had taken place.

So soon as the mind has been induced to form a conception of the beautiful divorced from any connection with material reality, the definition and determination of metaphysical beauty, which must be universal and unchangeable, becomes a mere matter of logical induction. The starting point or premises may be utterly absurd, but this has never troubled metaphysicians, as they succeeded in establishing their conclusion by regularly formed syllogisms. Beauty, as understood by them, naturally became the unique and supreme aim of all the arts, the eternal model for every effort of man, and the goal of all his aspirations. Considered from this point of view, it calls itself the ideal, though

it is nothing but a feeble reflection of truth,<sup>1</sup> only existing in the world of the intellectualists and their abstract ideas.

This conception of beauty is certainly the most wide-spread. It is propagated by university teaching, and has, therefore, peculiar prestige and influence in the official world.

Its principle rests upon an abstract hypothesis which is absolutely without justification, and has no show of reality beyond the mere existence in the dictionary of the word from which it takes its origin, like every other metaphysical entity of a similar kind. It is true, indeed, that either from early inability to analyse sensations and to distinguish between cognate perceptions, or from the later necessity for simplification and generalisation, language has summarized in the expression "beauty" the ensemble of all admirative impressions. All this, however, does not give metaphysicians any right to deduce the fundamental and substantial unity of the cause from results which are actually so various.

Unless we are prepared, either to withdraw from the domain of art a large number of works which have given honour to the genius of man, or to make violent changes in the meaning of words, we shall find it quite impossible to make such an idea of beauty suffice for the gratification of all artistic aspiration. Art, in truth, addresses all the feelings without exception; hope or fear, joy or grief, love or hatred. It interprets every emotion that agitates the human heart, and never troubles itself with its relation to visible or ideal perfection. It even expresses what is ugly and horrible, without ceasing to be art and worthy of admiration. The battle field of Eylau, the hideous and awful tortures of the damned, the crimes and ignominies of those ferocious beasts who under the name of Cæsars struck so great horror into Roman civilization—have not these afforded to Gros, to Dante, to Tacitus, opportunities for magnificent works whose models would hardly be found in the world of the intellectualists? What beauty is to be found in a

<sup>1</sup> And not the *splendour of truth*, as those who endow Plato with the fancies of their own imagination believe him to have said. Such beauty as can be conceived by man is, by his teaching, but the obscure shadow of divine perfection.

battle field strewn with dead and dying? What in a vision of Ugolino devouring the head of his enemy, or of Tiberius at Capri?

Such examples as these we have given are to be found everywhere, in all the arts. The most classic poems are full of them. From the very beginning of the Iliad Achilles and Agamemnon abuse each other with an *abandon* and in a style that must please the most daring realist of our day. The corpse of Hector dragged round the tomb of Patroclus, the portrait of Thersites, the scenes of massacre which succeed each other without intermission, (Edipus tearing out his eyes and coming in his blood to recount his woes, Hercules destroying his children in a fit of mad folly, Medea cutting the throats of her sons to revenge herself upon a rival, the furies pursuing Orestes, and a thousand similar passages—amply prove that the Greeks themselves, in spite of what Plato may say, did not confine their art to the search for beauty.

What beauty lurks in the more or less odious and shameful vices of that great multitude of wretches which peoples the literature of all times and countries? Where is it to be found in such men as Nero, such women as Agrippina, in Madame Bovary or La Marneffe? Whence comes it that the description of basenesses and degradations, themselves horrible to us, can produce, in works of art, so different a feeling?

This strange effect is explained as being the natural result of imitation. Boileau, who can hardly be suspected of realism, said without meeting with any contradiction :

Il n'est point de serpent, ni de monstre odieux  
Qui, par l'art imité, ne puisse plaire aux yeux.

Long before him Aristotle said : "Imitation always pleases. The productions of art prove that it is so. Objects that we could not see *in propria personâ* without discomfort, hideous animals, for instance, or corpses, afford us pleasure when viewed through



exact representations." Pascal states the same fact, though from a very different point of view. "What vanity is painting," he says, "which arouses our admiration for objects whose originals we never admire." We are thus compelled to refuse acquiescence in any theory which describes beauty as the result of perfection. The examples we have given imply also a duplication of the question at issue, and prove that an essential distinction exists between the beauty of nature and that of art. The former alone has to do with ideal perfection, while the latter arises from a purely human and accidental circumstance, imitation. We shall return by and by to this distinction, and shall endeavour to estimate its value ; at present our only concern is with artistic beauty.

Is it true that a spectacle which is frightful *in propria personâ* becomes beautiful when imitated? Is it, in fact, the excellence of the resemblance which gives beauty to a work of art? Certainly not. Aristotle, Boileau, Pascal, and all the partisans of the imitative theory, have been deceived by a superficial notion which will not bear examination.

Get the most able of artists to paint the portraits of Thersites or Quasimodo. Their frightful forms would become no less horrible as figures, and we should not be deluded by the painter into thinking so. The portrait of an ugly man remains ugly if the representation be faithful ; just as the exact delineation of the features of an Antinous or an Adonis would of course give us the impression of a fine physique. At the same time it is quite possible that we may consider the portrait of Quasimodo, hideous though he be, infinitely superior as a work of art to the Antinous, although it, too, may be an exact resemblance.

This fact has escaped the notice of those who hold that imitation is the supreme aim of art, and its exactitude the infallible measure of the merit of a work.

It is, however, a most important fact, because it enables us to arrive at the very essence of art, and to understand how it has come to occupy so high a place among the manifestations of human genius.

To begin with—if all artistic effort were confined to the mere imitation of objects, we should be perforce obliged to acknowledge that the rôle of art has now come to an end, so far at least as the reproduction of linear form is concerned ; as, from such a point of view, no imitation could reasonably pretend to greater accuracy than that of photography. The sole advantage remaining to the painter would be the power, which the mechanical process is as yet without, of reproducing colour. But if, as seems probable, chemistry should one day achieve this last triumph, art, its occupation gone, would have to surrender its place—just as in industrial labour, machinery tends daily more and more to supersede hand-work.

Accuracy of imitation may, we allow, have a certain utility and importance, when, for instance, it is employed to reproduce the features of some famous man occupying a place in history, or to delineate a particular passion or character. In such works we must have accurate resemblance and precise detail. Portraits of Richelieu, Louis XIV., and of Napoleon rank among our historic documents. We should not tolerate their representation in poetry or painting with features other than those historically belonging to them. Why do the moral portraitures of La Bruyère, of Molière, of Balzac, create so lively an interest ? Is it not, partly at least, because they are so true ; permitting us to penetrate, under the guidance of these great spirits, into mysteries of the human heart which we should otherwise never have known so thoroughly ?

But the importance of faithful imitation must not be exaggerated. We must point out one essential distinction. The historian and moralist naturally attach great value to accuracy of reproduction. From their special point of view there is immense interest in tracing, in historic portraits, the features of men who had in their lives great influence over the fate of their fellow men ; and, in observing in pictures of manners, the traits which help to explain and elucidate the passions, caprices, and vices of humanity. They love to feel themselves upon sure ground, and are very

grateful to the painters, poets, and other observers who serve them by facilitating their researches.

But from the æsthetic standpoint, which indeed is ours, the value of a work must not be estimated by the number of services that it can render. Such a criterion may be fitly applied to science or industry, but not to art.

Look, for instance, at the portraits drawn with such rare vigour and powerful relief in the memoirs of St. Simon. Why are they so telling? Is it because they are so like? Of that we cannot judge, as we have not the models before us. No! it is the diabolic verve of the man which fascinates us; the concentrative power with which he grasps and renders in a few words the essential characteristics of a physiognomy; the passionate gusto with which he lets loose the hatred or contempt that most of the originals of his portraits inspire him with, as if to justify the evil he has spoken of them. Such being his character, it is hardly probable that he should be capable of displaying the necessary impartiality for the production of portraits with any pretensions to be considered historic documents; and, in any matter not illustrated by other sources of information, we may always take it for granted that he has not hesitated to maliciously accentuate certain traits and leave others in the background.

None the less do his memoirs constitute a gallery of the first order from an æsthetic point of view; because, in default perhaps of resemblance, his pictures are full of movement and life. We feel that their author has wished to make them truthful, and has believed that they really were so; but nevertheless he has depicted men and women such as they seemed to him through the lens of his own feelings. Sincerity in art takes the place of truth.

The degree of realism possessed by a work of art has, then, no æsthetic importance, except in so far as it enables us to estimate the power of penetration necessary for its grasp, and the force of imagination required to reproduce an object in such relief as to excite our admiration.

But we must recognize that the conditions are different when, instead of the portrait of an individual, we have to do with the delineation of passion or character. True and well understood features then acquire much greater æsthetic value. But, in this latter case as in the former, the intrinsic beauty of the model possesses but secondary importance.

§ 2. *What we admire in a work of art is the genius of the artist.—  
Definition of Æsthetics.*

While we watch the development of the character of Tartuffe, of Harpagon, of cousin Bette, of La Marneffe, the æsthetic interest that we feel is caused neither by Tartuffe, the miser, Bette, nor La Marneffe, but by the profound powers of observation which have enabled Molière and Balzac to penetrate to the inmost depths of these characters; and, above all, by the ability shown in creating an external embodiment of their accumulated observation, and placing living beings in the searching light of the stage or of fiction. What we admire in these characters is, not themselves, but the genius which created them, which gave them movement, which gave them life so peculiar and so intense that, once installed in our memory, they can never be uprooted, but remain ineffaceable visions. When we hear them speak and act, whether in the pages of a book or on the boards of a theatre, we marvel at the wonderful magic, the miracle of intuition that has enabled their authors to render the perceptions of their brains visible and palpable to all; to construct complete images more lively than their models; and to animate their phantoms with an inner and communicative vibration that the real persons never possess in the same degree, and which has given them the right of equal entry into that superior world where dwell the immortal types created by the imagination of man. Never ceasing to be true, they excel the reality from which they spring; they condense and complete it by the most significant features, free from trivial detail which would obscure our clear perception of them: and

attain, by such condensation, an intensity of effect that we do not meet in nature. This is the true mission of art, thanks to which, its creations become models in their turn.

Now what do the above-named types represent to us? Hypocrisy, avarice and envy! Who would say that the beauty which we find in the portrayal of these hideous vices exists in the vices themselves? Obviously not—it lies entirely in the art and personality of the poets who had power to create such lively images. It is, then, not only accuracy of imitation which fascinates us, but chiefly the art that has evolved these perfect *ensembles* from the materials furnished by real life. We do not admire the vices represented to our view, but the genius of the men who have so thoroughly understood and delineated them. In sum, what seems so fine to us is, not the originals, but their portraits; and, for a similar reason, the portrait of a Quasimodo may be a beautiful work of art.

To give other examples—what is it that strikes us in the fresco of the Sistine chapel, where Michael Angelo has represented the separation of light from darkness? Evidently imitation has nothing to do with it. No man, Michael Angelo no more than any other, saw the creation of light. The imagination of the artist had absolutely free scope. The arrangement of his work was completely subordinate to the power which he could put into the interpretation of his idea of a spectacle, whose elements were only to be found within himself. The Bible, even, could be no guide to him, so far as imitation is concerned. Jehovah said: “Let there be light, and there was light.” How is the energy of these creative words to be represented in painting? It would be madness to dream of it. The resources of the painter are not those of the poet. The one addresses the mind through the ear, the other through the eye. This the artist understood. He replaced words by a gesture; and succeeded as well as Moses himself in communicating the impression of sovereign grandeur and power produced upon his imagination by the act which he wished to represent. When Ruysdael shows us a thicket struck by the wind, is it the indi-

viduality of its form which interests us?'<sup>1</sup> Need we, to excite our emotion, make sure that a forest, as painted, accurately re-

<sup>1</sup> Of every work of art we may truly say that its chief value consists in the personal character of its author; and this is, perhaps, more true of Ruysdael than of any other man. E. Fromentin, who has studied the Dutchmen and Flemings in their native country with admirable care and sagacity, asserts that Ruysdael, judging from details alone, is inferior to many of his compatriots. He was wanting in skill at a time and in a school where every one possessed consummate skill. He fails in being what we call facile. He seems slow of intellect, his motives are all on the surface, he has but little vivacity or archness. His drawing has not always the incisive, clear, even fantastic character visible in some of Hobbema's pictures. He never succeeded in placing figures in his pictures. (There is a fine Ruysdael in the National Gallery in which figures are introduced, a very rare practice with the painter.—Trans.) He is without the fine atmosphere of Cuyp; in modelling he is far inferior to Terburg and Metsu. He is wanting in subtlety and insight, and the intellectual finesse of his rivals makes him appear a little morose. His pictures are very like one another; and when we see many together, they soon become monotonous. His colour is wanting in variety and richness. It has but little splendour, is not always even pleasing, or of good quality. Nevertheless, and in spite of all, Ruysdael is unique. Of this we are soon convinced in presence of his pictures in the Louvre,—'Buisson,' 'La Tempête,' 'Le petit Paysage,' (No. 474). . . . At the exhibition of old masters held for the benefit of Alsace and Lorraine, Ruysdael assuredly held undisputed sovereignty; in a collection, too, very rich in the works of Dutch and Flemish masters. . . . I appeal to the recollections of all those to whom that assembly of excellent works was a real enlightenment—did not Ruysdael prove himself a great master, and, still better, a great intellect? At Brussels and Antwerp, at the Hague and Amsterdam, the same effect is produced. Wherever Ruysdael appears, it is with a way of his own; self-contained, imposing, demanding respect and attention, telling us that we have before us the mind of one who comes of a great race, and who can always tell us something worth knowing. Such are the grounds of Ruysdael's reputation, and they are enough. In him we see a man who thinks, and each of his works contains an idea. As thoughtful in his way as the most thoughtful of his compatriots, with natural gifts similar to theirs, he is, at the same time, more prone to reflection and emotion. More than any other Dutchman did he possess that equilibrium which adds perfect unity to other excellencies. In his pictures we find an air of plenitude, of serene certainty and profound repose, which are the distinctive characteristics of his personality, and prove that harmony never for a moment ceased to hold its sway over his fine natural powers, his great experience, his lively sensibility, and his unwearied thoughtfulness. He paints as he thinks, calmly, forcibly, and largely." We could not put more clearly the influence of man's personality upon his work; and this is the proposition which we sustain, and which, as we understand the subject, is the unique and solid basis of all æsthetics.

seembles the real one which served as model? What does that matter? Enough for us that it is a forest; we only care about that character, which, impressed upon the work, brings to us the identical feeling of its author. We may say the same of the Iliad, the Odyssey, the tragedies of Æschylus, of Sophocles, of Euripides, of Corneille, of the dramas of Shakespeare and Victor Hugo, of the Divine Comedy, of all the great achievements of human genius. Who ever thinks, when reading these works, of asking whether they are strictly in accord with the truth of facts?

Imitation is no more the aim of art, than a mere collection of letters and syllables is the aim of a writer who wishes to express his thoughts and feelings by the aid of the words which they form. The poet arranging his verses, the musician composing his airs and harmonies, are well aware that their real object lies beyond words and notes. This distinction, as we have here explained it, is perhaps less clear in matters of painting and sculpture. Some artists, and these not the least capable, are quite convinced that when they have a model before them, their one duty is to imitate it. And indeed they do nothing else; and, by virtue of such imitation they succeed in producing works of incontestable artistic value.

Here we have simply a misunderstanding. If an artist were really able to reduce himself to the condition of a copying machine; if he could so far efface and suppress himself as to confine his work to the servile reproduction of all the features and details of an object or event passing before his eyes: the only value his work would possess, would be that of a more or less exact *procès verbal*, and it would perforce remain inferior to reality. Where is the artist who would attempt to depict sunlight without taking refuge in some legerdemain, calling to his aid devices which the true sun would despise? But enough of this. Just because he is endowed with sensibility and imaginative power, the artist, in presence of the facts of nature or the events of history, finds himself, whether he will or not, in a peculiar situation. However

thorough a realist he may think himself, he does not leave himself to chance. Now, choice of subject alone is enough to prove that, from the very beginning, some preference has existed, the result of a more or less predeterminate impression, and of a more or less unconscious agreement between the character of the object and that of the artist. This impression and agreement he sets to work to embody in outward form; it is the real aim of his work, and its possession gives him his claim to the name of artist. Without wishing or even knowing it, he moulds the features of nature to his dominant impression and to the idea that caused him to take pencil in hand. His work has an accidental stamp, in addition to that of the permanent genius which constitutes his individuality. Poet, musician, sculptor and architect, all pay more or less strict obedience to the same law. To it, point all those rules of artistic composition which pedantic academicism has subtly multiplied until they contradict each other.

The more of this personal character that a work possesses; the more harmonious its details and their combined expression; the more clearly each part communicates the impression of the artist, whether of grandeur, of melancholy or of joy; in fine, the more that expression of human sensation and will predominates over mere imitation: the better will be its chance of obtaining sooner or later the admiration of the world—always supposing that the sentiment expressed be a generous one, and that the execution be not of such a kind as to repel or baffle connoisseurs. It is not of course impossible, that an artist endowed with an ill-regulated or morbid imagination may place himself outside all normal conditions and condemn himself to the eternal misapprehension of the public. Impressions that are too particular, eccentric feelings, fantastic execution or processes, which do nothing to raise the intrinsic value or power of inspiration of a work, may give it so strange and ultra-individual a character, that it may become impossible for us to arrive at its real merit. The best qualities, when exaggerated, become faults; and that very personality or individuality which, when added to imitative power, results in a



work of art, produces when pushed to extravagance nothing but an enigma. ||

We see, then, if we have succeeded in making ourselves understood, that the beautiful in art springs mainly from the intervention of the genius of man when more or less excited by special emotion.

A work is beautiful when it bears strong marks of the individuality of its author, of the permanent personality of the artist, and of the more or less accidental impression produced upon him by the sight of the object or event rendered.

In a word, it is from the worth of the artist that that of his work is derived. It is the manifestation of the faculties and qualities he possesses which attracts and fascinates us. The more sympathetic power and individuality that these faculties and qualities display, the easier is it for them to obtain our love and admiration. On the other hand, we, for a similar reason, reject and condemn bold and vulgar works that by their shortcomings demonstrate the moral and intellectual mediocrity of their authors, and prove the latter to have mistaken their vocation.

Consequently, then, beauty in art is a purely human creation. Imitation may be its means, as in sculpture and painting; or, on the other hand, it may have nothing to do with it, as in poetry and music. This beauty is of so peculiar a nature that it may exist even in ugliness itself; inasmuch as the exact reproduction of an ugly model may be a beautiful work of art, by the ensemble of qualities which the composition of it may prove are possessed by its author.

The very theory of imitation is but the incomplete and superficial statement of the ideas which we are here advocating. What is it that we admire in imitation? The resemblance? We have that much better in the object itself. But how is it that the similitude of an ugly object can be beautiful? It is obvious that between the object and its counterfeit some new element intervenes. This element is the personality, or, at least, the skill of the artist. This latter, indeed, is what they admire who will have

it that beauty consists in imitation. What these applaud, in fact, is the talent of the artist. If we look below the surface and analyse their admiration we shall find that it is so; whether they mean it or not, what they praise in a work is the worker.

This was the opinion of Bürger, who, in his *Salon of 1863*, says: "In works which interest us the authors in a way substitute themselves for nature. However common or vulgar the latter may be, they have some rare and peculiar way of looking at it. It is Chardin himself whom we admire in his representation of a glass of water. We admire the genius of Rembrandt in the profound and individual character which he imparted to every head that posed before him. Thus did they seem to him, and this explains everything simple or fantastic in his expression and execution."

After all this, we need not stop to refute the theory which would found artistic beauty upon the imitation of "beautiful nature." In spite of the brilliant reputation that its triumph in three academies has given to M. Ch. Sévène's book upon the science of beauty, it does not seem to us to be founded upon arguments worthy of respect; it has not shown us where "beautiful nature" (*la belle nature*) is to be found in *Le Pouilleux*, in the *Raft of the Medusa*, in the *Battlefield of Eylau*, in the character of *Tartuffe*, or of *La Marneffe*.

The only beauty in a work of art is that placed there by the artist. It is both the result of his efforts and the foundation of his success. As often as he is struck by any vivid impression—whether moral, intellectual, or physical—and expresses that impression by some outward process—by poetry, music, sculpture, painting or architecture—in such a way as to cause its communication with the soul of spectator or auditor; so often does he produce a work of art the beauty of which will be in exact proportion to the intelligence and depth of the sentiment displayed, and the power shown in giving it outward form.

The union of all these conditions constitutes artistic beauty in its most complete expression.

With a few reservations, then, we may preserve the definition of

æsthetics which usage has sanctified—*The Science of Beauty*. For the sake of clearness, however, and to prevent confusion, we prefer to call it the *Science of Beauty in Art*. Had not the tyranny of formulæ by custom become too strong, we would willingly refrain from using the word “beauty” at all, for it has the drawback of being too exclusively connected with the sense of seeing, and of calling up too much the idea of visible form. The employment of this word became general when *the art par excellence* was sculpture. To make it apply to the other arts, it was necessary to foist upon it a series of extensions which deprived it of all accuracy. Language possesses no word more vague or less precise. This absence of precision has perhaps contributed more than might at first be supposed to that confusion of ideas which can alone explain the multiplicity and absurdity of current æsthetic theories.

All these inconveniences and obscurities may be avoided by simply putting it thus:—

Æsthetics is the science whose object is the study and elucidation of the manifestations of artistic genius.

## CHAPTER VII.

## DECORATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE ART.

§ 1. *Characteristics of Decorative Art—Decorative Art among the Greeks.*

THE idea of beauty as understood by the ancients, and as defined in most modern treatises upon æsthetics, is not in itself sufficient to account for art. The two conceptions, to speak in academic style, are not coterminous. Art goes far beyond mere beauty, and, therefore, cannot be included in it. Their true connection is the exact opposite. It is art which encloses the beautiful, just as it encloses what is terrible or sad, ugly or joyous.

In fact there exists a distinct art, having beauty for its object, and with a particular character of its own, which is one to be carefully distinguished by us. This art arises from an instructive and voluntary search for the pleasures of the eye and ear. It is achieved mainly by arrangement of line, form, colour, sound, rhythm, movement, light, and shade, without any necessity for the intervention of idea or sentiment. This branch of plastic art is called "decorative," in contradistinction to the other branch, which is called "expressive" art.

It is essential to distinguish between the two things; and it is partly because this has not been done, that the science of æsthetics has not even now emerged from its period of obscurity and confusion, to which false conceptions have given so long a life.

The arts of design are not the only ones which may possess a decorative character. It is to be found in the dance, in music, in

poetry, and in rhetoric. Our ballet measures are usually nothing but decorative dancing, with the one object, to please the eye. The special character of Italian music, with its bravura airs, its roulades, shakes and embellishments, is purely decorative, aiming but to amuse the ear. Poetry, as understood by our modern Parmassians—who subordinate all thought and feeling to complex conceits of rhyme and quaint concords of sound, who think more of harmonious versification than of true or noble sentiment—is decorative poetry. This description applies equally to that academic kind of literature of which the most perfect examples are the *éloges* of Thomas, the funeral orations of Flécherier or the poems of Delille, whose more or less successful resurrection occurs whenever a new member is received by the French Academy. The chief characteristic of such work is the laborious care taken to make a grandiloquent speech without anything in it.

Does it follow, then, that decorative art must be false and contemptible? Certainly not. So long as it confines itself within its proper limits, which may be said to be grace, prettiness, and *beauty*, and refrains from obtruding itself in its search for novelty into what is strange, or, in mere eccentricity, into what is old-fashioned or false, decorative art is perfectly legitimate, and in supplying a natural want, cannot be too much encouraged. All lovers of art visited the great show of tapestries collected in 1876 in the *Palais de l'Industrie* by the *Union Centrale des Beaux Arts appliqués à l'industrie*. There was to be seen that great art in all its splendour, the very tradition of which seems to become more lost to us every day.<sup>1</sup> What harmony of colour! what taste in composition! Had these old fellows some power in their eyes which we are without? Nearly all the art of the eighteenth century,

<sup>1</sup> The truth is, that the most natural combinations were long ago exhausted by our ancestors, and the necessity for never-failing novelty has driven us to adopt complications which are rarely happy: how can they be, when we consider the modern dislike to the use of a subject more than once? If we would but consent to take our themes from the every-day life around us, we should there find harmonies of line and colour which would enable us to avoid repetition without falling into eccentricity. But what would the Academy say to this?

up to the Revolution at least, was purely decorative. Watteau and Boucher, admirable as decorators, troubled themselves very little about what we call "high art." They received from nature a gift for infinite grace, stamping all their works with its inimitable and unmistakable seal.

Greek art itself partakes to a great extent of a decorative character. I do not only refer to that charming form of art which spreads with inexhaustible invention over the utensils of every-day life. No, a decorative stamp is impressed upon almost all Greek art until the day when it first began to take note of moral expression and human personality; because, as we cannot too often repeat, a decorative aim is not only compatible with what is graceful and pleasing, it includes beauty also, in its generalities, so far as it is expressed by form.

Here we come to an essential point upon which we must dwell a little to obviate possible indefiniteness.

Sculpture was preeminently the chief of the arts in ancient Greece. Now, its oldest monuments may be divided into two distinct categories. On one side, we have the images of the gods, the Zeus and Pallas of Phidias for instance, in which, as the embodiments of divine power and wisdom, the dominant characteristic was the expression of an attribute; that is, of an idea. On the other, we have the statues or reliefs which reproduced scenes from heroic or religious mythology, and were intended for the decoration of monuments.

This difference of purpose determines two tendencies in art which we should be wrong to confuse. The former led to that expressive sculpture of which Phidias afforded the earliest models; and the moral significance which he could not help giving both to the separate features and to the complete personalities of his statues, took gradually, in the works of his successors, a more and more important place. The latter produced a form of art that has ever remained subordinate to architecture, of which, indeed, it is an integral part; we call it ornament. This latter art naturally made the refinement of linear contour its

main object, seeking for perfection of form and harmony of effect; in fact, for the sculpturesque qualities which charm the eye.

We must observe that those Greek sculptors who most strongly insisted upon moral expression, were as faithful as any in their representation of physical beauty.<sup>1</sup> This worship of plastic perfection was one of the dominant traits of the Greek intellect. This kind of art has always been the most accessible to the public, and its examples the most numerous. This, too, is one of the causes of the opinion which has been so general and so long-lived, that beauty is the chief aim of sculpture; the existing æsthetic rules of the arts which appeal to eyesight being constructed upon this single conception.

It is true, however, that the poetic ideal of the Greeks is infinitely more comprehensive than, from such a starting point, we might suppose.

The notion of beauty, expand it how we may, could never suffice to give even the smallest idea of Greek poetry. The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the tragedies of *Æschylus*, of *Euripides*, even of *Sophocles*, are founded upon a conception of art at once broader and more complex than Plato's system of æsthetics; although the latter does not confine itself within the bounds prescribed by the "sculptural beauty" notion. In fact, Greek poetry was from the very beginning the poetry of humanity, comprehending a crowd of sentiments and ideas that could not be explained by any such narrow theory.

Music with its different methods, to the moral power of which many an ancient tradition bears witness, could not, any more than sculpture, be shut up within the narrow limits of the beauty theory of æsthetics. Its province was not confined to the arrange-

<sup>1</sup> We may put on one side realistic forms of art; which, however, were not so entirely neglected by the Greeks as we sometimes imagine, although they cannot be said to have exercised much influence. The art critics of antiquity seem to have utterly ignored them; no doubt the influence of Plato did much to keep them in the background.

ment of rhythm and sound so as to tempt the ear with more or less agreeable sensations. It sought after expressive power and obtained it. If it be restricted, like all the other arts, sculpture included, to the refinement of certain qualities of form more or less exterior to us, none the less is it a language which speaks to the soul through the communicative faculty of emotion.

Even Greek dances, their sculptural character notwithstanding, were in most cases equally expressive. Although they were in one sense, by their study of graceful or severe attitudes, by the rhythmical cadence of their movements and their harmonious groupings, peculiarly decorative, still they were not reduced to be merely spectacular. Their ambition was not to please the eye only by presenting agreeable images; the expression and communication of emotions were also aimed at and achieved. The "beauty" theory, then, does not entirely embrace this art, no more than it embraces sculpture or the rest of them.

From all these observations we may conclude that no single form of expression appealing to either sight or hearing, can of itself suffice as a foundation for a complete system of æsthetics, unless we modify and arbitrarily extend the meaning of such expressions.

Another equally grave inconvenience from this point of view, is the confusion caused between beauty in art and beauty in nature.

Such confusion is easily understood when it occurs, for instance, in decorative sculpture, the true aim of which is the almost literal reproduction of the most perfect physical forms, for which reason the model chosen is the almost absolute arbiter of the art whose only aim is to reproduce it.<sup>1</sup> Plato has tried hard to make us

<sup>1</sup> I do not mean to affirm that the Greeks made use of professional models, as we do. The reverse has often been asserted, but in fact we know nothing about it. Among a people whose costume veiled the form but slightly at any time, it is possible that the habitual sight of the nude enabled their sculptors to dispense with other aid; that, however, is scarcely probable. On the other hand we know by anecdotes which have come down to us, that in many cases sculptors confined



believe that the sculptor, instead of copying the figure which he has before his eyes, applies himself mainly to the reproduction of ideal forms which he has never seen; but such metaphysical theories can never prevail against truth. The sculptor always does copy the human form; and if he be able to correct the faults of the model posed before him, it is by virtue of the aid which he obtains, not from an imaginary spectre of some divine prototype existing in the unexplored depths of his own nature, but from the observations of bygone experience stored up by his memory. The beauty of nature is, then, the source from which we obtain decorative art; and we may say, in one sense, that the value of the works is to be measured by the power with which they reproduce the beauty of their models. The beauty of a statue depends upon the refined interpretation of a beautiful form; a picture is beautiful when it renders certain natural and pleasing effects, those of light and shade for instance. The beauty of Claude Lorraine's landscapes lies mainly in the power with which he works out the various effects of sunlight appropriate to different hours of the day: as for moral expression or human personality we must look for them elsewhere. Landscape painting, as practised by Claude, is decorative landscape in its highest perfection. Decorative is to expressive art, what Ariosto is to Homer. We have cited a few examples of it in the painting of the 18th century. Watteau and Boucher were admirable decorators. Greek sculpture was often purely decorative. A certain number of the productions of the renaissance, especially those which were founded upon mythology, had but little of any other character. We might instance a great deal of the work of Raphael, of Correggio, of Titian, and of Paul Veronese: but the creations of Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo absolutely refuse to submit to any such classification,

themselves to the servile reproduction of actual models. Xeuxis got the young girls of Agrigentum to sit to him; the bosom of Lais was the frequent model of painters. Praxiteles made a statue of Phryne; the women of Athens frequented the studio of Phidias; the iconical statues of the victors at Olympia were done from nature, and there are other instances.

although the latter hardly ever worked except in decoration. Must we include Rubens among the decorators? It is certain that a vast number of his canvases have for their chief merit the power to enchant the eye by glorious displays of colour; but there are many where this magic colour is united with power of movement, with moral expression and epic meaning. Now the presence of lively and sincere emotion is fatal to decorative character; it constitutes both the superiority and the distinguishing feature of expressive art. Its possession, to give examples from cognate arts, made Demosthenes and Mirabeau superior to Cicero, Shakespeare and Corneille to Racine. The eloquence of Cicero was decorative, so are the tragedies of Racine; the rhetoric of Demosthenes and Mirabeau, like the drama of Shakespeare and Corneille, was "expressive;" because, instead of attempting to please the public and gratify their fancy, it set about convincing them by a sincere and vivid statement of the feelings and ideas of the orators. It was, in fact, living and spontaneous eloquence, in the literal sense of the word; while Cicero, like too many of the characters of Racine, was always thinking of the external effect to be produced.

§ 2. *Expressive art.*—*Grace and beauty are not necessarily found in expressive art.—Expression and abstract beauty.*

These distinctions in the two kinds of art are never so clearly defined in reality as in theory. Decorative art does not exclude all expression or expressive art; and expressive art does not consider itself at liberty, simply because it is founded upon feeling, to disregard all consideration of form and contour, or to despise the, in one sense, exterior rules to which all forms of art must submit. The whole matter is in fact a question of degree; taste may comprehend it, but the scrupulous critic would find it a very difficult matter to formulate any absolute or precise rule upon the subject. Who shall dare to say that all sincere emotion is banished from the rhetoric of Cicero, or that the pictures of passion, which we find in the drama of Racine, are entirely

artificial, and have no object but to give momentary pleasure to an audience? It would be equally hardy to pretend that neither Demosthenes nor Mirabeau cared to please those who listened to their eloquence; or that we could not find in their speeches bravura passages, only meant to hide the want of passion, which either has never been felt or has grown cold. If we reviewed, one by one, the works of the artists whom we class among the decorators, it might not be easy, in each case, to determine exactly the causes of the impressions which decide the category in which they should respectively be placed. But we may be sure that, after such an examination, we should possess a mass of partial but successive impressions, which would leave us in no doubt as to our ultimate conclusion. In the distinction which we have set up, there is a point of difficulty, however, which is not without apparent weight. We must refer to it in passing, that we may anticipate objections to which it might give rise.

We may say that every work of art is expressive, so far as it manifests the manner in which its author understands the sensation or sentiment which belongs to it, and so far as it gives a measure of the impression which he has received, and of the power of expression which he possesses. This is quite true as a general proposition. But, in spite of its intrinsic truth, it has, in the present case, no value. A work cannot be ranged in the category of expressive creations, except on condition of possessing evidence of an imaginative power and sensibility above the average. It is clear enough that if, æsthetically speaking, it is unable to suggest to our minds the true meaning of its author, such inability would suffice to class it in our eyes among vulgar works, and to deprive it of all expressive merit.

But this is not all. A work may easily escape being vulgar, in some aspects it may even be very worthy of distinction, without deserving a place in the category of expressive art. This occurs whenever the sentiment or character expressed by the work takes a general and impersonal form, and causes us to look upon the artist as wanting in individuality in his power both of comprehension and

of feeling. In a word, whenever in presence of a work of art, we are not impressed by any clearly indicated individuality of sentiment, we feel that such a work, no matter what may be its other merits, is not an expressive work in the true sense of the phrase. A few examples will make this notion more easily understood. Certain artists have had for their chief aim elegance of form combined with grace of attitude and movement. Parmigiano, Guido, and Albani, had scarcely any other idea. Now, the dominant characteristic of grace is absence of effort in either attitude or movement. All visible exertion of force destroys grace. The body, during any muscular effort, becomes stiff, the muscles swell, the head is thrown back, the limbs are strained. Hence arise a multiplicity of angles, of straight or broken lines, suggesting the idea of power; whilst, on the other hand, the notion of grace is conveyed by a combination of curved lines that excludes all idea of effort. The observation of this fact suggested to Hogarth his theory of the serpentine line of beauty.

Whence comes the pleasure which the contemplation of grace affords us? The answer is: from the more or less unconscious but very real sentiment of human sympathy, which makes us involuntary partakers in the joys or sufferings that come before our eyes. As the sight of a painful effort oppresses us and gives us sympathetic pain, so does an easy and graceful action arouse in us an instinctive feeling of muscular repose and calmness—the invariable result of seeing great strength at rest. But here our impression is limited to the spectacle itself, without going outside of it. The personality of the artist is not in question. The more he has succeeded in rendering this absence of effort, the more do we abandon ourselves to the satisfactory feeling resulting from his work, and the less do we trouble ourselves about himself. Such a result always seems to have been achieved naturally and without effort, and gives an appearance of impersonality which is the direct opposite of that which we consider the essential characteristic of expressive art.

It must be clearly understood that we are here speaking of

grace in attitude and movement only, which is a simple question of form. What we have said above cannot be applied to grace in facial expression, for this presupposes some sentiment of moral perfection, and is consequently outside the limit of decorative art. From the same point of view, the question of beauty is more complex than that of grace. It may be considered under two different aspects. We may either confine ourselves to the mutual relations of the lines and forms which are its constituents; or, going deeper, we may endeavour to establish the connections which attach certain classes of form to superior moral significance. To the man who reflects, and analyses the reasons of his preferences, it seems very difficult to separate these two points of view—because so soon as beauty has been acknowledged to be superior to ugliness, we at once want to know how and why it is superior. If we analyse beauty of face, we shall always find the causes of its superiority to lie in its moral expression. To take one by one the constituents of ugliness, a prominent and heavy jaw, cheek bones standing out on each side, low forehead, large mouth, thick and protruding lips, oblique and staring eyes—all these are precisely the salient characteristics of inferior races, and even of the animals. Physiologically, they result from the inferior development of the intellectual organs, and the predominance of purely physical instincts over moral wants.<sup>1</sup>

We find then that the idea of beauty springs from, and is justified by, a conception of moral superiority, which again is derived from physiological observation.

The beauty of the body is no more arbitrary than that of the face. It consists essentially in the appropriateness of the organs for their work, with this difference—the functions of the body are almost exclusively physical, and therefore the idea of moral perfection has a much less important share in its appreciation.

We might say, then, that as Greek art is founded mainly upon the idea of beauty, it must be essentially expressive. Such a state-

<sup>1</sup> See Herbert Spencer on the development of this physiological proposition in "Essays on Various Subjects."

ment would, however, generally be erroneous, because Greek artists do not seem to have been much preoccupied with the ideas which the forms they produced were calculated to express. With the exception of a few works—as, for example, the Jupiter of Phidias, in which the exaggeration of the facial angle makes evident the intention to bring into prominence the intellectual superiority proper to the chief of the gods—it is very certain that Grecian sculptors simply made use of the relative perfection of the living models provided for them in abundance by their gifted race. They instinctively chose those models whose conformation reproduced the essential characteristics of the race in the greatest purity, and never doubted that such conformation was the result and the outward physiological evidence of moral and functional superiority. They imitated the appearances which they had under their eyes, seldom going beyond them; and when they did make corrections, it was only with intent to conform to the type of beauty to which their eyes had become accustomed, but never to give greater relief to the moral conception of which that type might be either the product or the physiological instrument. Now, the word *expression* itself carries with it a double idea—the sign, and the thing signified. From the moment that these two terms cease to maintain their reciprocal relation in the thought of the artist—though he may show powers of imitation, reproduction, even of idealization, he will be without expression. A work may be admirable from the point of view of an art founded solely upon the idea of beauty; but it is not therefore expressive in the correct and complete sense of the word, if it fail to give rise to the idea of a personal and subjective creation—that is to say, of an intelligence manifesting, under visible and material form, an individual sentiment or idea suggested by the object or spectacle represented.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Hettner, an enthusiastic admirer of Winckelmann (*Revue Moderne*, 1st January, 1866), frankly acknowledges this. “The imperfection of Winckelmann’s work,” he says, “consists in the fact that his fundamental idea is somewhat narrow and inadequate to explain even his notion of the essence of beauty and its realization by art. Winckelmann himself has not deferred to the prejudices of his times; for he never shook himself free from the idea bequeathed by Cæsar and

Those critics who have devoted themselves to Greek art with the most exclusive worship, have, far from denying its neglect of moral expression, greeted this very neglect as a merit, considering it altogether voluntary and systematic. This is no more than the logical consequence of their method of appreciation. The ideal of the great artists of Greece, say they, was "pure beauty." If the term have a meaning, it is the denial of all search after expression.

What we mean by expression, is the manifestation by attitude and physiognomy of the habitual sentiments or accidental emotions of the soul; that is, of the dispositions or passions which constitute the moral life. If it be one of the characteristics which distinguish modern from ancient art, to what conclusion does it point, if not to the absence in antique sculpture of the manifestation of the moral life? But then, what do they mean by pure beauty, if not this absence of moral life? Would they consider it a merit if the

Mengs, and continued to believe with them that the production of ideal forms, of forms, that is, superior to reality, was the final aim of art and its essential constituent. In every effort which, following the Platonic theory, he made to grasp the constitution of the beautiful, he never had any conception of it other than as the beauty of form or plastic perfection; he saw in it no incarnation or expression of ideas, of intellect, of sentiments, of natural proclivities. The intellectual principle of art seems never to have dawned upon him. Beauty for him consists in unity and majesty of form, in a certain typical generalisation; or, to employ a fantastic word coined by himself, "Inappropriation"—that is to say, "in forms neither appropriate to any particular person, nor to the expression of any state of the soul or of the passions, for these," he said, "would introduce foreign traits into beauty and would destroy its unity!" According to this, beauty should be like the purest water drawn from a spring, which is considered healthy in proportion as it is without taste and if it contains no foreign bodies. The radical defect in this way of looking at things is strongly felt when Winckelmann, leaving the bounds of Greek art history, proceeds to consider the more general character of æsthetics. As beauty of form in art is for him absolute—possessing a distinct reality of its own, itself the aim instead of being the creation of art and a product of the imagination destined to give expression to feelings and ideas—the ideal, as he conceives it, is no longer pliable and variable, adapting itself to the diversity of notions and times, a thing determinate and individual like the sentiment which it is used to express, but it is unique, universal, imposing itself alike upon all peoples and upon all arts, in all ages. "Truth," says Winckelmann, "is one and never changes." It follows that modern art finds no grace in his eyes, except in so far as it approaches a Greek ideal.

ancients cared only for physical life? Do the critics and the dilettanti mean to bring us back to the exclusive worship of corporeal beauty, under the partly false pretext that the Greeks could neither have known or understood any other?

To this their logic will lead them, and yet they will not allow that it is their goal. Such critics elude the conclusion forced upon them by their apparently unconscious psychological confusion. What they call "pure beauty" is nothing more than physical beauty, the harmony and perfection of line and form, though they mean more by it. They really, without knowing or wishing it, add some indefinable and impossible moral expression, which is in itself a contradiction of their theory, and the absurdity of which a moment's consideration will suffice to prove.

A statue or painting that expresses some attitude or condition of the soul other than perfect immobility, cannot impart an idea of abstract beauty; because any particular emotion, permanent or transitory, that requires for its outward expression special contractions or developments of the muscles and features, cannot but destroy the geometric and physiologic harmony of the typical human form as conceived in its mathematical perfection. It must disturb that supreme ataraxy, that serene repose, which is essential to the visible manifestation of pure and abstract beauty.

We are once more then brought to our old conclusion: that pure beauty consists in the negation of all expression. It is summed up in the unflinching application of all the geometrical laws of proportion recognized as constituting the canon of physical perfection. To give an example—the Venus of Milo seems to be one of the most perfect models of beauty left to us by antiquity. Certainly the statue is fair, but under what conditions? We grant its beauty only on condition of being allowed to fancy that it will not for ever rest under the spell of moral immobility. Its form is perfect, and, thanks to this perfection, we consent to wait indefinitely for its reanimation. It is this *quasi* possibility and pleasing expectancy which endow the figure with beauty; in fact, it seems to us beautiful because it appears able to be so in more ways than



one ; its physical is but the promise of its moral beauty. Moreover, as its organism is complete in all its parts and of just balance, no feature so predominates as to determine beforehand the characteristics of the moral manifestation to be revealed in some imagined future ; and in contemplating the image of the goddess, we dwell in a state of general and undefined admiration which is not directed into any one channel more than another. This condition of the mind creates in us the idea of what is called abstract beauty.

The thing itself is altogether artificial and illusory. Such beauty is only fair in our eyes on condition that its existence is about to cease, and that it is able to throw aside its immobility. The theory of the ancients was an exactly opposite one.<sup>1</sup> Abstract beauty to them was beauty *par excellence* ; just because it could not be reconciled with any moral expression or manifest emotion of the soul, for this would cause its instant disappearance. Abstract beauty, with the Greeks, consisted essentially in moral immobility ; that is, in suppression of the interior life and in the perfection of the body alone—the perfection of the soul having no other external interpretation than the absolute equilibrium of all the organs, and vanishing entirely upon the failure of this exact balance. Thus it is that those successors of Phidias who attempted to extend the province of sculpture to the expression of certain passions and sentiments, generous enough in themselves, have been accused of corrupting Greek art.

Though the conception of the beautiful which we have just described was much less narrow and despotic in the poetry of the time, still it was for cognate reasons that Euripides was long considered a poet of the decadence. He breathed into his own branch of art a study of humanity and human feelings which, had it not clashed with the prejudices that transcendental philo-

<sup>1</sup> All the moral theories of the Greeks pointed to one conclusion upon this point. Their moral ideal was the final suppression of all passion ; and their ideal of physical beauty was the reflection, through constant immobility of feature, of eternal repose of the soul.

sophers guarded with so jealous a care, would have restored that art.

The *persona* of the tragedies of Æschylus are impersonal. The fatal power of events, the logical consequences of acts, dominate over and sway his characters. Action with him is everything; marching over his men and women, it breaks their wills and crushes them. Sophocles follows the same system; and, although humanity in his works holds a much more important place, although the assertion of liberty, or rather the demand for it, is sometimes found in them, still his men remain more the instruments and victims of facts than the controllers of them. With both these poets action is the chief care. It may be called the hero of their dramas.

Euripides on the other hand opens up a new system. He presents to us man with all his passions. If his heroes perish, they are themselves, at least in some degree, the authors of their fall, for they are free agents and the masters of their own will. Not that the antique notion of fatality is entirely absent from his work. It appears in his mode of conceiving passion, for this he describes as a blind and indomitable force, often, and somewhat fantastically, mixed up with the sentiment of human freedom. Nor has he any active consciousness of the revolution which he is accomplishing. He ever remains influenced by recollections of the old traditions, and even believes himself to be faithful to them. The psychological and human tendency which struggles into light in nearly all his plays, suffices to show us the narrow field to which he believed it necessary to confine his conceptions. Hence the indecision of plot with which he has so often been reproached. It has not been recognized as the logical consequence of his mode of conceiving tragedy, nor has it been clearly understood, that, so soon as the human soul became the active and dominant personage, thenceforward it was impossible to accommodate the arrangement proper to the tragic action of the fatalistic drama, to the development of the new idea.

The decadence which began with Euripides, real, if we look

only at the unity of form in his works, was, in fact, progress, if we look at their aim and directing idea. This latter was the substitution of a psychological for a fatalistic conception.

The comedy of manners, too, dates from Euripides. To his example must be referred the psychologic drama of the seventeenth century; and this fact explains both the instinctive preference felt by Racine for his works, and the discord manifested by the French poet between his treatment of the historic events that form the ostensible subjects of his plays, and the delineations of passion which form their real interest.

Expressive art, then, has nothing to do with beauty, whatever we may consider that to be; or, at least, for it, beauty of nature can only be a point of departure or an accessory. It does not despise beauty; it willingly interprets it when occasion shall arise, but with no exclusive preference. Look at the series of celebrated portraits by famous and great painters. Does appreciation of the natural beauty of the models have any effect upon our estimate of the work? Who shall have the hardihood to say that Rembrandt, who perhaps never painted a beautiful figure as Greeks and academic critics understand the word, is any less an artist than Raphael, the only great painter that ever took special pains to elaborate physical beauty? Dare we call the pictures of David perfect works? And yet his personages are academically faultless!

No! perfect art does not necessarily concern itself with beauty of form unless the object have been specially designed for art use. We must expel the idea. It confuses and falsifies principle, and disturbs the consciences of young artists. The theory that makes beauty the one aim of art may be very well for narrow intellects, such as that of Ingres, which see nothing but beauty of line, and sacrifice to its attainment all that manifests human character, sentiment, or idea.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The devotees of beauty did not hesitate to give most startling illustrations of the falsity of their own theories. How much of the work of Ingres will live? His portraits—and these are in absolute contradiction to his asserted principles, and their value is the result of that disagreement.

§ 3. *Resumé.*

To sum up—there are two distinct kinds of art. The one, decorative art, we understand to be that whose main object is the gratification of the eye and ear, and whose chief means perfection of form—~~are~~ harmony and grace of contour, diction or sound. Such art rests upon the desire for beauty, and has nothing in view beyond the peculiar delight caused by the sight of beautiful objects. It has produced admirable works in the past, and may produce them again now or in the future, on condition that its inspiration be sought in actual and existing life, and not in the imitation of works sanctified by time. We must recognize, however, that modern art has no tendency in this latter direction. Beauty no longer suffices for us. Indeed, for the last two thousand years something more has been required; for even among the chefs d'œuvre of the Greeks not a few owe their creation to a different sentiment. Some of the great artists of antiquity were certainly occupied with the interpretation of the moral life; and had not time destroyed their painted works, we should, at the present moment, probably be able to show absolute proofs of this tendency. But we may readily dispense with the confirmation which they would have afforded to our arguments; for we find more than sufficient evidence in the avowed character of the music of the Greeks, in many of the most important works of their sculptors, and in most of their great poems.

The chief characteristic of modern art—of art, that is, left to follow its own inspiration free from academic patronage—is power of expression. Through form this, the second kind of art, traces the moral life, and endeavours to occupy man, body and soul, but with no thought of sacrificing the one to the other. It is ever becoming more imbued with the quite modern idea that the whole being is *one*, metaphysicians notwithstanding, and that its aim can only be complete by refusing to separate the organ from its function. The moral life is but the general result of the conditions of the physical. The one is bound to the other by necessary

connections which cannot be broken without destroying both. The first care of the artist should be to seek out and grasp the methods of manifestation so as to comprehend and master their unity.

Art, thus understood, demands from its votary an ensemble of intellectual faculties higher and more robust than if founded solely upon an ideal of beauty. Art founded upon the latter notion would be sufficiently served by one possessing an acute sense of the beautiful—the degree of his sensibility being indicated by the plastic perfection of his work. But expressive art demands a capability of being moved by many varying sentiments, demands the power to penetrate beneath outward appearances and to seize a hidden thought, the power to grasp either the permanent characteristic or the particular and momentary emotion ; in a word, it demands that complete eloquence of representation which art might have dispensed with while it confined itself to the investigation or delineation of a single expression, but which became absolutely indispensable from the moment that the interpretation of the entire man became its avowed object.

We may say, too, that modern art is doubly expressive ; because, while the artist is indicating by form and sound the sentiments and ideas of the personages whom he introduces, he is also by the power and manner of such manifestation giving an unerring measure of his own sensibility, imagination, and intelligence.

Expressive art is in no way hostile to beauty ; it makes use of it as one element in the subjects which require it, but its domain is not enclosed within the narrow bounds of such a conception. It is by no means indifferent to the pleasures of sight and hearing, but it sees something beyond them. Its worth must not be measured only by perfection of form, but also and chiefly, by the double power of expression which we have pointed out, and, as we must not omit to add, by the value of the sentiments and ideas expressed. This latter point is too often and wrongly ignored by artists.

Between two works which give evidence of equal talent—that is to say, of equal facility to grasp the true accents and charac-

teristics of nature, and equal power to bring out both the inner meaning of things and the personality of the artist—we, for our part, would not hesitate to accord the preference to that of which the *Conception* showed the more vigorous intelligence and elevated feeling. The art critics seem to have made it one of their principles to take no account of choice of subject, but only to look at the technical result. Such a principle is plausible rather than true. The individuality of the author can never be excluded from a work, and choice of subject is frequently one of the points by which this individuality is most clearly indicated.

It is true, of course, that elevation of sentiment can never take the place of art talent. On this point we cannot too strongly condemn the practice of academic juries who, on the one hand, reward mere mechanical labour simply because it has been exercised upon what are called classic subjects; and, on the other, persecute more independent artists to punish their obstinacy in deserting the beaten track. Nothing, then, can be further from our thoughts than to require critics to substitute, in every case, consideration of the subject for that of the work itself; or to condemn *à priori* all artists who remain faithful to the traditions, ideas, and sentiments of the past. In these, indeed, some find their only inspiration. We only wish to affirm our conviction that choice of subject is not so indifferent a matter as some say it is, and that it must be taken into account as of considerable weight in determining an opinion of a work of art.

The necessity for this is one consequence of the distinction which we have established between decorative and expressive art. The former, solely devoted to the gratification of eye and ear, affords no measure of its success beyond the pleasure which it gives. The latter, whose chief object is to express the feelings and ideas, and, through them, to manifest the power of conception and expansion possessed by the artist, must obviously be estimated, partly at least, by the moral or other value of the ideas and sentiments in question. And, as the value of a work depends directly upon the capability of its author, and as many artists

have been about equal in their technical ability, we must be ready to acknowledge that moral and intellectual superiority is a real superiority, and is naturally marked by the possession of an instinctive and spontaneous power of sympathy.

In the following pages we shall treat mainly of expressive art, which, with every day that passes, becomes more predominant, and is surely destined to be the art of the future.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## STYLE.

§ 1. *Individual style—Impersonal style—Style in Greek sculpture.*

STYLE is the man, says Buffon ; and he is right. Get some one who *can* read, to read a page of Demosthenes *and* of Cicero, of Bossuet and of Massillon, of Corneille and of Racine, of Lamartine and of Victor Hugo. However slight may be your literary perceptions, you will at once notice that no two of them sound the same. Apart altogether from the subjects or ideas, which may be identical, each one has an air, an accent, which can never either be confounded or replaced. In some of them we find elegance, finesse, grace, the most seductive and soothing harmony ; in others, a force and *élan* like the sound of a trumpet, enough to awaken the Seven Sleepers.

Style only exists by virtue of what Bürger calls *the law of separation*. "A being only exists in consequence of his separation from other beings. . . . . This law of successive detachment—which alone renders progress possible—may be proved to influence the course of religion, of politics, of literature and of art. What was the renaissance but a break in the continuity of the middle ages?" It is by style, by the manner of comprehension, of feeling and interpretation, that epochs, races, schools and individuals are separated and distinguished one from the other. In all the arts, analogous differences are to be found ; plainly marked, in proportion as a more or less extensive field is offered for the development of artistic personality. Michael



ardo and Veronese, Titian and Corradini, resembled each other no more and each resembled Rossini; Weber, Mozart, or Beethoven, has his own style, his peculiar manner, and of expressing those feelings and

ists no style? For the same reasons. The particular characteristic of a style is its originality of thought and feeling. At a certain moment, there is a general average value of the style. Such works as rise above this general average are called geniuses in exact proportion to the amount of originality which they display. To the general level, but does not pass beyond it, he thinks and feels like the ordinary man. To "separate" him from the crowd. The peculiar habits of working peculiar to each style in the accurate sense of the word, for the latter is really a product, and not a mere quality, acquired from the word, from the soul itself, and not from the hand.

It is an absolute necessity for a painter when he has brush in hand, to do what he wills. What he wills only he does. What he wills not at all is, of course, absent from his mind. Any distraction or forgetfulness; any little relaxation of efforts, or falling short of his usual exertions, or insupportable weariness of work or insupportable passion for it; any determination of his sensibility; and a record in his mind, from the pictures of a conscientious painter, as clear as if he had literally made the world his own, is certain, from the pictures of a conscientious

Does it follow that those who deserve the title of artist possess style innately; that it is to be seen as clearly in their youthful and imperfect works as in those of their maturity? We are very far from entertaining any such belief. The most gifted men find, in the experience of their lives and the practice of their art, sources of inspiration previously undreamt of. Genius can be elevated and widened by judicious education. Although it may not be completely enclosed in that which forms the basis of its individuality, yet it has the power to develop itself very greatly; and style, which is no more than the result, or rather, the manifestation of such progress at each moment of its evolution, naturally follows all its various phases.

This method of understanding style is pretty generally accepted, when its consideration is confined to the particular work of any one artist. But the word is also used by art critics in an absolute sense to which we can scarcely give our consent.

M. Ch. Blanc says in his *Grammaire des Arts du Dessin* that "by reason of these differences in style, which represent the various shades of feeling and thought of the great masters who have con-

We shall find plenty of proofs in the course of our everyday life. Gesture, attitude, the carriage of the eyes, the sound of the voice, constantly reveal the changes in our moral condition. With the help of a little experience, we may sometimes discover a complete drama in the most seemingly simple conversation. How much easier must it be, then, to do so when we have before us the works of artists, of the men who, by nature, are the most impressionable, and whose impressions enjoy the most spontaneous outward interpretation. Any one who listens attentively to the reading of a poem, to an oration, or to a piece of music, can easily distinguish between the passages which come from the author's heart and those in which his inspiration failed. Such discrimination is, perhaps, more difficult in the arts which appeal to the eye, for in these it requires more particular study, whereas most people give it but slight attention. It does not, however, escape the discerning critic.

The salient characteristic of art is its power to transform and *personalize* realities. But such transformation, to be artistic, must be involuntary; that is, the impression from which it springs must be absolutely lively and spontaneous, and also sufficiently long-lived for the complete achievement of the work. Vivacity, spontaneity, and, still more often, persistence of impression, are all wanting in mediocre artists. They try to supply their place by academic procedures, by nostrums and secret processes to which true artists need never turn.

secrated them, it follows that there is some universal and absolute quality which we know under the name of style. As *his style* is the distinguishing mark of such-and-such a man, so *style* is the imprint of humanity upon nature. In its highest sense it expresses the ensemble of traditions handed down by masters from age to age, and, including every classical way of looking at beauty, it is beauty itself. It is the opposite of pure realism; *it is the embodiment of the ideal*. A painter who has style sees the great side even of little things; while the realistic imitator sees the small side even of great things. A work possesses style, when the objects in it are represented under their typical aspect, in their primitive essence—freed from all insignificant details, simplified, elevated. Architecture which inspires no sentiment, awakes no thought, has no claim to style. Paintings or statues are without style when, aiming to be but literal and mechanical transcripts of nature, they betray no human feeling. So a landscape produced by such an apparatus as the camera lucida cannot have style, any more than an image reflected in a mirror. A photograph is without style; although we do sometimes recognize in it some of the preferences of its author, in his manner of arranging his model and managing the incidence of light so as to accentuate forms or soften them. But at best we can only call this a kind of superior trade mark.”

“The Dutch school is without style, because it has ever been destitute of beauty; but it has played a brilliant part in a lower walk of art, the aim of which is consummate execution. The schools of Italy, as exemplified in the works of Leonardo, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Titian, and Correggio, were all grand in style. But the Greeks alone, when at the zenith of their excellence, seem to have attained for a moment, under Pericles, to style absolute and perfect; to that impersonal and therefore sublime form of art upon which most of the elevated characteristics of beauty are founded—a godlike mingling of sweetness and strength, dignity and warmth, majesty and grace. Winckelmann has penned these profoundly true words: ‘Perfect beauty is like pure water, it has no particular savour.’ So in the sculptures of the Parthenon, the personality

of the sculptor is so entirely effaced, that they are rather the creation of art itself than the work of an artist: Phidias, instead of animating them with a breath from his own soul, has inspired them with the universal soul of man."<sup>1</sup>

We have cited this passage in spite of its length because it seems to show very clearly one of the points that characterise the better class of idealists, and furnishes us with an opportunity to indicate precisely the illusion into which they seem to have fallen.

In every artist whose personality is stamped on his works, we recognize a particular style, the unfailling mark of such personality. Beyond this peculiar style of each artist, we admit the existence of the style of the school, nation, or race, to which he belongs. This style, too, is as much a mark of the personality of a race or school as that of an individual is of his, and is composed of the various features which are common to the works of art of such groups. There is, of course, a Greek style, as well as an Egyptian, a Syrian, and an Arabian style; then there is the style of the Venetians, which differs from that of the Florentines, from the schools of Rome and Lombardy. But when we begin to talk of essential style, of absolute, abstract, or impersonal style, we are

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare such development of opinion in an art critic of the first order, who, after having once "looked," as he said, "upon the ideal as but a cloudy phrase"—*abstract ideal* and *impersonal style* being one and the same thing—has completely turned his back upon his old beliefs, as the following passage will prove:—"Critics have one word which they air at every opportunity, which word drops out of sight whenever they attempt to practically explain works of art;—the *ideal*. What is this *ideal*? Is it in a subject or in the manner of its portrayal? If the ideal exist in Raphael's school of Athens, where can we find it in Rembrandt's school of anatomy? Why is a landscape by Poussin more ideal than one by Ruysdael? We do not mean to act sphinx to these artistic mysteries. If symbolic intention constitute idealism, the most downright of naturalists has only to paint a drowsy female and dub his picture *Slumber*. Thereupon the critics will find a peg on which to hang most ingenious speculations. 'Death, it is sleep . . . or perhaps awakening! and so on'—just as the fine groups of shepherds near an ancient tomb in Poussin's *Arcadia* rouse profound reflections upon the uncertainty of happiness and the shortness of life. Such philosophical amusements may exercise the faculties as easily before a smoker by Brower as before a muse by the Carracci. 'That smoker! what depth of allegory! Alas! all things vanish like smoke!

at sea. If we admit that the impersonal style is beauty, we still have to face the fact that beauty is felt in very dissimilar ways by different artists. How are we to reconcile this diversity with a style which, as it is absolute, must logically be without internal change? In the school to which M. Ch. Blanc belongs, it is understood that Raphael is the great painter of beauty. But beauty, as he understood and interpreted it, has nothing in common with the quality under the same name as rendered by Leonardo, Michael Angelo, or Rubens.

“Raphael,” says Jules de Goncourt in his *Notes de Voyage*, “has created a classic type for the Virgin by carrying ordinary beauty to perfection—the absolute reverse of the system of Da Vinci, who sought beauty in rare excellence of type and refinement of expression. The former has given her an altogether human serenity of character, a formal and holy beauty which is almost Jesus-like. His virgins are ripe and dignified mothers, wives of St. Joseph. He thoroughly realised the *métier* assigned by the faithful to the mother of God. His pictures will be ever popular. They will remain to eternity the clearest representations of the Virgin of good Catholics; the most general, accessible, easily understood in their divine authority; the most grateful to the mingled desire for art and piety. The Madonna della Sedia will ever be the academic type of the deification of woman.”

These remarks may seem a little harsh and exaggerated, but Life is short, happiness is fleeting, virtue is the one thing to be desired.’ So we return to the arcadia of Poussin in company with a haunter of tap rooms!”

“Truly art is more single-minded than criticism. The true artist has more ingenuousness. He is satisfied to represent what he sees, and to express what he feels—two things, insight and feeling, inseparable from every really worthy artistic achievement. It is the ego and the non-ego of philosophy naively and irresistibly put into action; a form borrowed from external nature, and animated by the sentiment which it inspires in the inner man of him who borrows it. Nature and humanity are, indivisibly and at one time, both the object and subject of all the arts, as of science and industry. Art displays the phenomena of the universal life, science explains them, and industry adapts them to the various wants of man. Art sets the goal, science affords the means, and industry makes use of it.” So writes M. Bürger of idealism, in his review of the salon of 1861, in *Le Temps*.

on the whole, they are just. They give a fair estimate of the idealism of the lovable genius to whom they refer, facile and perhaps superficial, diffuse rather than profound. Raphael, like most men, looked upon beauty as external rather than internal; he saw its visible form rather than its moral basis. His style then is not *style par excellence*. It is no more than *his style*, marking his own personality. That which renders him, in the view of many, worthy to be called the prince of painters, and, therefore, to be placed above Leonardo, Michael Angelo, and Rembrandt—is exactly the quality, or rather the deficiency, which places him beneath them, when we come clearly to understand that impersonal style is merely absence of style; and that, if Raphael possessed more than any other man this pretended perfection, it was merely because his works never received those profound and trenchant marks of individuality which are so striking to the masses and so disconcerting to academists, but which are not the less on that account marks of powerful and vigorous genius.

The same remarks might with justice be made of the vaunted impersonal style of Greek works. Were the intended eulogium merited, it would be the condemnation of Greek art. We know no literary style more personal than those of Æschylus, Demosthenes, and Aristophanes. If the statues do not show such strong marks of individuality, it is not because their authors “breathed into their works the breath of the universal soul;” but simply because the ideal aim of sculpture was, as Plato says, for a long time almost exclusively confined to the representation of perfect physical types. This narrow ideal found its limit and its laws in the peculiar genius of the Greek race. The province of the artist was confined to rendering, with the greatest possible completeness, the ideal physique determined by universally accepted rules. His first care was to seek out and faithfully imitate the fine models furnished in abundance by that perfect race. Secondly, he had to summarize and condense the mass of details into a comparatively small number of essential features; this process was insisted upon by the character of the Greek intellect, which was ever antagon-

istic to anything particular or individual. To their philosophers, as to their artists, only general principles seemed worthy of attention ; in their systems of philosophy, as in their statues, they proceeded by long strides, by masses ; they suppressed detail, and preferred synthesis to analysis. This characteristic was common to the whole race, and was but little favourable to the expression of individuality. Beyond the special necessities of sculpture, which we shall consider later, the artist found himself within certain habits of intellect outside which he was forbidden to go. He was compelled, whether he liked it or not, to adopt types ; that is, to the generalization and abbreviation of things. So in the end he troubled himself but little about the expression of the face, looking first and mainly to the beauty of general form, and to the well-balanced proportion of parts. When some of the successors of Phidias, weary of the serene immobility of god-like souls, began to represent human life with all its joys and sorrows—teaching themselves to mark by attitude and physiognomy certain sentiments and passions that can be expressed by means of sculpture—a cry of decadence was raised ; in the same way in which Euripides was accused of having degraded the Greek drama, when he had substituted for the almost geometric symmetry of the tragedy of action as understood by Sophocles, or at least had added to it, the delineation of the passions and of man's moral activity.

This exclusive pre-occupation with physical beauty among a people peculiarly sensitive to its influence ; this striving after a type by abbreviation of detail ; this imperious desire for proportion, for what they called *Eurythmia* : did not constitute an impersonal art in the true sense of the word. All that we can assert of Greek sculpture is, that the peculiar character of the artist was in great part swamped by the general personality of the race—very much as we see it in that collective work which has come down to us under the name of Homer.

We have already said enough on this point, and we need not revert to it. There is no such thing as an impersonal style. The union of the two words forms a contradiction in terms.

§ 2. *Style in Italian Painting and in that of Holland—Capital importance of the question—The Academic style—Official teaching.*

The fine work of M. Fromentin contains a passage which summarizes very completely the whole question of style.<sup>1</sup> Comparing Italian painting with that of Holland, he says :—

“ There existed a habit of high and noble thought, an art which consisted in the choice of things and subjects, in embellishing and perfecting them, living rather in the absolute than in the relative, seeing nature as she is, but eager to depict her as she is in rare moments. This art all referred more or less to the personality of man ; was dependent on it, subordinate to it, and copied from it : just as some laws of proportion, and certain attributes, such as grace, force, nobility, beauty, learnedly studied from man and digested into the form of doctrine, came to be applied to matters which had but little to do with him. Thence sprang up a kind of universal humanity, or humanized universe, of which the ideal human body was the prototype. Historical facts, visions, beliefs, dogmas, myths, symbols, emblems : the human form, in one way or another—was made to express everything which it could, by any means, be made to interpret. Nature existed but vaguely around this absorbent personage. At best it was looked upon as a frame which should diminish, and even disappear, so soon as man was ready to take its place. Elimination and synthesis were the order of the day. As it was necessary that every object should borrow its plastic form from the same ideal, there was no question of derogation. Soon, by virtue of the laws of historic style, it came about that planes were reduced, horizons brought near, trees generalized, skies simplified, that atmospheres became more limpid and monotonous ; whilst man had become more fixed in type, nude oftener than draped, and usually of full stature and noble visage, so as to be a real sovereign in the rôle which he had to play. In these days our task is more simple. We have to render each

<sup>1</sup> *Les Maîtres d'Autrefois*, pp. 174-175.



object with its own especial interest, to put man back in his proper place, and, on occasion, to do without him altogether."

"The time has come for less thought, and for less lofty aims ; we must now look at things more closely, and observe better. We must paint as well, though in a different fashion ; we must work for the general public, for the citizen, the man of business and the parvenu—everything is now for them. We must become humble for humble things, petty for petty things, subtle for subtle things ; we must follow them all and track them out without contempt or omission ; we must be familiar with their homeliness and enter lovingly into the conditions of their existence. It is all a matter of sympathy, of patience, and attention, of never flagging research. Henceforward, genius will consist in absence of prejudice, in taking nothing for granted, in allowing oneself to be governed by one's model, in inquiring only how it may demand to be represented. Embellish it? No! Ennoble it? We must not ; neither must we chasten it. It would all be so much falsehood and useless trouble. *But is there not in every artist worthy of the name some indescribable quality which accepts that trouble naturally and without conscious effort.*"

These words indicate the whole theory of style. Style, which is a simple reflection of the artist's personality, is naturally found in the work of every artist who possesses any personality. The indescribable quality, the "je ne sais quoi" of which Fromentin speaks, is precisely the assemblage of qualities, the condition of being and temperament which caused Rubens to see things differently to Rembrandt. The two extracted from one and the same object or subject, emotions widely different though congenial to their respective natures ; just as a tightened string in a concert room will vibrate in response to the note which it would itself produce if struck. The one thing needful is the power to vibrate, which is too often wanting.

The question of style has considerable importance. We might even say that it includes the whole of æsthetics, which is in fact the question of personality in art.

If no one took up art but those who are born artists — those, we mean, in whom æsthetic emotion arises with that spontaneity and energy which constitute creative power—discussions such as this upon which we are engaged, would be purely academic, and it would be childish to dwell upon mere definition of style.

But it is not so: the subject upon which men think least is generally their own character, and so vanity leads them into strange delusions; and, what is perhaps still more important, their ignorance and caprice find baneful aid in the rules and formulas of official teaching.

“Style,” says M. Ch. Blanc, “expresses the collection of traditions transmitted to us by various great masters from age to age. Summarizing all classical ways of looking at beauty, it means beauty itself.” That is, if we wish to acquire style and interpret beauty, we need only study the mass of classic tradition! This is the doctrine of the Academy, baldly stated. By virtue of this belief have been edited and compiled the collections of recipes which treat of poetry, rhetoric, and æsthetics, and enunciate as law, more or less inaccurate observations on the art of constructing chefs d’œuvre. The method is simplicity itself; we have but to look back and see how anything has been done before. You want to write an Epic? Nothing can be easier. Examine Homer’s way of going about it, and do the same. Sophocles will show you how to compose a tragedy. You mean, perhaps, to devote yourself to sculpture and painting? Doubtless you have but little pretension to excel Phidias, Polycleetus, Praxiteles, Raphael, Titian, or Michael Angelo. Now, a study of the productions of these great men will of course convince us that their superiority arose from the care with which they sacrificed the real to the ideal. They saw the grand side of subjects which had no sides that were not petty; they represented objects under their typical aspect, in their primitive essence! Perhaps you don’t understand? Well, all this merely means that they ignored unimportant details, and simplified their compositions to obtain dignity. They were in the habit of embellishing, correcting, and

improving, proceeding always by elimination and synthesis, reducing planes, bringing forward horizons, generalizing trees, purifying atmospheres, idealising the human body, and replacing its vulgarities by the forms which have become academic.

All this is taught to young men preparing to practise art. To help them to understand poetry, it is translated into prose for them, and art is reduced to a mere matter of processes. The natural result upon their minds, is a conviction that for the production of a work of genius the first condition is, not genius, but elaborate rules. If we may trust the Academy, Michael Angelo is inferior to Raphael, although his genius is superior ; and for no better reason than his disinclination to or unfitness for the tyranny of rules. How many of the young are there who, having studied Boileau's *Art poétique* or the numerous successors of the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle, or official lucubrations on æsthetics, imagine that they can only be very bad poets, very mediocre advocates, or very incapable artists !

These mistakes are much more frequent than might be imagined. They have deplorable consequences even for those who have received the necessary gifts from nature. Their first effect is to destroy all sincerity and spontaneity, without which no art is possible. Instead of giving free scope to their real impressions, and interpreting them faithfully and directly just as they are felt—the method is to torture these impressions by rules concocted and imposed by privileged legislators, to pass them under the academic standard, and for this purpose to clip and oppress them till they are killed, and then, forsooth, to be surprised to find nothing left but corpses.

This substitution of executive skill for spontaneous feeling produces theatrical art, which is deliberate, cold-blooded, and calculated exaggeration superimposed upon the naïve and unconscious exaggeration of true art. Academic art runs into the extremes of what is false and theatrical in order to escape from vulgarity and inanity. Not being sustained or warmed by internal feeling, which it has been taught to despise, it loses itself

in deliberations as to lines, details, and arrangements which contradict and destroy all harmony or unity of effect. It is this want of *abandon* and sincerity which constitutes the besetting sin of academism. The natural simplicity of true, personal impressions, is displaced by exaggeration and respect for tradition, which allow calculation and effort to become conspicuous. This is not art; it is only more or less laborious industry.

What can be said of the condition of any young man who, probably entirely ignorant of his own powers, never for a moment supposes that the dicta of men stamped with the official imprimatur and accredited by successive governments, can come from lying oracles? He, too, will understand and perceive by notable examples, how dangerous may become any pretence to an opinion of his own on æsthetic subjects. His liberty of thought is conspired against on all sides. The very moment when he most requires to be sustained, encouraged, and aided in the development of his own individuality, is that chosen to overwhelm him with every kind of intimidation and temptation. Imitation and study of the great masters—excellent things for the artist already started on his right path—are full of peril to the young man still dubious as to which road he ought to take.

This mistaken method has been energetically criticised by the more competent men. M. Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, who, professor of drawing though he be, is among the few that show the most just and lively sense of the necessary reforms, has recently published the following opinions in a brochure for which the Academy will never forgive him.

“Young men who take part in competitions, direct all their efforts, as is but natural, to obtain the prizes which follow success. Unhappily, the means which usually commends itself to them as being both the surest and easiest, is the imitation of works which have previously obtained the approval of the judges, and have been shown with honour and *éclat*, as if with the intention to afford examples, and to point out to younger men the straight road to similar success. Do people realize the whole effect of such

a stimulus, when they see the majority of the competitors abandon their individual inspirations, to follow, with complete docility, the recommendations of the *École des Beaux Arts* which seem sanctified by success?

“With but very rare exceptions, mere admission to the competition<sup>1</sup> cells is only achieved after long periods of study exclusively directed to the one purpose; and it is the long duration of this unnatural preparation which makes it so fatal to the freshness of original gifts.

“Pupils delayed in this way, end by resembling those aspiring bachelors whose aim is rather a diploma than the acquisition of knowledge.

“Two tests are demanded before admission to a cell is allowed—a sketch or composition of any given subject, and a painted figure from a model. Preparation for this double test becomes the one idea of young artists. Their only studies are the daily repetition of these sketches and common-place figures—always executed in dimensions, within a limit of time, and in a style identical with those required for the competition itself.

“After whole years devoted to such practice, what can remain of the more precious qualities? What becomes of naïveté, sincerity, naturalness? The exhibitions of the *École des Beaux Arts* tell us only too clearly.

“At times, certain competitors imitate the style of their respective masters, or that of some famous artist. Some seek inspiration from the works of former laureates; others borrow from recent successes at the Salon, or from other works which may have left lively impressions upon them. All these various influences may give a certain diversity to a few of the exhibitions; but they do not give anything like natural variety or the original character flowing from individual inspiration.”

M. Lecocq de Boisbaudran affirms that our first effort should be directed to make students perceptive and impressionable, to which

<sup>1</sup> The cells in which competitors are separately confined during the “con-cours.”

end he has imagined very efficacious means. This is the essential point, and precisely that which is most neglected.

Technical education in the elements of design is no less defective. Speaking of the models patronized by the Ministry of Fine Arts in all their teaching establishments, M. Lecocq says:—“It is a strange thing that at a period when the example and authority of Raphael and other great designers are more than ever appealed to, the models used for the training of youth are systematically the very contradiction of that great master’s designs—so animated, so striking, easy, and undulating in contour, so well understood and accentuated from the point of view of perspective and construction.”

Similar strictures are to be found in a communication, dated 1864, from M. Viollet-le-Duc to M. Vitet, in which, referring to the instruction in the art of drawing at a time when the Academy of the Fine Arts, shaken for a moment in its supremacy, had just acquired a new lease of its baneful dictatorship, the learned and able architect says:—<sup>1</sup>

“What do they mean by teaching drawing after the classic manner? They begin by placing before the student silhouettes, which they call ‘feature drawings,’ to be mechanically copied. The eye of the child, who is thinking only of rendering by help of the hand, a still imperfect instrument, this feature or silhouette, acquires from the very first a bad habit of ignoring planes, seeing in the object to be delineated nothing but a flat surface bordered by a contour. . . . What is the further course of teaching at the *École des Beaux Arts*? It is confined to copying what are commonly called *academies*; that is, nude men, always under the same light, in the same place, and in positions which may be fairly described as torture paid by the hour. Such is the course of drawing from nature which has now lasted for about two

<sup>1</sup> M. Viollet-le-Duc is well known to be one of the best draughtsmen in France; and he has laboured with unremitting ardour to introduce into our schools the reforms which our administrations and academies, under the tyranny of the spirit of routine which has so long obscured their counsels, have refused to discuss.

hundred and seventeen years, and the suppression of which, if we may believe M. Vitet, would be the annihilation of art !”

At first sight, this obstinate clinging to a useless and foolish tradition seems very strange ; but a little reflection will explain it. In our country, men never rise above the crowd until they are no longer good for anything. To be a general, a minister, or an academician, old age is necessary. When a man has been well battered and used up by the difficulties of life, and has imperative need of repose—then the great offices are opened to him, and he is allowed to take his share in the regulation and direction of national activity ; but always on one condition, that he have no reforming tendencies or revolutionary instincts. As soon as this can be ascertained ; as soon as it can be shown that a man who, when young, possessed vigour, talent, and activity, no longer has any one of them : he is called up into one of those numerous “*hôtels des Invalides*” called ministries, academies, administrative and governing bodies of all kinds and descriptions. In these the old gentlemen meet again and talk over the good old times of their youth ; and, naturally enough, combine to anathematize all who have the temerity to advocate change. If some too vigorous colleague, possibly admitted by mistake into the learned company, pretends to believe that some little matters require modification, he is overwhelmed with ridicule ; and if he hazard any definite proposal smacking of heresy, he is incontinently crushed and smothered by adverse votes. Not that we feel any ill will to academies and administrative bodies in themselves. They are only what we have made them. The blame lies with the popular prejudices which confine the greatest prizes to those who have lost their teeth, and lay the most weighty responsibilities on men no longer able to discharge them. We insist upon having generals to command our armies who can no longer sit a horse, and directors for our art institutions who have lost both eyes and ears. The judgment of such men is of course founded upon recollections. So much the worse for us who refuse to understand that it is so. It is but natural that dotards should love the old

fashions which recall their youth ; and that they should treat as profanation, any effort which would seem to menace the sanctity of their memories.

We must not forget that similar vices are found everywhere. Instruction in letters among us is worthy of the same process in the fine arts. It is everywhere carried on under the same methods. Fatiguing and monotonous exercises have fatal effect in reducing everyone, professors as well as pupils, to the condition of machines. Iron routine is despotic. Every day of the year some professor repeats wearily and dogmatically the lesson of corresponding days in preceding years ; and that lesson, more often than not, is addressed only to the memory of the pupil. Our children are taught upon the same principle as performing dogs, by innumerable repetitions of the same act—the main difference being the substitution of “impositions” for the cane. Thus do we pretend to form the characters of men. We form dunces instead, who carry nothing from our lyceums but horror of all intellectual work ; whose one care is to wipe out the weary recollection, by plunging into those many forms of brutal amusement which are the glory of the “well bred” young men of the day. One thing indeed surprises us : it is, that with such a method of instruction, we still find so many young men able to outgrow its evil influence, to right themselves and acquire a proper basis for intellectual pursuits. Let us hope that at some future day—when voices have been long raised against administrative laches, against the crystallization of academies and their rulers, against the softening of youthful vigour and the decadence of true artistic principle—a time may come when men shall understand that, instead of working for effect, they must go back to cause ; that they must refuse to confide the direction of the living to the dead ; that they must free our youths from the oppressive and stultifying methods by which to-day they are being crushed.

The first aim of instruction should be to elicit individual powers. Rembrandt attached so great importance to this point, that he condemned his pupils to a solitary mode of study, and so



prevented the possibility of one copying from another. In these days, our one idea and the necessary consequence of our methods, is the annihilation of individuality by the substitution of process for inspiration, mannerism for sincerity, and calculation for spontaneity. Imaginative and poetic art we scarcely attempt. As opposed to those who look within themselves and obtain style naturally, by the artless expression of their true sentiments, there are to be found vast numbers, who toil and labour to master a borrowed style by the application of mechanical recipes, and so lose all the benefit of their own natural gifts. The latter method kills the spirit, and the introduction of formula reduces art to a trade.

G. Planché, in his article upon David d'Angers, says :—"What is, according to the Academy, the clearest manner of proving one's respect for tradition? Is it not to efface oneself so thoroughly, to absorb oneself so completely in the imitation of ancient work, to bring together in a new and unknown work so many ancient and well-known passages, as to make it impossible for the spectator to say with confidence, 'This is the work of a new man?'"

Not that the accepted theories are necessarily false and dangerous in themselves. Many of the precepts which obtain in our course of public teaching and in official tradition, are founded upon real observation—often, perhaps, narrow, but on the whole fairly just and accurate. The process of analysis by which they have been extracted from the masterpieces of art, often reveals remarkable perspicacity. But even undoubted truths become dangerous in presence of the prevailing errors in method, which by their insistence on the importance of rules, end in making young men think that the excellence of the great masters arose from their rigid adherence to rules; whilst, in fact, their excellence was but the expression of their individual qualities, and the spontaneous manifestation of their genius.

Students even come to imagine that, like themselves, Homer, Æschylus, Shakespeare, Leonardo, Michael Angelo, Rubeus, and Rembrandt, all worked from rules, which were able to instil into

them all alike the supreme laws of eternal reason—a revelation anterior to the existence of art itself. Art is thus reduced to a kind of inflexible geometry, with axioms equally despotic over all temperaments and intellects; and with theories deduced by irrefutable logic, which are certain to produce masterpieces when respected, abortions when neglected. As for genius, emotion, the internal movement of the soul which warms the imagination and is alone able to render it fertile in consummate art—these are put on one side, and are only casually referred to when they give opportunities for high-flown language. When such conventional homage has been paid, serious instruction, *i.e.*, the distribution of formulas, is resumed with fresh vigour.

This perversion of talent is disastrous. It sterilizes both the teaching of masters and the efforts of pupils. War must be waged indefatigably against it, if any good results be desired. Before unfolding the whole catalogue of processes, and showing young men how they were used by the great masters for the manifestation of their ideas and sentiments, we must begin by making the students understand that the first and most important point is the possession of an idea; and, moreover, that the said idea must be personal, lively, and keenly felt. We must teach them that in the absence of this antecedent condition, no rules, no formulas, no recipes, can save a work from that commonplace which is the true antipodes of style. That is to say—before setting up an arsenal for the benefit of artists, we must render them capable of making use of the arms provided for them. Before we show them how to interpret emotion, we must see that their souls are sufficiently developed and educated to feel it.

As things are now, it seems that personality has no proper part to play in art—at least we do not suppose that a young man who presents himself for official instruction has arrived at a point when he has nothing to hope from its aid. It would be a mistake to think so. Generally a little facility with the pencil is the only accomplishment of young men entering the *École des Beaux-Arts*. Their literary instruction has been nearly always completely

neglected ; their brains are empty and untroubled with intellectual labour. Their natural artistic faculties require nourishment and opportunity for exercise. Thus movements and warmth of imagination may be in a state of potential activity, but they are undeveloped for want of exercise.

We must, then, take these young men in hand. We must develop them and guide them through the mazes of æsthetic emotion ; foster, by every means in our power, the expansion of their moral qualities which constitute the real sources of art ; refine their sensibilities, elevate their conceptions, and warm their imaginations by familiarizing them with liberal ideas, by putting before them masterpieces in every branch of art, by teaching them to comprehend the basis of human society and the grandeur of man's nature, and by bringing them face to face with objects that are calculated to awaken and develop enthusiasm and poetic sentiment : in a word, we must multiply for them, in every conceivable way, the special delights of the eye and ear which are, strictly speaking, æsthetic pleasures.

If it be true that style is, above all, the imprint of individuality left upon a work by its author ; if we acknowledge that its elevation will depend upon the generosity and loftiness of such individuality : is it not evident that the surest means of ennobling style, is to enoble the personality of the artist ?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We take pleasure in recognizing that this latter truth is felt in the most lively manner by the present director of the École des Beaux-Arts, M. Eugène Guillaume. He has always insisted upon the necessity for systems of study, which, without bearing directly upon the theoretic or technical teaching of sculpture or painting, would effectually widen the intelligence and imaginative power of artists, whose horizons are, in truth, too often restricted. He understands as well as any one how narrow and inadequate the method is which has been in vogue up to the present time. Thanks to his exertions, many improvements have been introduced ; but his efforts clash with obstinate prejudices, which, in all probability, will finally prove too strong for him. One of the most urgent of the necessary reforms, is the suppression of existing privileges ; for these invest a few men with absolute artistic dictatorship, and, putting an end to all free instruction, condemn French art to a state of hopeless stagnation. The adoption of our young artists by the state has not, and never can, produce results other than disastrous. In art, as in all else, fertility is the outcome of freedom. We cannot understand how it is that

So soon as we have done this, and have replaced things in their proper places and true rank, we shall no longer find it impolitic to acquaint young men with the results of our examination of master works. We should no longer have cause to fear the annihilation of spontaneity by imitation, imagination by memory, inspiration by recipes. Even if the students did remain mediocrities it would be in their own way, and this would be much better than imitation of the mediocrity of others, or even than the smothering of personality in eclectic combinations necessarily condemned to impotence. Premature study of the old masters has the certain effect of preventing study of nature, and, consequently, the development of all spontaneity. It is an excellent thing to study the execution of others in order to add to the completeness, lucidity, and accuracy of one's own. But it is first of all necessary to acquire an individual style; for without this, there is great danger that one will permanently remain a slave to that of some other man, and nothing can be more pernicious than such a result.

The mode of teaching which we suggest would have another advantage. It would enable those subjected to it clearly to determine whether or not their natural gifts would fit them to succeed as artists. If taught nothing but processes and general axioms, they might take for granted their ability to apply this teaching. If it were enough to understand how Raphael or Rubens went to work, to analyze their principles of composition, to study their design, to master their schemes of colour, to store up in the memory the accumulated observations of the learned men who have more or less passed their lives in dissecting chefs d'œuvre—then few men could doubt their possession of the capacity necessary for such mechanical achievements; nothing, in fact, being wanted but power of attention and a good memory. But so soon as it is generally allowed that, to be an

the men who pretend to have avowed fidelity to the art of Greece and the Italian renaissance, have harboured such a thought as the wilful suppression of the very conditions which rendered these great manifestations of artistic genius possible.

artist a man must receive from nature imaginative power, warmth of feeling, enthusiasm, sensibility to æsthetic pleasures, peculiar aptitude to estimate the artistic value of things, and an instinctive, imperious desire to give to internal feelings external manifestation under one of the special forms of art—then will young men, during the noviciate to which they will be subjected, have many opportunities for self-examination as to their true vocations, many tests for measuring their artistic capabilities, and will no longer be exposed, as they are to-day, to the danger of lamentable mistakes, too often expiated by a life-long despair. In the result, we should find in all those who persevered to the end, that peculiar "*je ne sais quoi*" which is the essential condition of style.

END OF PART THE FIRST.

## PART THE SECOND.

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### CHAPTER. I.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF THE ARTS.

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WE have explained the general principles which obtain in all the arts. We have now to consider each art separately. But first there is a preliminary question to be decided—in what order shall our inquiries be made? We cannot leave it to chance. Such a course would expose us to fatiguing repetitions and disagreeable confusions. We must then discover and adopt some classification which may constitute a logical succession, and enable us to pass easily from one subject to another.

The chronological order, which has several advantages, presents as many inconveniences. First, we are not sure that we know it—a difficulty on the very threshold. Shall we attempt its reconstruction by means of conjecture? That would hardly be any easier. It is probable enough that the arts appealing to the ear preceded those belonging to the eye. The reason for such probability is that poetry, music, and the dance, reduced to their most simple expression, imply nothing external to man himself and require no foreign aid. Rhythm of language, singing, and movement, produces these arts quite naturally, for it is quite instinctive. But which of these three arts came first into being? Was it dancing, singing, or poetry? It would be difficult to determine with any certainty. The difficulty would be no less great in the other category of the arts. I am quite aware of the existence of a very convenient theory which derives sculpture and painting from architecture. This is what Lamennais says: “Just as the beings

...id in which they had only a potential  
...ives by very small degrees at a time,  
... that universe which contained their  
...e, their common mother, have been  
...ic evolution, all the arts potentially  
...always united with it, though distinct  
...idualised in exact proportion as such  
...ympathy with that of the world itself.  
...rst, by its steady progression from low  
...t, the emancipated statues, in break-  
...binding them to the temple, entered  
...s of their own. Painting, whose pri-  
...vary and enliven flat surfaces with  
...h a more marked boundary the hardly  
...ulpture, at last obtained emancipation  
...mitted itself to a life of its own; unti  
...stic symbolism of early art, began to  
...nd his individuality, and to see that  
...nt part in the universe, were it only  
...ects."

...better than to be able to adopt this  
...cepted doctrine, could we but clearly  
...ich it is founded. Unfortunately its  
...usually neglected to point them out,  
...r proofs. They seem to consider that  
... architectural symbolism, whose ob-  
...en reproduction of the great features of  
...cessary any more direct evidence. But  
...thy of credence? Is it represented in  
...itecture? Of this we have no proof  
...lliant explanation of the arts of design  
...ary theory. We know very well that

elements existed, and were so intimately connected as to form an almost indivisible ensemble. Moreover, we know that amongst the Greeks, and probably amongst other nations also, the arts of the ear formed a single group. Poets sang to the accompaniment of their own lyre or cithara. Lyric poetry, as we find it in tragic choruses, was sung by groups moving in studied time and rhythm. These are instances of the intimate combination of poetry, music, and dancing.

As we remarked at the commencement of our inquiry, the arts are reduced, by their affinities of nature and origin, into two distinct groups. It is, however, neither proved nor suggested that any member of these two groups sprang, completely fashioned, from the brains of our ancestors; and in considering the arts of hearing, we find ourselves confronted with the same difficulty as we met in trying to determine the precedence of the arts of vision. Which of the two groups was the first to give evidence of its existence? And, to take each group separately, in what order did the arts of which it is composed make their first appearance? To this question we can give no answer. Thus, as we have no facts to guide us, and are unwilling to plunge into the regions of more or less hazardous conjecture, we shall put on one side the chronological arrangement until such time as new discoveries may enable us to resume it with some hope of accuracy. It seems, too, more in conformity with the subject and title of our work, to seek for a basis for a classification of the arts among æsthetic characteristics themselves. This we must endeavour to do.

By their origin and the nature of their processes, the arts, as we have seen, naturally divide themselves into two well-defined groups. The one springs from the sensation of sight, and is more or less immediately connected with the practices of primitive scribes. The three arts of which it is composed are, sculpture, painting, and architecture. Their common feature is development in space; their manifestations have to do with a single point of time: consequently, they exclude movement, which is succession and duration, replacing it by simultaneity and order, whose law is proportion.



The other three arts, poetry, music, and the dance, are subject to the laws of rhythm. They have sound for their vehicle of expression, they appeal to the sense of hearing, and take their immediate origin from spoken language, which seems for long to have consisted of a species of cadenced singing. Their principle of action is by succession, through which they are referred to general ideas of lapse of time and movement. They are, therefore, the more direct expression of the inner essence of life ; while the other three deal with it rather in its exterior forms—which, being expressed at one given moment of their action, become as it were disguised by the very necessity under which they labour to limit themselves to a definite attitude, depriving them of the most salient characteristic of the other group of arts,—movement and power of change.

It would perhaps be quite reasonable to found a classification of the arts upon the more or less powerful expression of life found in each. We must first understand what we mean by life. Do we mean physical or moral life ? We are evidently concerned with both. It is not enough for a painter or sculptor to excel in rendering the outward appearance of the living body. Its attitudes and gestures, the disposition of its muscles both of trunk and visage, must express, so far as possible, character and sentiment, intention and reflection. Now, from what we have said, if we have succeeded in making ourselves understood, it is evident that the value of artistic manifestations does not depend upon fidelity of imitation. If our only object were the sight of the human body, we need only go to a public bath, or make a model disrobe. Any day we may see the signs of the moral life, in the attitudes, gestures, physiognomies and language of the groups which collect in the street on every slight occasion, or in conversational discussion with our friends. However great the interest we may feel in making these various observations, we must quite understand that the impressions received from them are in no way artistic. They possess a kind of philosophic interest, a satisfaction for our psychologic curiosity ; they confirm or demoralise previously-formed observa-

tions : all this they do, but they never give rise to any such feeling as that which we experience before a picture or a statue, even though they express the same ideas. And why is it so? Because that which strikes us in a work of art and stirs our emotions; that which we admire in the artistic expression of moral and physical life : is not really that life itself, but the power and originality shown by the artist in interpreting the impression made by it upon him and the manner in which he comprehends its manifestations. In fine, the cause of æsthetic pleasure does not reside in the personality of the beings represented, but in that of the artist himself shining through them.

Upon this clearly-understood principle we must now found our classification of the arts. We shall preserve the division into two groups, as seems natural. But we shall class each of the arts of which they are composed, in accordance with the amount of facility which they respectively afford for the manifestation of artistic personality ; and this brings us back to a classification of the arts after the number and quality of the impressions which they are capable of rendering—for it is by such impressions that the artist manifests his particular genius and talent.

Here, then, is our classification, which we must justify when, in the following chapters, we study the nature and expressive limits of each art.

We place the least expressive first in each of the two series :

*Arts of the eye* : Architecture.—Sculpture.—Painting.

*Arts of the ear* : Dancing.—Music.—Poetry.

## CHAPTER II.

ARCHITECTURE.

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§ 1. *Architectural symbolism.—Modifications of architecture by climate, nature of its materials, character of political and religious institutions.*

IT is in treating of architecture that the symbolic school has gone to the greatest extremes.

“In the very earliest social systems,” says M. Charles Blanc, “architecture was conceived as a creation fit to enter into competition with nature, and even to reproduce her most imposing and awe-inspiring aspects. Mystery was the condition of its eloquence. But still it was not its final aim, its deliberate intention. It symbolised the thoughts, struggling to light, of a whole people, rather than the well-defined ideas of an individual or class. In the complicated civilisation of modern times, architecture has become specialised; every edifice affects a character of its own, and it is even considered an evidence of taste and skill in an architect, to have succeeded in clearly showing the purpose of his building. It was not so in ancient times. Monumental works of early ages did not bear their purpose clearly marked upon them; they had little of the utilitarian character. They spoke forcibly to the eye, but vaguely to the spirit. The priesthood by which they were conceived kept to themselves their mystic signification. Just as the Deity is at the same moment both present and concealed in the universe, so is the idea of the architect present in the temple, both visible and concealed. If its walls were covered with symbols

borrowed from nature, the masses would not comprehend their meaning; and even he who created that enigmatic writing upon stone, would possess no key to its signification. So the manifestation of the idea was confided to an undecipherable character, and the mystery petrified in granite." . . . . .

"The earliest architects—the priests—raised monuments which, compelled to be obscure emblems of the divinity, reproduced in an ideal form great features of nature's architecture. So they imitated the sublimity of high mountains in constructing the pyramids—*instar montium eductæ Pyramides*, says Tacitus; and to these artificial mountains they gave symbolic form, that is, surfaces whose numbers were venerable and mystically redoubtable. So, too, they imitated the firmament in star-spotted ceilings, and the mystery of caverns by subterranean labyrinths; they symbolized the great plains of the sea by long horizontal lines, rocky peaks by towers, and the forests of nature by forests of columns. . . . . In their heroic aspirations they do not imitate the dwellings of man, but the architecture of God. . . . . The priests sought to reproduce the most imposing features of the universe; to borrow from the Supreme Artist his own peculiar materials, stone, marble, and granite; and to employ them after his manner, in producing the three dimensions of length, width, and depth. . . . . Such is the origin of architecture. From its beginning it has been nature reconstructed by man." <sup>1</sup>

Lamennais is quite as dogmatic in a similar sense.

"The religions of India," he says, "all enclose a pantheistic idea, united to a profound consciousness of the forces of nature. Their temples bear the stamp of the same idea and consciousness. Pantheism is at once very immense and very vague. We feel in its temples an infinite power of increase. No symmetrical structures are presented to our eyes, to be by them easily seen and comprehended; they force us, by dint of what they leave unachieved, to keep our imaginations continually on the stretch, without ever attaining any complete or well-defined idea, and so they give

<sup>1</sup> *La Grammaire des Arts du Dessin*, by Ch. Blanc, p. 59, *et seq.*

expression to the pantheistic feeling. The sensitiveness to the phenomena of nature shown by their constructors also attaches them to the ideas of pantheism. In it they are conceived and developed. Communing with nature in her mysterious moods, the artist thinks out his work and fills it with life; life which begins to proclaim its individuality even in the first rough productions; symbol of a world in germ; of a world becoming animated and organized, receiving into the chaos of its primordial substance, the all-powerful breath of the Universal Being."

To all these fantastic theories we vastly prefer the less ambitious but infinitely more trustworthy explanation of an eminent architect, M. Viollet-le-Duc: "As far as the architect is concerned, art is the sensible and easily understood expression of a want satisfied." One fact has by this time been irrefragably established—the constant and never-failing connection between the religious and civil architecture of all ancient peoples, and the arrangements of their early habitations.

Caverns and forests were evidently the refuges of man in his early savage state. As soon as he had advanced so far as to be equal to the fabrication of the necessary implements, he scooped out artificial caves, which call to mind the subterranean temples of India, Egypt, and Assyria. Later, he learnt to work and joint wood.

This latter kind of construction must have been practised in the East throughout a long series of centuries; because, as M. Viollet-le-Duc has shown, its traces are to be found even in the arrangements of edifices built in stone. There are in India monumental edifices cut in the rock, whose roofs or ceilings are carved to resemble the joists and planks of timber construction. The pillars which are left for the purpose of sustaining these ceilings, are made to look as like barks of wood in form as possible. Among the capitals in the ruins of Persepolis, there are many the shape of which is to be explained in the same way.

M. Viollet-le-Duc says, that "the decorative system of tower façades, the system universally adopted throughout the palace of

Khorsabad, consists in the juxtaposition of portions of cylinders after the manner of organ pipes ; still more like the trunks of trees placed vertically side by side. Such a system of decoration seems to be a last reflection of those wooden linings which once served to sustain the walls of earth, the clay, before the regular employment of unburnt bricks."

The same author states that "the majority of the very ancient monuments of Asia Minor which still remain to us, do not show a single form of stone construction that is not borrowed from carpentry." His examination of the monumental remains of Thebes, discovered a similar contradiction between forms and structural materials: he shows us the Egyptians setting themselves to work to raise in stone, by means of the prodigious power at their command, imitations of cabins of rushes and mud. He can find no explanation for such a contradiction but in the supposition that these men had been transported from a well-wooded country long familiar to them, into one denuded of trees.

The same phenomenon is to be found in the monuments of Asia Minor which are usually attributed to the Ionians. Some of these monuments are cut in the solid rock, like those of the Hindoos ; but here again we find imitation of the balks of wood which, in their prototypes, were used for supports, cloisters, galleries, and doorways. As for the belief which discovers in the structure and decoration of Doric edifices reminiscences of wooden building, M. Viollet-le-Duc will have none of it ; and it seems to us difficult to contest the truth of his arguments.

There is nothing mysterious in all this. Men built their houses of the materials which they found to their hand in the countries which they inhabited, and the mixture of styles simply proves the force of habit.

When a man took it into his head to build a temple or a palace, he was content to give increased proportions to familiar forms, so as to keep them in fitting relation to the importance of the dwellers for whom they might be intended. Their size depended upon the idea that held the more dominant place, whether it was

of divine or of royal power. The pyramids were not raised in such formidable masses to gratify a desire for a parody of creation by building artificial mountains; but merely because kings, who were to be buried in them, wished to mark, by the actual immensity of their monuments, the distance between themselves and ordinary mortals. The Bible and the Iliad teach us that it was formerly the custom to hide corpses in caves and cover them with stones, to protect them from the attacks of savage animals. The higher this hill of stone was raised, the more clearly did its elevation indicate the important *rôle* filled by the person who obtained such a mark of respect from his contemporaries.

When the kings of Assyria caused the palaces which dominated the country far and wide to be built, it is probable that they were impelled by a similar sentiment; to which, perhaps, was joined a desire to find in their altitude a little of the freshness wanting in less elevated dwellings.

The immense size of the temples of the East, is explained by two reasons: first, because in the nature of the gods whom they adored, the sky, the luminous atmosphere, &c., were looked upon as filling the whole universe; and, besides, there was hardly any method of symbolising their omnipotence other than by the colossal proportions of their representations; secondly, because the priests of their sacerdotal societies themselves inhabited the temple and turned it into a sort of town. Such were the temples of India, of Egypt, of Judæa.

Among those peoples who looked upon the temple simply as the abiding place of the god, in Greece for instance, it still remained larger than any single habitation, because the statue which it enclosed was always more or less colossal. But as there was no sacerdotal caste—the priests being simple citizens living in the town among their fellows, and the ceremonies of their worship taking place in the open air at the altar standing before the doors of the temple—these buildings never rivalled the enormous proportions rendered necessary by the practical necessities of the daily worship of some other countries.

In northern countries, the temple, at first small enough, finally became huge, but for very different reasons. Instead of springing from the religious conception itself, the increase was caused by considerations of climate, of security, and even of vanity. There was no longer any question of housing colossal statues or numerous families of priests; but, as the invisible God, to whose honour such monuments were raised, was believed to be infinite, it was necessary to give some indication of that belief by the proportions of the edifice—above all, by its height. And then, too, ungenial climates did not readily lend themselves to the celebration of religious pageants in the open air; thus it became necessary to enlarge the temple so as to receive the multitudes of the faithful within it.

But this is not all. The epoch which saw the construction of our great cathedrals, was precisely that in which the nations of Christendom awoke from the long torpor in which they had been held by the sinister predictions as to the year 1000<sup>1</sup>, and took a new lease of life. Communities began to free themselves from the tyranny of the priests and of the feudal system; and they displayed their gratitude to the heaven to which they owed their freedom, by the construction of great edifices, which were destined to be at

<sup>1</sup> This date, now too much forgotten, exercised a baneful influence upon the history of Christian races. We know that, according to St. Luke's Gospel (chap. xxi. verses 25 to 30), Jesus Christ announced to his disciples the end of the world, and his return in a cloud to judge all men. He added (v. 32): "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away until all be fulfilled." The early Christians at the time believed that the end of the world would rapidly follow the death of Christ. When, however, they saw years and generations pass without bringing to pass the fulfilment of this prophecy, they sought to give it another meaning; and by collating it with various passages in the Psalms, they came to the conclusion that, in the mouth of Christ, the word "generation" meant "a thousand years." Such was the origin of the almost universal belief that the year 1000 would see the destruction of the world, and the last judgment. People saw the approach of the dreaded catastrophe with ever-increasing terror; and, especially during the last century which, so they thought, remained to them, activity was almost suspended, and men, their spirits overwhelmed with apprehension, thought only of preparing themselves for the terrible and inevitable end.



once the symbols of their religious sentiments, places of meeting for all members of the community, and the signs and guarantees of their independence.

All these ideas are mixed up together in these ancient monuments, and it is quite a delusion that they were only proofs of faith in God. Their great vaults were not only meant to shelter the faithful collected under the eye of the priest before the altar where he said the mass; they were also places of assembly. M. Viollet-le-Duc calls an old cathedral a kind of sacred forum, where matters of interest to the community were discussed. The high towers were built, not so much to direct men's eyes heavenwards, as to enable watchmen to see afar, and to signal conflagrations, storms, and the approach of enemies. The bell which called men to their religious duties, called them also to arms, or to meetings of their fellow-citizens.

It has been often said that Gothic or Pointed architecture probably sprung from the habitual employment of wood in the structures of the Gauls. Augustin Thierry held that opinion. Describing the edifice upon the ramparts of Rouen in which Brunehaut and Mérovée took refuge from the pursuit of Chilperic, he says :—“ It was one of the wooden basilicas then common throughout Gaul, in which a soaring style of construction was in use, pillars and pilasters formed of several trunks of trees bound together, and arcades necessarily taking the Pointed form from the difficulty of shaping an arch in such materials; and it gave, in all probability, the original prototype of that Gothic vaulted style which, several centuries later, became so general in great architectural works.”

This explanation has not been in any way absolutely proved, but there is nothing in it difficult to reconcile with that of M. Viollet-le-Duc, who sees in the final selection of the low-crowned arch the result of a series of tentative experiments, to which the architects of the middle ages were condemned before they could discover the form of vault which should unite the two advantages of solidity and the greatest possible absence of thrust. The solution of the problem was found in a compromise between the acute

angle formed by two pieces of wood, and the semicircle of the Roman arch.

It has been our care from the first to repudiate the whole mass of *a priori* reasonings and metaphysical conceptions with which the origin of architecture has been so long and so fancifully obscured.

§ 2. *Architecture sprung from the natural aggrandisement of man's primitive dwellings.—The architectural theories of the Greeks.*

Building industry, the aim of which was bounded by the desire to provide shelter for man, did not change its nature when its task was to construct dwellings for divinities or kings. The *Odyssey* enables us to understand what the palace of a king or a tribal chief was in those remote days. It was nothing but a wooden cabin, somewhat larger than those used by ordinary mortals. The temples of the gods had a similar origin. All races of men were at first contented simply to provide for the use of their gods enlarged habitations of the construction with which they had become familiar in building their own dwellings. But this very increase in size gave a peculiar character to the buildings. Homer expresses sincere admiration of the great wooden hut of Alcinous. Such admiration was the cause of artistic conceptions. The increased scale of which we speak, brought forward in a peculiar manner some of the features of the common architecture; it gave rise to impressions which could never have been produced by the sight of the ordinary domestic dwellings—precisely because they were ordinary. These impressions were more or less vague; but it was enough that they were awakened at all, and that attention was directed to the new aspects of structures, so that the imagination, with logic to help it, could push on from point to point by a series of experiments, the aim of which was to achieve, by means of the completest possible agreement between means and end, the fullest manifestation of the impressions received.

So soon as this point was reached, architecture ceased to be

an industry and became an art. Convenience and utility were no longer its sole objects. It strove to convey an idea, and to excite admiration ; it was not content with size in itself, but endeavoured to produce an impression of vastness superior to the mere fact of size.

It was by size that it first endeavoured to amaze beholders. "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven," said the men assembled on the plains of Shinar. This legend of the tower of Babel shows how greatly the races of antiquity were impressed by the enormous structures of the Assyrian kings. Architecture obtains other æsthetic characteristics, or remains *in statu quo*, according as the genius of a race is more or less progressive. The Assyrian empire was too short-lived to have had sufficient time to add many modifications to the first style of its monuments. In Egypt, too, the type once found was adhered to and indefinitely repeated. Its essential characteristic was solidity derived from the mass of blocks disposed in more or less truncated pyramidal forms. In India, architectural progression and its different periods, are manifested less by changes in form and structure, than by the addition of ornament and decorative design. By this, too, is marked the introduction of symbolism. In Indo-China the discovery has lately been made of a large number of buildings, immense both as to amount of space covered and as to elevation, all built upon the same plan, and all literally covered from top to bottom with decorative sculpture, executed with the most remarkable care.<sup>1</sup>

This combination of great size with elaborate and intricate ornamentation is well calculated to astonish at first sight ; but no very prolonged reflection is required to enable us to recognize in such an alliance a sure mark of barbaric taste. Notwithstand-

<sup>1</sup> This architecture is the only style, within my knowledge, which can afford any justification for the assertions of M. Ch. Blanc. It seems to have had hardly any other aim than the imitation and emulation of granite mountains. Or, I should say, we cannot, as yet, clearly tell what purpose such edifices could have served.

ing the considerable merits of Egyptian and Assyrian architecture, it is not till we come to the Grecian, that we find any real architectural principle fully reasoned out and undeviatingly followed.

This principle regulated the use of three essential members ; the column or support, the architrave, and the pediment. The column replaced trunks of trees or fagots of reeds bound together ; the marble architrave was the substitute for the balks of wood of primitive times ; while the pediment sprung from the necessity to give inclination to the roof that the rain might run off. All this, it is easy to see, is perfectly logical ; and we fail to discern how a straightforward inquirer can find in it any materials for the mystic or symbolic fantasies of which we have already spoken. All the proportions were determined by rigid geometrical rules, in which was conspicuous the very systematic genius of the Greek people—lovers of proportion and symmetry in every sense of the words.

At the same time, these strict geometrical principles lent themselves very readily to the gratification of æsthetic sentiment, and fell easily into a series of combinations of which the chief examples were the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders. Each of these orders resulted logically from the various proportions assigned to the column. The Doric order, in which the height of the column is less than six times its diameter, expresses solidity, severity, and strength. The Ionic, in which the height of the column is eight or nine times its diameter, expresses lightness and elegance. The Corinthian column is still more slender than the Ionic. It need not be said that all the parts of the column in each of the three orders were so conceived as to contribute with absolute certainty to the general effect. Thus, the Doric column, like a tree springing from the earth, has no base, and its capital is confined to the slight enlargement which is absolutely necessary for the support of the entablature. The Ionic column stands upon a base and possesses a capital of volutes, which recalls ideas of flexibility and grace, but is still far from possessing the richness and magnificence of its Corinthian rival.

The logical development does not end here. The dominant idea expressed by each order of columns, becomes in a sense the motive for the whole monument—thanks to a series of mathematical calculations, proceeding naturally the one from the other.<sup>1</sup>

The character of sturdy strength which distinguishes the Doric order became progressively attenuated through the Ionic and Corinthian styles, and gave place to the elegance and richness which is their special characteristic. Following a similar course, the severe ornamentation of the first-named order gradually developed itself through the other two, till, in the last, it came to border on exaggeration.

Greek architecture represents, then, an absolutely complete system, all of whose parts stand to one another in logical relations, determined by a series of mathematical calculations; its propor-

<sup>1</sup> The despotic character of these mathematical rules is such that they even determine the height of the steps that give access to any classic monument. Their dimensions always maintain a certain relation to those of the columns. When the diameter of the latter becomes very great, the steps attain such a height that they lose their first *raison d'être*, and it becomes necessary to get to the top to make use of a smaller flight hidden between the gigantic stages necessitated by the rules of proportion. In all this there is an abuse of the logic of numbers which we should hardly have expected to find among so practical a people as the Athenians. This symmetry, when pushed to extremes, possesses another inconvenience from the æsthetic point of view. The proportions of everything are so rigorously calculated that the appearance of grandeur is in great part lost. The architects who built our cathedrals did not make the same mistake. They kept the steps and doors down to the scale fitting for man; thus the contrast between the smallness of these parts and the total elevation of the building, gave an increased idea of size.

Besides, we must remember that the primary conception of the Greek temple and that of the Christian cathedral partly explain these differences. The church of the Christians, as its name—*ἐκκλησία*, assembly—declares is, not only the abiding place of the Deity, but the place of meeting for the faithful. It would in such a case have been ridiculous to construct the steps of such a height as to be hard to climb. The Greek temple, on the other hand, was looked upon solely as the dwelling of the god, who was represented by a more or less colossal statue entirely filling it. We know that in some cases the statue was so large that it could not have assumed an erect posture without bursting through the roof. The public never entered these temples. All they did was to march around them in certain of the annual ceremonies; we therefore need feel no surprise that the steps and doors had proportions superior to those intended for men—they were on a divine scale.

tions are none of them left to chance, although some liberty is allowed to the artist. The rules, precise as they are, are not absolutely inflexible. The figures which we have given for the diameter and height of columns may be looked upon as representing the mean ; and enough play is allowed to the imagination of the architect to enable him to realise his own personal conceptions. The Greeks, notwithstanding the systematic bent of their genius, preserved, through long periods, sentiments of liberty much too lively to allow them to consent to the imprisonment of art by absolutely rigid formulas.

One of the circumstances which clearly indicate the delicate nature of their æsthetic perceptions, is the effort which they made to find an escape from the chief inconvenience of their architectural principles. It is certain that in the Greek temples, especially in those of the Doric order, the all-pervading predominance of straight lines could not fail to raise an uncomfortable impression of stiffness and disagreeable monotony. In most cases this monotony is no longer felt, because there hardly remains a classical temple which is not more or less a ruin, and the ruined parts break down the rigidity which otherwise would be a fault. Imagine all the columns in their places, faithfully upholding an entablature perfect in continuous parallelism with the horizon ; above this a pediment composed of two straight lines meeting each other ; add the almost absolute symmetry of the parts in strictly prescribed geometrical relation : and the result would be an ensemble, perfectly logical indeed, but cold and without grace.

Of this some of the Greek architects showed a lively consciousness. The columns of their buildings are not perfect cylinders. They are always more or less conical, and sometimes gradually swell up to a third of their height like a spindle, and then grow slender again toward the capital ; both walls and columns incline sensibly inwards. And this is not all. In the temples at Pæstum, and still more in the Parthenon, it has been discovered that all the horizontal surfaces present a gentle swell, and a similar con-

vexity is found in the basement, the architraves, the frieze, and the pediment. On the other hand, the entablatures of the lateral façades and the walls, take a concave form. These observations were made by an English architect, Mr. Penrose, who measured all the parts of the Parthenon with the greatest care.<sup>1</sup>

Certain parts of the latter monument do not possess the symmetry which their mutual relations seem to require. Ictinus did not hesitate to sacrifice absolute regularity to the need for variety; and, thanks to this judicious decision, he escaped the danger which seems to be inherent in the Greek system of architecture. It is evident then, that, outside the limitations imposed by materials and those general rules which were the expression of the collective genius of the race, there was still scope for the intervention of the personal genius of the artist. He was not permitted to change the general character of a monumental building, determined in its great lines by the accumulated laws of proportion; yet he had the right to modify it by details of construction, and, above all, by the system of decoration, the choice of which was left entirely to him. So, in the case of the Parthenon, we may affirm that the grave and severe character of the divinity to whose honour it was raised imposed the Doric order upon its architect to the exclusion of any other. But where did Phidias find the wonders of sculptural decoration which he added to its friezes, its metopes, and its pediment, if not in his own commanding genius?

Now in what lies the beauty of this decoration? It lies both in the perfection of its parts, considered separately; and in its admirable appropriateness to the architectural character of the monument and to the moral significance of the deity who was to occupy it. In considering a work of art as a whole, harmony is the first thing to be sought; for it is simply the co-operation of all the parts in the production of the desired effect, and it is exactly in the production of this effect that æsthetic character consists. In working this out the Greeks were super-excellent, and thus vindicated their title to be considered great artists, in

<sup>1</sup> An investigation of the principles of Athenian architecture, 1851.

spite of the narrowness of their architectural ideas, and the very slight amount of variety permitted by the type of horizontal construction which they exclusively favoured.<sup>1</sup> They succeeded in making the very most of the resources which this construction afforded, and to this day remain absolutely unrivalled.

§ 3. *The Roman, Byzantine, Arabian, and Romanesque styles of architecture.*

So far as religious art is concerned, the architecture of the Romans is very inferior to that of the Greeks; most of their temples being, in fact, nothing but more or less imperfect imitations of those of Greece. To the Romans, however, belongs the credit of having been the first to comprehend the full value of the keyed arch, which appears to have been originally discovered in the east, and thence to have passed to Etruria. An entablature supported by columns had the great disadvantage of requiring blocks of stone both very long and very strong, which were not always easily forthcoming. The keyed arch, on the other hand, accommodates itself readily to every description of material, an advantage which would be fully appreciated by a people so practical as the Romans. They seem to have made use of it on almost every occasion. It is found in the great majority of their monuments, even in those which are imitated from the Greeks, if their temples be excepted, for in the construction of these they seem always to have applied the principles of pure Greek architecture—that is to say so far as they understood them. By

<sup>1</sup> We must not suppose, however, that their art displayed no variety. Besides the diversities which characterized their three principal orders, they were able to obtain variety by changing the numbers, the disposition, and the spacing of their columns. They even ventured to disregard symmetry, when they thought it could be done with advantage. They substituted a circular form for the usual rectangle in many of their monuments. But still, we may fairly say that one aspect pervades the great majority of their structures. If I may be allowed to go to literature for a comparison, and it gives a good idea of what I conceive to have been the spirit of their architecture, I should compare it to the poetic system of Sophocles. Euripides, on the other hand, had no sympathy with it. It was pure and logical rather than grand or picturesque.



the mixture of straight and curved lines, so agreeable to the eye, the Romans escaped the monotony infallibly resulting from the exclusive use of horizontal and vertical lines which Greek principles necessitated; but their system is not so satisfying to the intellect. It is difficult to arrive at any logical reason for the juxtaposition of entablature and arch, column and pier, which it presents. It is a wholly unnecessary duplication of power. In fact it is a deliberately calculated imitation, a sort of patch-work, whose only *raison d'être* was the habitual admiration felt for everything connected with Greek art. Influenced by this admiration, the Roman architect suppressed his own individual genius and the requirements of his fellow countrymen. The internal structure of his edifice remained essentially Roman, but he gave it outer forms copied from the Greeks. He sometimes even, by way of decoration, loaded it with all the three orders at once, so as to give evidence of his learning and taste—just as, in poetry, Virgil tied himself down to the imitation of Homer, and Horace to that of Pindar, without ever realising that such borrowed beauties were in reality faults, blots upon their own artistic merit; or that a mixture so discordant clearly betrayed a want of true inspiration, and a singularly false idea of æsthetic principle.

Whenever Roman architecture was content to depend upon its own merits—as, for example, in the aqueducts and amphitheatres—although it was without the symmetry and rigidly logical proportions, the marvellous purity of detail, and the supreme delicacy of that of Greece, yet it possessed a grandeur of effect which we should seek in vain in its rival; to say nothing of convenience, in which it has never been surpassed. Thanks to the employment of the arch, it realised a type of solid durability as complete as that conveyed by the huge and solid blocks of the Egyptians, while it escaped their appearance of dull weight and immobility.

In Byzantine architecture a combination of lightness and boldness prevails. It borrows the Roman arch, replacing the massive pier with the light column of the Greeks. This, however, is not its essential characteristic. Its originality consists in bold domes,

resting upon pendentives, which in their turn stand upon arches, and thus permit large spaces to be covered over without an embarrassing number of supports. This form of cupola did not spring from mere architectural eccentricity, it was imperatively required by the symbolism of Christianity. In the eastern churches it was customary to represent the sky by a dome; and, besides, they were always built, in plan, on the form of a Greek cross—a cross, that is, of four equal arms, which was considered to express the idea of the Trinity, because composed of four *gamma*— $\Gamma$ —placed back to back; *gamma* being the third letter of the Greek alphabet.

The architect, thus placed, found himself called upon to solve a problem of a nature to daunt the most courageous. He was required to leave the four branches of the cross entirely free, whilst by means of a dome he covered the square formed by the four straight lines uniting the apices of the four right angles of the cross; that is, he had to raise a cupola upon the four angles of a square.

The problem was solved by the system of placing a dome upon pendentives, of which system the chief example is the church of St. Sophia, at Constantinople. We need not enter into the details of construction, which belong to geometry rather than to art. But we can easily imagine the effect which such a cupola suspended in space without obvious means of support, must produce; whilst to add to this startling effect, its architect, as if to detach it completely from the body of the edifice, has pierced it at its base with a continuous series of openings through which floods of light illumine the interior.

This principal dome rests upon other vaults or semi-domes which cover the four arms of the cross, and whose external lines follow the lines of the exterior of the building. If we add to all these curved lines, the windows disposed in double and triple arcades, we must inevitably be struck with the exaggerated rebellion of the Byzantine architects against the abuse of the straight line perpetrated by their ancestors of classic Greece.

To sum up, Byzantine architects borrowed nothing from the Greeks but the column. Everything else they obtained from Roman art; the arch and the vault for instance. We may say the same of other forms of architecture which sprung up later: Saracenic or Arabesque, Romanesque and the Pointed Gothic.

The architecture of the Arabs bears a certain resemblance to that of Byzantium. It uses columns to support arches, and imitates the method of resting domes upon pendentives disposed in square. But it is distinguished from the Byzantine by the employment of the ogee and the horse-shoe arch, lighter in effect than the semicircular form; and by the strange but graceful innovation in the shape of the pendentives supporting the dome, which have given to the form of construction in which they are employed, the name of *voûte à stalactites*. The bare walls without openings that Saracenic exteriors present, are necessary to resist the power of the sun; the interiors, on the other hand, present a profuseness of ornament of the most exquisite and refined kind, which, though every sort of animal representation is excluded, depends for its effect upon variety of colours and materials. This form of architecture is replete with all that is fanciful; it often displays much grace and elegance, though rather of an artificial kind, and with more richness than dignity. It pleases the eye by the variety of forms and colours, by the play of light and shade, but it does not enrich the intellect with any defined or precise idea.

The Romanesque style presents characteristics of an altogether different nature. The Roman basilica, at first sufficient for Christian worship, soon became transformed by the addition of a transverse nave, the object being to give to the whole edifice the form of a Latin cross. Until the eleventh century its roof was of timber. At that period it was first proposed to replace the wood with a stone vault, so as to prevent the many conflagrations caused by lightning. This innovation brought many other changes in its train. Exterior buttresses, though of slight projection, supported the external walls at the points which had to resist the thrust of the vault. Massive piers, with engaged columns

upon each of their four faces, were alternated with the isolated columns. Sometimes these piers were replaced by coupled columns. The cornice was preserved in order to throw off the rain-water from the walls. The windows were round-headed, often coupled, in which case they were surmounted by small circular openings. A passage running entirely round the central nave allowed processions to be arranged in the semi-obscure parts of the church. Finally, in the centre of the cross, over the square formed by the intersection of its arms, a tower was raised crowned with a spire, which both received the bells and served as a watch-tower over the surrounding country.

In the matter of decoration, it totally disregarded the symmetry of the Romans. The form and ornamentation of capitals had no rule beyond the fancy of the sculptors. There are Romanesque churches in which no two capitals are alike.

The substantial nature of the piers, and the undeviating regularity of the semicircular arches, gave an appearance of solidity and solemn gravity, augmented and sometimes exaggerated by the dim light struggling with difficulty through a few low and narrow openings. The religious sentiment expressed by the Romanesque church is of a rather doleful and down-trodden nature, redolent of the cloisters in which dwelt the monks who were its creators. It has no *élan*, no audacity, no power—qualities which especially characterize the Pointed or Gothic style. Between the two styles there is all the difference which we could expect to find between two expressions of a similar idea: first, by the monastic intellect while under the dominion of the terrors inspired by the year 1000; and, secondly, by the lay intellect, exalted by the novel possession of unlimited freedom and hope.

§ 4. *Pointed or Gothic architecture.—The style of the renaissance.*

We have now arrived at the consideration of Pointed or Gothic architecture. The Pointed arch is the special property of France, as the column is of the Greeks, and the semicircular arch, of the

Romans. But we do not mean its invention. The Greeks were not the inventors of the column, neither were the Romans of the vault; they were the first to grasp the full possibilities afforded by these constructions, and the first to make them the centres of new and systematic styles of architecture. So also was it with the Pointed style. The construction which gives it its name was known and employed by the Arabs; but with them it never emerged from the state of being an accident or an ornament. In France it became the enlivening principle of a complete architectural theory, by a series of consequences flowing from the one fact—the thrust of a pointed arch is much less than that of a semicircular one.

According to the *Théorie des Constructions*, by Rondelet, the thrust of a pointed arch, compared to that of a semicircular one, is, *cæteris paribus*, as 3 to 7; and, again, the weight of a pointed arch upon its supports, as compared with that of a semicircular arch, is as 3 to 4—a result due to the sharp form of its summit and its tapering sides.

From these facts it follows that the substitution of the pointed for the semicircular form rendered it possible to construct churches both lighter and higher than before, without any increase either of expense or of labour; and increased height was the great object of desire. The Orientals, with the exception of the Babylonians, sought to obtain effect by greatness of detail and immense horizontal dimensions; the nations of the west, on the other hand, pinned their faith to grandeur of vertical lines and proportions.

Another improvement, not, perhaps, so striking at first sight, but nevertheless very considerable, contributed to increase the advantage offered by the pointed form of construction. The Romans very frequently employed ribbed vaults. But they did not place the ribs where they were most wanted, along the angles of the diagonal groins; so they were compelled to build all their vaults, even minor ones, with heavy materials, the formidable thrust of which demanded walls and piers of great thickness. The introduction of the diagonal ribs gave a double advantage;

first, it permitted the employment of very light materials, and, secondly, it enabled all the weight to be so arranged as to fall upon four predetermined points.

Then began the construction of the great churches which thenceforth belonged to the public, to the commune; which they could never make fair enough or great enough for their new-born ideas of freedom. Higher and ever higher was the cry! They wished to miss none of the advantages afforded by the new system of architecture. Citizens looked upon their churches with the most jealous and emulous pride; they would not be beaten by their neighbours if they could help it, and especially by their neighbours of the abbey!

The modest buttresses of Romanesque churches, quite unable to sustain the terrible thrust of the semicircular arch, succeeded no better with the pointed arch when this was carried to extreme elevations. The flying buttress was then invented; and this resting its extremities exactly upon the points which received the thrust of the interior vaults, insured stability by affording equilibrium. After this discovery there was nothing to stop them going to any extreme; they might build up to heaven itself.

In this method were the great cathedrals constructed which still astonish beholders, and which evidently embody the form and arrangements most suitable to the religious sentiments of western races.

But this is not all. Thanks to a modification which allowed the whole weight of the roof to be supported upon the flying buttress, the wall, now completely free, was treated simply as a means of enclosure, and almost entirely replaced by many-coloured glass. Churches were no longer condemned to the sombre dulness imposed upon them by the Romanesque style; the play of light and shade was regulated at will by the arrangement of the coloured windows. A too brilliant light would not have been easily reconcilable with the kind of impression desired; too much gloom would not have been *en rapport* with the proud and joyous sentiments excited in souls but recently enfranchised.

From this architectural arrangement a new art took its birth : painting on glass, which has given us so many wonders.

Thus it is that in the pointed style every modification is derived from pre-existing forms, with logic quite as rigorous and more real than that of Greek architecture. The Greeks based everything upon the diameter of the column, following the natural bent of their intellect, which was so prone to organize and systematize ideas and facts ; but we can hardly affirm that their system represented the exact and necessary outcome of facts. From their peculiar point of departure they attained results, which were some of them very admirable, but others—for instance, the enormous columns of a few of their temples, and the absurd flights of steps, each step as high as a man—to say the least of them, very strange.

In the Gothic style everything is founded upon, and referred to, the pointed arch—not by virtue of any fanciful system, but by a series of deductions from fact which demand practical recognition quite as much as theoretical assent. M. Viollet-le-Duc has placed these statements quite beyond the possibility of denial.

The weak point of the style is the flying buttress, and the necessarily unstable system of equilibrium resulting from it. To speak accurately : as no means has yet been discovered to construct an arch in one single piece with all its parts closely knit one to another, Pointed construction must depend for its stability on the opposition of two never-resting forces, whose precise power it is most difficult to calculate. Where an entablature is used such accuracy is superfluous. It is enough, to insure practically eternal stability, that the resisting power of a column be superior to the crushing force of the mass supported. The strong supports the weak. In semicircular construction, as practised by the Romans of antiquity and the Italians of the middle ages, the thrust of arches and vaults was resisted by great masses of masonry or by buttresses, representing an inert force which could neutralise and annihilate the antagonistic thrust from the interior if it were constructed with but a slight superiority of strength.

But, in the Pointed style, as the buttress was composed of arches in the same manner as the interior of the building, a double and reciprocal action was set up, which could only be annihilated by a miracle of skill and accuracy in calculating the power of the opposing thrusts. For this reason our beautiful churches are too often in need of repair. Again, all this apparatus of buttresses, of flying arches, and of other more or less decorative and decorated supports, inevitably creates, notwithstanding the ornament which attempts to conceal its nature, a consciousness of barely successful effort.

I confess that I cannot share the admiration of M. Ch. Blanc for this, the weak point of Gothic architecture; he says,—“Following that law which Mnesicles and Ictinus have so clearly expressed in their handling of the Doric, the chief order of Greek architecture, our French artists declare that construction should always direct and, so to speak, be the matrix of decoration; that necessities well met, create beauty: that architecture should throw off all disguises, and recover its eloquence by casting off all restraints upon its freedom. Now, do we all believe this? In our cathedrals, the builders unconsciously obeyed the most important of the principles which produced the eternal beauty of Greek art. It was by virtue of these principles, though differently applied, that Villard, Pierre, Robert—obscure masters sprung from the people—carried out so memorable a revolution in the art of building; I say revolution advisedly, because the introduction of buttresses standing free and of flying buttresses, helped to impress an altogether novel character upon architecture, by making an energetic display of the whole structure of buildings, and by changing their conditions of stability into motives of decoration. . . . In the new style all grace depended upon

<sup>1</sup> Why should we not believe it? M. Blanc's surprise is amusing. What is there extraordinary in the fact that Western artists have succeeded in so educating themselves as to comprehend the same principles as those of Greece? We can perceive in the words we have quoted evident traces of that fetichism which looks upon Greek art as a sort of revelation vouchsafed only to one favoured race.



utility. Every structural necessity became a pretext for ornament; and the most apparently capricious conceptions were, in reality, nothing more than contrivances for embellishing the work forced upon the artist by the inexorable law of gravitation." Doubtless the architect ought no more to hide the structure of his buildings, than a painter or sculptor ought to conceal the anatomy of his personages. But suppose, for the sake of a strong effect, he made them mere skeletons, should we not call it exaggeration? Sincerity is a good and fair thing in its proper place; but we may affirm of the artists of the thirteenth century, without blaming them very severely for a fault which, possibly, they could hardly avoid, that they carried it to an extreme which considerably detracted from its merit. It is right enough that architecture should not be constructed ornament, but ornamented construction. But true though this assertion be, it is no conclusive reason why we should praise the art when it makes a show of mere mechanical resources.

Besides this, the multiplicity of pinnacles, finials, and ornaments of various kinds which architects of that epoch accumulated upon their buttresses, shows that they were quite alive to the fault of which we speak, and that they wished to distract attention from it. They had no deliberate intention to display the framework of their buildings; they tried to conceal it, and they would, with all the pleasure in the world, have renounced all praise for that sincerity which has been erected into a virtue, had they but known how to escape it. Without exaggeration we may say that they sacrificed exteriors to interiors, and the flying buttress with its accompaniments was forced upon them as the inevitable logical consequence of their determination to build to the greatest possible altitude. With their requirements, all these external devices were necessities, absolute and indispensable; I cannot see that they were beauties. Had it been possible for Pointed architecture to have dispensed with their aid, does any one believe that they would have existed?

It is not in such devices as these that we must seek for the

beauties of the pointed style. M. Viollet-le-Duc has shown us where to look for them. "Let us examine," he says, "the forms of that new architecture belonging to the lay schools of the west during the latter part of the twelfth century. The tendency towards a system of building based rather upon reason than tradition, made its appearance in the edifices of that period, in their construction, form, and decoration. We have seen that the only principle admitted by the Greeks was that of the vertical line charged with a horizontal entablature, over a single row of columns; that the Romans long employed both arch and entablature without troubling themselves much to reconcile their opposite natures; that, aided by the Greeks towards the close of the empire, they introduced the arch resting directly upon the column, but without properly combining the two principles."

"The Roman school made a great stride in advance when it made use of arrangements in which the column became entirely subordinate to the arch; became, in fact, no more than a comparatively unimportant accessory. With the earliest Gothic architects, the arch was of the very first importance; it was the essence of all their vertical construction, and was the ruling element, not only of construction, but also of form—the whole of their architectural principles were really based upon it. The Romans, in a great number of cases, based their constructional methods entirely upon the arch; but still the chief point of support in their architecture was always a solid and inert mass—even their vaulted buildings appear as if carved from a single block, such vaults being nothing but gigantic mouldings. The architects of the twelfth century, on the other hand, gave useful work to each separate part. Their columns are veritable supports; their spreading capitals help to bear the load; when the profiles and ornamentation of their capitals are greatly developed, it is because such development is necessary. Their vaults are divided into many intersecting arches, because these arches are nerves, each fulfilling its proper function. The stability of vertical points of support depends upon their being efficiently propped and counterweighted;

every arch-thrust finds itself met by some other compensating thrust. Walls disappear; they are no longer supports, but merely enclosures. The whole consists of a system of braces and trusses, maintained in their places, not by their mass, but by a nice calculation and combination of opposite and reciprocally annihilating forces. The vault is not a mere crust, a covering in a single piece, but an intelligent combination of ever active pressures, weighing upon certain bases arranged to receive them and transmit their force to the ground. Profiles, sections of ornament, are so designed as to aid the comprehension of the mechanical truths employed. These deeply-cut profiles fulfil, in a very perfect manner, a purely useful function; when external, they preserve various parts of the building from the destructive effects of rain, and that by means of the most simple sections. When used internally, they are not so numerous; they serve to accentuate the different stories, and, being very freely developed, they are employed as corbels and other kinds of supports. Such ornamental parts were always designed after the local flora, as architects then depended upon themselves alone, borrowing nothing from tradition or from strange forms of art; they were selected with regard to their future situation, where they would always be easily seen, and should be as easily understood; they were subordinate to the general architectural arrangement and construction; they were carved in the workshop before being fixed in place, and took rank with the other necessary members of the finished edifice."<sup>1</sup>

Is all this a mere matter of calculation, of geometry and of mechanism? Perhaps it is. But in architecture, calculation, geometry, and mechanical resource possess capital importance; and we may affirm that, had our architects done nothing but prove themselves the equals or superiors of the Greeks and Romans in these qualities, they would have deserved no slight glory. But they have shewn other great capabilities. Their works are no less admirable from the point of view of art and style. M. Viollet-~~le~~

<sup>1</sup> " *Entretiens sur l'Architecture*," vol. i. p. 272.

Duc says: "The French school of architecture which sprung up towards the close of the twelfth century—which must ever take a foremost place when pointed architecture is spoken of—seemed, in the midst of the rough civilization of the time when ancient ideas and modern aspirations mingled in so great a confusion, like a flourish of trumpets sounding above the inarticulate noises of a crowd. All ranged themselves round the knot of artists and artisans who had the power to disenthral the long imprisoned genius of a nation. . . . and it appears that from that time no man attempted to hinder these artists in the development of their principles. None, in fact, were troubled but those who did not identify themselves with these principles. A principle is a faith, and when it is founded upon reason, the arms that are successfully used against unreasoning faith are powerless to hurt it. Try to shake the faith of a mathematician in geometry! . . . Style, in architecture, is the result of the methodical observance of a principle; it becomes a kind of unstudied emanation from the facts of form. Style, when studied, becomes mannerism. And whilst mannerism will grow out of favour, style never will."

"When a community of artists and artisans is strongly imbued with the logical principles that require all form to be a consequence of the destination of objects, style manifests itself in every work that comes from their hands—from the commonest urn to the greatest monument, from the kitchen utensil to the richest piece of furniture. We admire this unity in the good periods of Greek art; we find it again in the best epochs of the middle ages, though with another character, because the two forms of civilization were so different. We cannot assimilate the style of the Greeks, because we are not Athenians. We cannot master the style of our ancestors of the middle ages, because times have changed; we can do no more than affect the Grecian manner, or that of the thirteenth century. In a word, we can but make pasticcios. But, if we cannot create the same things as they created, we can at least proceed as they proceeded; that is to say, we can imbue ourselves with true and natural principles like theirs, and

then our works will possess style without any striving for it on our part."

"The chief distinction between the architecture of the middle ages and the styles of antiquity that are worthy of being looked upon as types, is freedom in choice of form. The accepted principles of the former, different from those of the Greeks and Romans, were perhaps followed with greater rigour; but form obtained a liberty and elasticity previously unknown. To gain in truth, form betook itself to a greatly extended field, in system of proportion, in method of construction, in the employment of details borrowed from geometry and from botany. Architecture became, so to speak, more {developed in its organic nature; it embraced an increased number of practical observations, became more learned, more complicated, and therefore more delicate. . . . It possessed style because its forms were the logical results of its principles of construction, which were derived—first, from the materials employed; secondly, from the manner of introducing them in the work; thirdly, from the requirements to be fulfilled; fourthly, from a logical deduction from the ensemble to the details. . . . Principle is nothing but sincerity in the employment of form. Style is developed in works of art in exact proportion as they spring from a just, truthful, and clear impression." <sup>1</sup>

We shall not speak of the style of the Renaissance, notwithstanding the masterpieces of grandeur and grace which it produced, because we cannot discover any universal principle in it. It depended mainly upon a mingling of the ancient traditions of French art with the imitation, more or less incorrect, of the freer forms of Greek and Roman architecture. It is almost impossible to trace any coherent and reasoned out principles in the buildings of the Renaissance. Each artist pushed on in his own way, and a study of the architecture of that epoch could only take the form of a series of monographs.

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du onzième ou seizième siècle*, article—STYLE.

§ 5. *Conclusion.*

Architecture, as we have said, is the least personal of all the arts. It has to submit, in fact, to many controlling facts and circumstances from which other arts are free. It is first an industry, and then an art—in the sense, that it almost always has some utilitarian aim to govern its manifestations. Whether its task be to construct a temple, a palace, or a theatre, it must in the first place accommodate its work to the predestined purpose. Nor is this all: due consideration must be given to the requirements of materials, climate, light, situation, and habits; which are all matters demanding great skill, tact, and forethought, but can hardly be considered as belonging to art in its strictest sense. They do not give the architect much opportunity for the exercise of his æsthetic powers. Let us remember too, that, in the majority of cases, especially in ancient times, the forms of monuments were more or less borrowed from those of ordinary buildings; and therefore were determined by the *ensemble* of qualities and conditions which constituted the collective genius of the race, causing the individual and personal predilections of the artist to be under considerable restraint.

In most cases it would be a mistake on our part to suppose that the ideas and moral impressions created in our minds by the sight of certain edifices, were foreseen and intended by their authors. When, for instance, the architects of the thirteenth century exerted all their powers to increase the height of the cathedrals, is it quite certain that their only motive was to direct men's souls upwards, and to symbolize the gulf fixed by the Gospel between things of earth and things of heaven? Perhaps it may have been so, but we must not forget that they were carrying out a symbolism forced upon them. The planning of churches after the form of the Latin cross was meant to recall the sacrifice of Christ and His passion; their great elevation symbolized his triumph over death and ascension into heaven. Every architectural member, almost every stone, had its separate signification; and nothing can be

more curious than to trace the subtlety of the intellect of those times in discovering all kinds of imaginary connections between dogma and natural facts. To these motives must be added, as we have already observed, the necessity for some means of out-look over the surrounding country, and the jealous vanity of city populations, emulating each other in the height of their steeples.

All these impelling reasons no longer exist, and so we are left face to face with the single impression of size, which is all the more striking because not immediately explicable.<sup>1</sup>

We should not think nearly so much about the æsthetic aspect of monumental edifices, if for us they had not lost much of their *raison d'être* as instruments for religious or social purposes. That this is so, cannot be denied. It is this fact which makes a ruin more poetic in our sight than a recent monument. Certainly the Coliseum has provoked many more laudatory apostrophes in the days of its ruin and decay, than when a hundred thousand spectators assembled within its walls to applaud the fights of gladiators or of mimic navies. It is the same sentiment that makes us so severe upon contemporary art. It has disappeared to make room for utility; when the latter vanishes in its turn, art will reappear.

We do not mean to say that the great monuments of architecture were without poetry for their contemporaries and their authors. While affirming that these were much more taken up with the convenience and the practical purposes of their buildings than we are in the present day, we also acknowledge that they took considerable pains to realise an idea, possibly more or less vague, yet real—an idea oftener collective than individual, but

<sup>1</sup> We might add this instance to those given by Herbert Spencer in his first volume of *Moral, Scientific and Æsthetic Essays*. In a short article of a few pages, entitled *Utility and Beauty*, he very ingeniously upholds the theory that beauty always commences with utility, and that in the great majority of cases it is nothing but utility that has lost its use. Such a theory, advanced by him in rather too absolute a fashion, no doubt contains a considerable proportion of truth; but the conclusions to which it leads him are evidently erroneous, and that always on the side of over-generalization.

giving the opportunity for the expression and assertion of their personality—to be measured by the intensity of the effort to conceive and express it with the greatest possible completeness.

Finally, architecture in its own province, has a power of expression which cannot be denied. That it can convey an impression of calm or of boldness, of grace or of power, of religious bigotry or of gaiety, of size or of richness—the sight of certain monumental works is sufficient to prove. In our study and analysis of architectural construction, we may easily notice the reasons for each of these impressions: for example, prolonged horizontal lines create ideas of stability, durability, and weight; vertical lines, on the other hand, express boldness, enthusiasm, aspiration; the predominance of plain surfaces over voids, suggests austerity and gloom; while many and various openings, create absolutely opposite ideas. We must also recognize that the nature of materials and their arrangement, the various use of smooth and carved surfaces, can either add greatly to, or much detract from, the character and beauty of an edifice. Great architects are those who are able to tell in advance with accurate knowledge and feeling, the exact effect which all these various conditions will have in the finished building. But it is obvious that this ability cannot be acquired except by a series of experiments, in which each component part is gradually reduced to its just importance. Architecture, even when considered from the æsthetic point of view, remains so dependent upon geometry, upon mechanics, and upon logic, that it is difficult to discover accurately the share which sentiment and imagination have in it.

It is this uncertainty which has rendered it possible to fasten upon the art a string of various ambitions and speculative notions—people even going so far as to derive its origin from rival creations of the universe. Truly, architecture moves in a sphere of somewhat narrow sentiments and ideas—narrower, at least, than that of most of the other arts. Its first aim is to minister to convenience; it has to provide edifices fitted for their final destinations. In most cases such fitness is in itself enough to endow them with



character. It is, as we have said, all-important. If it carry beauty naturally with it, so much the better; but nothing is more repugnant to true architecture than an illogical use of forms divorced from their true purposes and real significations, in order to act as ornaments which are, in truth, no more than disguises. Such a proceeding reminds one of the discourses of those fine talkers of Molière and La Bruyère, who were never content to speak of things as they are, but decorated their conversation with a crowd of flourishes and phrases as ridiculous as they are far-fetched.

To sum up: in most cases the pleasure of the eye was but a secondary aim of architecture; and we may easily believe that the inventors of different styles hardly foresaw the æsthetic results which they were destined to produce. And they did not the less create a work of art because they implicitly obeyed the requirements of situation and climate, of the materials and purposes of their buildings. We could wish that our architects would follow the example of their predecessors, instead of allowing themselves to be dragged through all sorts of queer ways by a deplorable spirit of eclecticism. Imitation is seldom prolific. That our contemporary architecture possesses so little character, is the fault mainly of academic prejudice, which holds men down in superannuated traditions that are incapable of properly satisfying modern wants. The problem offered by our present civilisation is capable of being stated very simply. It demands the enclosure of vast spaces, in which great crowds can meet and circulate; but, at the same time and by a happy coincidence, science offers the very means required to carry out the demand in the most fitting manner—iron and steel. It is hardly possible that with such conditions and facilities, the problem above stated can long remain unsolved.

But, to make any new departure possible, we must begin by casting aside the academic traditions of *high art*. To any one who will trouble himself to give the subject a moment's reflection and unprejudiced examination, it will be obvious that the architectural

forms of the past were intimately connected with the nature of the materials employed—with their power of resistance, with their length of span, &c. It will be the same in the future. The consequence of introduction of iron and of cast forms into construction, must be an analogous modification of architectural processes. “Men may say that iron can never be employed in our buildings in an outwardly evident manner, because it does not lend itself to monumental forms; but it would be more in accordance with truth to say, that existing monumental forms, being the consequences of the employment of materials possessing totally different qualities from those of iron, cannot be adapted to the latter material. The logical deduction is, that we must not restrict ourselves to those forms, but must devise others appropriate to iron.”

Such is the conclusion to which M. Viollet-le-Duc comes; it is also our own. But how can improvement be possible, so long as the education of our young architects is entrusted to a corporate body of men who are one and all convinced that progress consists in marching backwards; and that the last word on every artistic subject was spoken by the Greeks and Romans?

## CHAPTER III.

SCULPTURE.

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§ 1. *Symbolism—Services rendered by it to sculpture—The beauty of the Greek race—Sculptural types—Pure beauty.*

It is generally assumed that sculpture, like painting, took its origin by a kind of spontaneous generation from architecture, when the latter found it necessary to decorate the structures it raised in honour of the gods, and to accentuate their signification by representations of various kinds.

In order to prove the truth of this idea, it would be necessary to show that sculpture was unknown until it sprung into being as the handmaid of the other art. Now it is quite certain that, among the ornaments, the arms, and the utensils of prehistoric times, there are many which are undoubtedly works of sculpture. The designs which have been found on flat bones and on hard stones, engraved in more or less high relief, can only be considered, what we call, bas-reliefs.

We may say the same of the hieroglyphic figures which constituted the earliest kind of writing. It is, in fact, among such carvings that we find the earliest examples of relief. The more or less deeply and widely cut markings in the stone which at first sufficed, were soon followed by the cutting away and the rounding off of the edges of contours, by which veritable carvings in relief were obtained. We meet also with hieroglyphics that instead of standing out from the stone are excavated in it. At Thebes in-

deed figures have been discovered, in which the surrounding margin of the stone remains raised, so as to leave the carving standing out from its bed within a moulding, exactly like the bas-reliefs of more modern times. This point reached, nothing remained but gradually to accentuate the cutting, and finally to detach it entirely from the wall, to obtain both alto-rilievo and the statue.

Whatever we may think of this question of origin, it is easy to understand that sculpture, even from its beginning, found itself bound up in symbolism. Whether it be the offspring of hieroglyphic writing or of the necessity for images of the gods, the result is the same. Hieroglyphics were of course symbols; indeed the personification of such divinities as the sun, light, night, could not very well be anything else. It is the necessary result of the anthropomorphic type adopted by all the religions which superseded the fetich worship of primitive times.

This symbolism was modified to a certain extent by the varying genius of different races; but, though it changed its outward character, its real nature remained the same—for its aim was ever to make real to the visual sense the forms of imagiuary beings, in whom ideas more or less absurd were to be embodied. From the day when men ceased to adore objects which superstition had transformed into wonder-working talismans and protecting fetiches,<sup>1</sup> and addressed their prayers to the stars, to fire and to fiery meteors—they endowed their deities with forms which were similar to their own, if more powerful and endowed with peculiar attributes corresponding to the functions which they were supposed to fulfil in the government of things. This anthropomorphism became more pronounced than ever, when mediating gods, sons of men created gods by sacrifice, were added to, or took the place of, the divinities of the air and the sky.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We know that in remote times both Greeks and Latins used to render divine honours to rough stones. Pausanias has preserved for us many evidences of the existence of such a form of worship among the ancient Greeks.

<sup>2</sup> The series of these transformations is to be found in an appendix to the *Origines de la mythologie*, a sequel to the *Mythologie dans l'art ancien et moderne*, by René Ménard; 1 vol. 4to. (Ch. Delagrave), with 600 illustrations.

It is in consequence of this symbolism that the Hindoos have given three heads and a multitude of arms and legs to so many of their deities, to indicate the superiority of their strength and intelligence. The Egyptians attempted to convey an idea of the functions and characters of their gods, by giving them the heads of animals; and symbolized their power, by the enormous size of their statues. Assyrian art, which did not confine itself so much to the interpretation of religious ideas, was equally symbolic. Like the art of the Egyptians, its symbols were taken from the animal world; with this difference, however—instead of placing the heads of animals upon the bodies of men, they reversed the process, and crowned animal forms with human heads.

The two kinds of symbolism are found combined among the Greeks, in the figures of Pan, of Silenus, of fauns and of centaurs. But such mixtures are confined to a small number of peculiar conceptions; in the representations of the gods, anthropomorphism is supremely dominant. But we must not forget that it is still symbolism. The first Greek artists who represented Zeus with the eagle and the thunderbolt, Hera with the peacock, Athena with lance and owl, Hermes with caduceus and winged heels, had no intention beyond suggesting, by these attributes, the functions and position of each of the gods.

But the fact alone, of having separated the god from his attribute, contained the germ of all the future development of Greek sculpture. The attribute, which at first was the most important sign of the particular conception from which each deity sprung, soon came to be simply a means of accentuating, and, as it were, duplicating that conception in the image of the god. Artists, in each of their personifications, had to carry out a clearly defined programme, which at first was simple enough. They had to express a single idea, and this they set to work to do by means of the attitudes and physical conformation of their statues.

Thus were they led to the discovery of types appropriate to each, without having to pay regard to those metaphysical aspi-

rations which Plato, and the critics enrolled under the banner of transcendental idealism, so kindly manufacture for their use. They neither troubled themselves to discover what might be the ideal type of the human form, nor to find out in what way it might have been conceived in the divine intelligence. They merely perceived that, among the deities whose visible forms they had to reproduce—one was the personification of power, and another of strength; this one of beauty, and that of activity: and therefore that these qualities should be carried, even in divine persons, to their extreme expression. Moreover, in order to obtain this power of expression in their representations, they kept all other qualities subordinate to the chief one. Little by little they arrived at the point of making each god an epitome of the peculiar characteristic belonging to himself, everything that might either contradict or attenuate the dominant impression being carefully eliminated.

This determination to represent, in a measure to duplicate, the attributes of the gods, by causing their persons to conform to the attributes assigned to them by mythology, seems so simple and logical, that we can hardly look upon it as the evidence of any great merit in the Greeks. They were, however, the only people to whom such an idea occurred—an idea which, by drawing their art into a really æsthetic course, fixed its destiny.

They had other natural advantages, which explain a good deal of the superiority of their sculpture. The Greek race was originally a fine race, and, thanks to its contempt for everything that was not of it, remained unmixed. None but slaves, as a rule, were employed in the more violent or laborious kinds of work. Among their free citizens, a vast number regularly practised military and gymnastic exercises, which developed the muscles in due proportion. At these exercises, too, they were accustomed to see the naked body in every attitude and in every sort of movement, and thus could acquire a knowledge of the figure in all its details, the like of which can never be supplied by the more or less intermittent study of our days, of models who, in most cases, have a right to the name only in one sense—that they are so by profession.

Their minds became filled with a crowd of recollections and impressions which gradually became moulded and combined into more or less perfect *ensembles*. Every Greek carried by instinct in his imagination a host of statues, ready made and life-like. He had only to put one of them in this or that attitude, to modify a few details, and he had a *chef d'œuvre* of art drawn from the storehouse of his own memory, and hardly costing him an effort.

Thus, by the co-operation of memory, of imagination and of a disciplined notion of form, were formed those pregnant and expressive images of simple and general ideas, which metaphysicians attribute to some particular power of perceiving the ideal creations which they call types.

This latter expression is one of those which the partisans of academic æsthetic theories have most abused. By type they mean that ideal and perfect form which contains and summarises the especial characteristics belonging to any given quality. Every quality, good or bad, has its type, which is necessarily ideal—for perfection cannot be realised in matter. It is this very impossibility of any actual and material existence which metaphysicians look upon as the demonstration of the ideal reality of the type. Our intelligence, which is no more than a mirror, could not conceive the idea of type did it not perceive the eternal examples of things as they exist in the world of pure essences; this it does, thanks to our reason, which serves, as it were, for a window from which to look out upon the region of metaphysical entities. Consequently, memory and imagination, peopled as they are with recollections and impressions of vague reality, could not construct types by the union of disjointed fragments, were it not that some higher faculty gives the power to perceive what is their true and superior constitution.

It is easy to see that, to the advocates of these ideas, when carried to a logical conclusion, study of real form must be of very minor importance. That is to say, if it be possible to reconstruct a type by the aid of recollections which have faded away, it is only because the ideal type is deeply fixed in our reason, and is

at hand to direct, regulate and correct the facts of memory and the workings of imagination. Would it not be much better, then, to pass to it at once, and copy it implicitly?

Reasoning would certainly end by compelling us to answer in the affirmative; but, unhappily, such a conclusion would not be in accord with facts. An artist, in spite of the idealists, is ever in subordination to the realities which surround him. The sculptors of every country have a collective ideal of beauty, which leads them invariably to reproduce the essential features of the race to which they belong—always supposing that these influences be not annihilated by education. In the ideal of the Chinaman, the eyes are raised at the outer extremities, the face is large and the cheek bones prominent; in that of the negro, the hair is frizzy, the nose broad and flat, the lips protruding. The Greek had a very different notion of typical beauty, but his conception was in quite as strict accord with the characteristics of his race as those which we have cited.

The ideal type of the metaphysician rests upon a mere hypothesis; as, in fact, does the whole science of metaphysics. This hypothesis consists in the continual substitution of abstract and general ideas for concrete and living realities.

In truth, this ideal type is no more than a complete harmony of the forms, chosen and brought together for the expression of a dominant idea. Each individual function, both of the moral and of the physical life, produces and fashions such organs as are fit for its use. Thus the function is naturally indicated by the reproduction of its peculiar organ; and the predominance of any particular function, logically results in the exaggeration of that organ and in the diminution of those foreign to it.

The principle, from the purely logical point of view, is as simple as possible. It pretends that memory, with the aid of reason, would suffice for everything, so long as men should be able, as were the Greeks, constantly to observe the play of all the organs, and so to become familiar with them. Memory would, in fact, take the place of a book of anatomy, where nothing is desired but



the clear exposition of structural modifications, and information as to the deformities produced in the undue development of such and such a part of the body by the exaggerated exercise of its functions.

But we must remember that the aim of art is infinitely more complex, even in the system of simplification followed by the Greeks. The problem was, how clearly to indicate the function, which was the very object of the work, without any of those deformities which result from excess, and are destructive of the physical perfection which the representation of the gods demanded. It was necessary that the work should preserve both its unity of idea and its lifelike *ensemble*—the essential condition of art consisting in complete harmony between the two. Now, in order to obtain a work, not of reason, but of art in the proper sense of the word, a good deal more is required than the mere logical juxtaposition of separate recollections: the one great point is that they must exist in the mind of the artist combined in one complete and definite impression, which he can keep before him to serve as the real model for his work; they must undergo the peculiarly elaborate work of æsthetic composition which goes on spontaneously in the imagination of men born poets, as the Greeks understood the word. The philosopher and the critic look upon all things as founded upon systems and abstract ideas; it is the distinctive mark of their vocation. With the artist, on the other hand, everything takes concrete form; and this is precisely why he is an artist.

It has often been remarked that the facial expression of many Greek statues, especially those of deities, seems undecided. In order to explain this immobile irregularity, the critics of the ideal school have invented a term as convenient as it is vague. Greek art, they say, sought above all things for "pure beauty," which would naturally lose its purity and abstract nature were it ever mixed up with passions and other accidental feelings. We have yet to learn in what this "pure beauty" really consists. No attempt is made to tell us, so that the explanation of the first difficulty does not amount to much.

Without plunging into any fantastic metaphysical discussion, we shall content ourselves with affirming that the immobility of countenance in Greek statues can be very easily explained by the great idea which the nation entertained of the dignity proper to free men, and still more to the gods. Impassibility and repose formed their ideal, as they still form the ideal of existing eastern races. Civilized and barbarous peoples alike preserve this common trait, making it the law and the aim of their moral system. Upon this point the Epicureans agreed with the Stoics; the only difference was that the former called it *ataraxy*, and the latter *apathy*,<sup>1</sup> words which have much the same meaning. Agitation and passion, undignified in man, could not very well be attributed to the gods.

We can feel no surprise at the care to preserve the representations of their divinities from all profanation of this kind. Another explanation of this impassibility is suggested by the essentially symbolic character of the sculpture of early times. What was its principal object?—to interpret an attribute by an attitude; to accommodate the gestures and movements of the body, not to a casual act giving the notion of accident, but to a permanent and an eternal function. In the Greek pantheon each god formed a part of the universal organization that preserves the world; a wheel in the great machine that keeps life on the earth, in the seas, and in the heavens. The divinities differed among themselves only in the nature of the *rôle* with which each of them was entrusted; and it was this difference which the artist sought to render, without troubling himself with anything else. Why then, should we be surprised because we do not find in his work that which he never meant to place in it; and why should we fatigue ourselves in the search for a pretext to attribute the change to our own natures?

<sup>1</sup> *Ataraxy*, from *ἀ*, privative, and *ταράσσειν*, to trouble; *apathy*, from *ἀ*, privative, and *πάθος*, passion. The two words equally signify absence of trouble or agitation.

§ 2. *Expression in Greek sculpture—Academic prejudice—In what does the superiority of antique sculpture consist?—Our ability to excel it in movement and expression.*

That the theory of pure or abstract beauty, put forward as the principal aim of Greek sculpture, is founded upon an illusion, can be proved by the fact that, in most cases, even those who have the most implicit faith in it and would wish most to rely upon it, are, in practice, obliged to give it up. Side by side with purely symbolic sculpture, there sprung up in Greece a very considerable development of the personal and human form of the art. This latter, having nothing to do with symbolism, did not fear to engage its personages in particular actions, or to give them gestures and even facial expressions, which energetically prove a desire for movement and the indication of moral life. We may cite the *Boiteur* of Pythagoras of Rhegium, the *Philoctetes* of Protagoras, the *Discobolus* of Myron, the *Niobe and her Children* of Scopas, the *Dying Gladiator* of Cresilaus, the *Wrestlers* at Florence, the *Dying Jocasta* of Silanion, the *Diotrephes pierced with Arrows*, the *Wounded Amazon*, the *Laocoon*, the *Weeping Matrons* of Sthenis, the *Child caressing its Mother's Corpse* of Epigonus,<sup>2</sup> &c.

Pliny mentions a statue of Hercules which was brought from Greece; the hero, consumed by the fatal shirt of Nessus and about

<sup>2</sup> The painting of the Greeks was as ready as their sculpture to put itself in opposition to the "purified" taste of our modern imitators of Aristarchus, and their theories of Greek art in general. Ancient writers have left to us descriptions of a certain number of pictures in which moral expression seems to have held a considerable place. Winckelmann speaks of a *Medea* painted by Timomachus, in whose face might be read the conflict between vengeance and maternal love. In a picture by Aristides, representing the sack of a city, one incident was that of an infant dragging itself towards the breast of its dying mother. The face of the unhappy woman, according to Pliny, marked in the strongest manner her fear that the child would draw blood from her instead of its accustomed milk. An *Ajax*, also painted by Timomachus, appeared full of shame and despair; "one had only to look at him," said Apollonius of Tyana, "to perceive that he was resolving upon death by his own hand."

to die, showed by his wild and contorted visage the agonies which he was suffering. It is true that he says such a representation was, in itself, a proof either of the decadence of art or of the bad taste of the artist. Such an argument is convenient; but it remains to be proved how and why it is that immobility and ataraxy should be esteemed of higher value, in sculpture, than life and emotion, while an opposite estimate obtains in all the other arts. Visconti, who can hardly be accused of any bias against Greek art, and who looked upon Phidias as the greatest of all sculptors, acknowledges, nevertheless, that other Greek sculptors excelled him in the expression of the head, especially in those of women; nor did he hesitate to describe this excellence as a merit.

As for ourselves, we are convinced that, although the processes and even the materials of sculpture, impose certain compromises which are less absolutely required in other arts, there is no good reason for the prohibition of all movement. At any rate, we may remind the despots of academic taste, who pretend to speak in the name of antique sculpture, that the latter happily took the trouble to contradict in advance, by its still existing examples, the narrowness of the theories of those who think to show their admiration of classic works, by a process of mutilation in order to make them fit their prejudices.

It is easy to understand that symbolism must early have become exhausted. So soon as each god had obtained a representation, consecrated as it were and free from change, those artists who had no wish to become mere copyists, found themselves forced to look elsewhere. Naturally they allowed themselves to take a course parallel to the current which was setting in, and which in poetry had superseded the epic poem by the drama, the tragedy of action by the tragedy of passion. The point of view taken by the sculptors of the images of the gods, offered several advantages, as we have already seen; but it had also the inconvenience of arresting progress rather too sharply by the *canon*, the limit imposed by the religious system—as their pre-occupation was chiefly centred upon

the rendering of a certain attribute, so soon as their end was completely attained they could go no further.

We must not, however, imagine that there was an absolutely regular sequence of religious art, carried to final perfection by Phidias ; and, following it, a more human form of art, inaugurated and developed by the artists of later epochs. Such regularity does not often occur in history. It is certain that the search after expression became more common after the time of Phidias, but it is also to be found before him. The bas-reliefs on the Theseum, or temple of Theseus, less perfect, perhaps, in execution than the statues on the pediment of the temple at Ægina, are infinitely superior to them in life and movement. At the same period, the great painter Polygnotus, who seems to have been a genius replete with boldness and inventive power, invariably endeavoured to endow his figures with a moral expression which up to his time had hardly been thought of ; and we know that he exercised a very considerable influence upon contemporary art. The surname—the Ethographer, or painter of character—given to him, shows how much such an influence made itself felt.

We must also remember that by the side of religious and heroic sculpture, there almost always existed in Greece another of a quite different nature, which we may term “realistic.” Instead of devoting itself to the manifestation of some particular and pre-determined quality, character, or sentiment, this took for its aim individual truth—often displaying very close study of the living model. Works of this kind are very numerous. In modern times multitudes of them have been discovered, chiefly of terra-cotta ; articles of pottery and personal ornaments. The infinite diversity of these, accords but ill with the narrowness of academic admiration, or with the *canon* which it would impose upon the arts, in the name of that ideal which it believes itself to have discovered in Greek sculpture, and in which, forgetting all the downright contradictions which it has received from the existence of works created upon principles totally opposed to its own, in the result it is hopelessly imprisoned.

We cannot insist too much upon the facts that combined to influence the history of the arts at this important epoch; because there is no doubt that it is from the literary and idealistic interpretations of the principles of Greek sculpture, that those metaphysical prejudices proceed, which form the greater part of the official notions upon æsthetics. These interpreters have not even given themselves the trouble to study the works of the ancients that have come down to us, as a consistent whole. Their intellectual system makes them content with the three or four statues which appear to lend themselves most freely to a fantastic Platonism, and upon these they have built up the whole of their theory. Everything that did not fit in with it—that is, the great majority of antique works—was simply put on one side or treated as an accident without theoretic importance. Such absolute rules once proclaimed, all efforts in any other direction were condemned as tainted with the spirit of decadence. In the last century, while Winckelmann enjoyed the rank of public dictator in matters of taste, the eternal models of “the beautiful” were supposed to be the *Apollo Belvedere*, the *Venus de Medicis*, and the *Laocoon*. They have been deposed in our day by the *Venus of Milo* and the marbles of the Parthenon. But, though the models have been changed the rules are not—they are just as eternal and infallible as ever; and, under other names, Winckelmann and Plato are still the tyrants of criticism.

An artist cannot be allowed to consult his own taste and individual preferences. Everything personal or particular belongs to the decadence. Art only exists in the ideal—in an ideal predetermined, confined, conventionalized, whose theories allow of neither contradiction nor neglect, under pain of anathema. Genius, individual temperament, spontaneous and sincere emotion, are all of very little importance. The one thing needful is to conform to rule, to simplify parts, to idealise according to formulas, to accommodate every figure to the type consecrated by the Academy; that is to say, to the type of the three or four statues erected into *canons* by official rule-makers.

M. Duranty quotes an interesting letter upon this subject from an observant artist :—

“Is it not very strange? A sculptor or a painter has for wife or mistress, a woman with a *retroussé* nose and small eyes, who is slim, light, and lively. He loves her even for her faults. He may perhaps have dared every danger and risk to make her his own! Now this woman who is the ideal of his heart and intellect, who has roused into action the true power of his taste, his sensibility, and even of his *invention*, which has also been excited and educated, is the absolute opposite of the feminine beings whom he persists in embodying in his statues or pictures. He goes back to ancient Greece for women; sombre, severe, strong as horses. To-night, the irregular nose which he loves delights him; in the morning, he commits treason against it and makes it straight. He is oppressed with ennui, or at best brings to his work the gaiety of effort and thought of a millboard-maker with his accustomed pot of paste, whose only reflections are where he shall go for drink when his day's work is over. And still, after all this, we are surprised at the existing lack of inspiration! We complain that the pupils in the *École des Beaux-Arts* do not produce *chef-d'œuvre*! As if the first condition of their production were not a real love for what they do, and the sincere interpretation of their own ideas! As if we could have any serious or elevated art without sincere and personal emotion!”

The writer of this lively sally has laid his finger upon the veritable plague-spot, the capital vice of the official theories upon æsthetics. So long as we take it into our heads to impose a ready-made ideal upon young men, to constrain them to repeat a lesson learned by heart—so long shall we continue to induce the habit of substituting imitation for imagination. We shall succeed in giving them great skill in execution, but we shall never make them artists. If there be among them a few who succeed in preserving their originality from all the pitfalls set for their inexperience, these may think themselves exceptionally fortunate.

These dangers chiefly menace the sculptor, simply because of

the *chefs-d'œuvre* which still remain to us from ancient Greece. These offer a specious argument for their use as models; whilst it is much too often forgotten that those who created them, themselves obeyed their own inspiration, nor were ever troubled to copy the ideals of other men. Neither must we forget that we have not—that, in fact, it is impossible that we should have—the passionate love for beauty of form which seems to have been both natural to the Greeks and a certain result of their mode of life.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the fact that our mode of life necessarily produces few models for the plastic arts, the exigencies of our climate compel us to swathe our forms in thick garments which hardly allow the general outline of the body to be distinguished. Under these circumstances, how is it possible that our eye can acquire the experience of and love for form, which was the privilege of Greek sculptors? We have to get on without the only fruitful source of artistic inspiration—the living reality. We find ourselves reduced, for knowledge of the nude, to the study, and, consequently, to the imitation, of antique art. Now, every kind of imitation must of necessity bear marks of æsthetic inferiority.

<sup>1</sup> Corporeal beauty had so great a value in the eyes of the Greeks that they subordinated everything to it. It was put above law, morality, modesty and justice. We have only to recall the stories which have been preserved to us by the admiration of the ancients to see that it was so. We know that on two occasions Phryne exhibited herself naked at Olympia before the eyes of assembled Greece. We are also told that when she was prosecuted for some unknown offence, her counsel had only to disrobe her before her judges to obtain an acquittal. They were so dazzled by the beauty of her form as to consider themselves at liberty to disregard the laws. The Venus of Cnidus and the Venus Anadyomene were transcripts of the body of that same Phryne, successively executed by the sculptor Praxiteles and the painter Apelles. Aspasia, another of the great Grecian beauties, is the heroine of a somewhat similar story. It was one day discovered that she was *enceinte*. Her beauty was threatened with partial destruction. The Areopagus ordered her to give herself a fall. The chief magistrates of Athens thought they could not do better than sacrifice the life of a child in order to preserve a famous courtesan in her full beauty. Imagine, if you can, the full *Cour de Cassation* of Paris ordering an abortion to avoid risk of deterioration to the proportions and harmonious contours of a beautiful form by a continuation of pregnancy! We do not give sufficient weight to all these fundamental differences when we attempt to impose an antique ideal upon modern sculpture.



It would be folly, then, to hope to equal the ancients in this respect. The nude is their peculiar domain, and, try as we will, we can never supplant them. Our artists may bring all their zeal, their patience, and their skill to bear, but they will never attain to that indescribable excellence which springing immediately from familiarity with nude forms, constitutes the incontestable superiority of ancient works; they will always be without the passionate and exclusive worship of the unveiled human body. The nude, with us, may be a superstition; it can never be a passion, a religion. We are impelled to it by education, by emulation; and, of course, there can be no question of suppressing it. But, if we wish sculpture to become a truly modern and independent art, we must apply ourselves vigorously to develop it in harmony with a modern spirit—that is, we must look mainly to expression and movement. In that point we may not only equal, we may surpass the ancients. It is deplorable to see an art enchained by conditions which fatally stunt its growth, while it would be so easy to grant it liberty, and allow it to take a new departure. Above all is it to be regretted that every year a certain number of young men (all under the influence of one fatal prejudice) enrol themselves among the copyists of the nude, and devote all their future to a series of barren efforts to reproduce forms in which they feel but little real interest, while another form of art would probably afford them sincere inspiration. That such exceptional men as MM. Chapu and Dubois, bountifully endowed as they are with a feeling for beauty of form, should persist in the interpretation of the nude, is a subject for congratulation both for them and for us. But how many there are who, possessing no iota of their feeling, persevere with a courage and patience which is truly pitiable, to sacrifice to the hopeless pursuit of an unattainable end, faculties which would be very useful in their own way!

Why, for instance, do our sculptors make no serious attempt to render our modern life in their art? Has any real proof ever been given that such an idea is utopian? that our habits are not sufficiently “nude” to merit interpretation in marble or in

bronze? It seems to me that the thing has already been tried, though timidly. We have seen, at exhibitions, *Sowers, Labourers, Spinners, Blacksmiths, Haymakers, &c.* But among all such figures how many relied upon their life-like reality alone? All of them bore, more or less, a family likeness to the shepherds of Watteau or the milk-maids of Trianon. They were mythological sowers, labourers, and blacksmiths, more or less directly descended from Olympus. When an artist does push his audacity so far as to give us a modern incident in marble such as the *Doj of Montargis*—he hastens to make the *amende honorable* and to obtain our pardon by presenting us with the *Athlete preparing for the Combat!*

The latter, of course, would sound better in the ears of the Academy, or when government commissions are afoot; and it is a bad thing to have to attempt self-justification before those who dispense the favours of ministers—but do the public count for nothing? To gain their favour I doubt very much whether images of Ajax and Achilles, or even of Andromache and Hebe, would compete, for instance, with the *Maternal Instruction* of Delaplanehe, or the *Peasant Mother suckling her Infant* of Dalou.

The works of these two artists alone are enough to show that even in sculpture, we could as easily dispense with the nude as with mythology, allegory, or the Academy!

Movement and expression form the proper aim of modern sculpture, which, in fact, has tended in their direction ever since the resurrection of the 12th century. Of course we do not mean to say that sculpture can express, like painting, the subtler shades of sentiment. Besides the difficulty offered by the materials employed, there are other, and in a measure moral difficulties, which are even more considerable. We can hardly tolerate, in this art, the complex movements and violent contortions which we sanction in painting and in poetry. We think it natural enough that Virgil should describe Laocoon, when seized by the two serpents, as uttering horrible cries: but the statue of a Laocoon with distended mouth, writhing form, and eyes starting from their sockets, would appear a frightful object. Poetry can accommodate itself to the

employment of such a horrifying event ; for it would cause it to pass so rapidly before our eyes, that we should not find ourselves obliged to dwell upon it. Moreover, that which we receive through our ears does not make so strong an impression upon us as that which we see with our eyes. In its rapid march, poetry carries us on from one idea to another, rousing, in passing, any excitement which its plan requires. But a statue remains ever unchanged ; and, in such a case as we have imagined, would leave us for ever face to face with a horrifying image, whose ever-strained contortions, and agony petrified at its very height, would soon become insupportable. Painting too, thanks to the multiplicity of personages and details that it can make use of to divide and turn away attention or to explain movements—like the succession of ideas in poetry—has some of the privileges of which sculpture is deprived. The statue of Marshal Ney upon its solitary pedestal, is made utterly ridiculous by its open mouth, one arm and one leg brandishing in the air. In a picture, at the head of a regiment marching against the enemy, such a pose would seem quite natural.

But if there is a limit which must be observed, there yet is nothing to hinder the domain of sculpture from being still considerably extended. Though it is necessary to forbid violent movements, and especially such as would give a disagreeable appearance, it does not therefore follow that the art should confine itself to the representation of permanent attitudes ; or that it should absolutely refrain from all imitation of rapid gestures or of fleeting movements. On such a point as this, great latitude must be given to the artist ; and the toleration of taste should not be exercised within too narrow limits. Success will entirely depend on the skill of the sculptor and on the nature of the movement which he attempts to reproduce. If he make use of hard or inharmonious lines, the spectator loses all sympathy with him, and, instead, invokes all his logic with un pitying and inflexible rigour. On the other hand, he has a great fund of indulgence even for exaggerations, when their employment results in a work of harmonious contour and happy general effect.

One of our sculptors<sup>1</sup> has not feared to execute, for a sepulchral monument, a figure of faith in an attitude which it would be quite impossible to maintain. It is a beautiful figure of a young woman who throws herself forward with clasped hands, her knees half bent, as if carried away by an ecstasy of love. This gesture, full of *abandon* and life, grasped flying, as it were, could not have been suggested to him by his model—probably not even by personal reminiscence. But he depicts with marvellous power the religious fervour and unbounded confidence of a mystic soul, which brings to the ordinary conditions of physical life a kind of supernatural attraction verging on the divine. A painter could hardly have ventured on anything more bold or expressive.

This desire for expression and vitality, is a much more powerful agent in the development of modern sculpture, than is the most skilful imitation of ancient statues. To vow servitude to the ideal of another age, is to voluntarily condemn oneself to mediocrity. If sculpture had no other object, we should be compelled to repeat the words of M. Cousin, “that modern sculpture is impossible, because the art in question is exclusively antique in spirit; because it is mainly the representation of beauty of form; and because its practice, like the worship of beauty, is a relic of paganism.”

Happily, however, such a judgment is entirely false, as are many others pronounced by the same infallible pope of eclecticism. The dogma may even come to be thought grotesque should modern sculpture go on in the way upon which it seems to have entered for some years past, and in which its superiority to modern painting becomes ever more and more evident.

Above physical beauty—which chiefly exists in just proportions, in the adaptation of means to end, of organ to function, in the happy arrangement of line and form—there is another kind of beauty, which is the exterior expression of the power to feel and

<sup>1</sup> M. Paul Dubois, for the monument to General de La Moricière. This figure, which ought to find a place in the Exhibition of 1878, seems to me even finer than the two statues of *Charity* and *Military Courage*, so much admired in the Salon of 1876.

comprehend. Antique sculpture never got beyond the lower of these excellences, except in the case of a small number of artists who attempted to add to it the expression of some of the more exterior and easily rendered sentiments. The modern sculptor, following the example set by Michael Angelo, is less preoccupied with physical perfection than with moral expression. Of course I do not speak of academic sculpture, which merely imitates antique work for its own sake, without even understanding it. France has lately lost an artist who carried the manifestation of life to its extreme limit. Imagine the same temperament united to a higher and more penetrating intelligence; what masterpieces might have been within its power! What new departures might have been given to that art, whose means of expression are so confined—if we are to believe those who attempt to enclose it within the limits of their own narrow theories!

§ 3. *Monumental sculpture—Cause of its decadence—Conditions of its production.*

Sculpture, they say, is the daughter of Architecture. This proposition—which, by the way, has never been clearly proved—seems much too absolute in the form in which it is generally given. But it is true enough that, in the more ancient of the monuments which remain, we find sculpture very intimately combined with architecture, we might even say subordinated to it.

This characteristic is particularly marked in the monuments of Egypt. These present an agreement so complete, a harmony so absolute between these arts, that we hardly think of attempting to distinguish between the two; it is fusion rather than mere harmony. It is impossible to imagine an *ensemble* more single in effect, or more concrete in its unity, than that presented by these structures. In them, sculpture is so mixed up and confounded with architecture that in a measure it forms an integral part of it. The seated colossi which flank the openings in the front of a temple have more the effect of supporting buttresses than of a

decoration. The caryatides which stand back to back around the piers of a portico, form part of the mass to which they are attached, as much by their form as by the monumental manner of their treatment. When historic sculpture makes its appearance upon the walls, it still remains intimately allied with the structural principle: it presents a kind of tapestry, covering the surface but not changing its nature. However minute the execution of his work, however exquisite his observation of nature, the Egyptian sculptor was ever ready to make large sacrifices to the monumental principle. He had marvellous knowledge of the forms which he interpreted; but he was careful not to insist upon all their details. He was content with a large and simple rendering, which, in spite of its archaic appearance, was never false. From this example of complete agreement between sculpture and architecture it results that other edifices seem to lose something of their unity, and our admiration is involuntarily offered towards the supreme expression of the unity of the three arts. This intimate connection between the two is the chief characteristic, the dominant quality of Egyptian architectural sculpture. Statues are some colossal, and some diminutive: in the former case they are never allowed to disturb the leading lines of a monument; in the latter, they never appear mean, nor take away anything from the grandeur of the whole.

All this appears simple enough when we are before the monuments which line the banks of the Nile. But if it seems to us as if the perfect result had cost hardly an effort, it is, in fact, a crowning merit in art to produce great effect without giving rise to any feeling of conscious effort or of pedantry. But to those who know how much knowledge and intellectual labour are required to produce an artistic result which shall attract and hold the attention without tormenting the fancy, the magnificent architecture of Egypt must assuredly seem the most "concrete" whole on the surface of the globe.

These observations, which are borrowed from M. Viollet-le-Duc,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens sur l'Architecture*, t. II., pp. 219, 220.

put the case with perfect justice. It is certain that even the Greeks did not attain to the complete unity of the Egyptians. With the exception of the caryatid and the capital, we may say that Greek sculpture, in spite of the utmost effort to make it subordinate to architecture, never became entirely blended with it. The Temple of the Giants at Agrigentum forms one of those exceptions which prove the rule. We may say that, in the great majority of cases, sculpture retains so much of its decorative character that it is seldom difficult mentally to suppress its existence. But attempt to strip an Egyptian monument of its sculpture, and the result will be the ruin of the whole.

When we turn to Roman buildings we find the same want of incorporation. As we have once before remarked, a Roman edifice was usually composed of two distinct parts: first, its construction, which, Roman in the strictest sense, was admirably adapted for the end to be attained, complete in its unity, absolutely satisfactory to the intellect; secondly, an imitation of the architectural forms, and especially of the orders, of the Greeks. These were added to, we might almost say plastered on, the structural core, and whilst intending to be purely decorative, and to please the eye, simply trouble and disturb the intellect.

Sculpture, in Roman architecture, is usually attached to this second part. This is as much as to say that it shows nothing which can be compared with the admirable unity of the Egyptians. The fact is that sculpture to the Romans was an exotic art, a luxury. Triumphal arches are almost the only Roman buildings remaining to us which show any intimate connection between sculpture and architecture.

The system adopted by our artists of the Middle Ages gave to iconography the importance which it had acquired with the Egyptians and the Greeks; but in the matter of composition, they proceeded upon different principles. They did not admit colossal statues; for that name only can we give to such as appear so in proportion to the buildings upon which they are placed. The statues of the kings in Notre-Dame at Amiens have no pretence

to be called colossal, notwithstanding their height of four *mètres*. These dimensions were given to them of necessity, because of the great elevation at which they were to be placed, which had they been smaller would have rendered them insignificant. Another peculiar characteristic of the sculpture of the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, is the grouping of figures so as to present, from certain points of view, very striking scenic effects. Contrary to the practice of the Greeks and Egyptians, no use was made of bas-relief, that quasi tapestry covered with figures standing out only slightly from their ground. All subjects were represented in absolute relief, except in a few places very near the eye, which were really intended to look like tapestry. The French artist did not wish, like his predecessor in Egypt or Greece, to display his sculpture upon wide walls and lengthy friezes. On the contrary, he concentrated it upon a few points, the great elaboration of which would give a most brilliant effect when contrasted with the dead spaces around them. The opposition which is a dominant characteristic of modern art—the contrasts which awaken sensation by suddenly exciting some organ of the brain, and then again as suddenly putting it into a state of repose—attained, in the sculptures of the Middle Ages, an importance which it had never before enjoyed.

We must add that the sculpture of this period was more intimately connected with the structural parts of a building than was the custom in times past. The association was complete; and we may instance, as proof of the fact, those richly decorated portals, whose every part,—lintel, keystone, panel, and sidepost—is strikingly defined by profuse sculpture, in such a way that subject and figure each possesses a definite and useful structural function. The French artist of the Middle Ages, as much from considerations of climate as from artistic motives, sheltered his statues, very rarely allowing them to stand out in silhouette against the sky. Again, his figures, like those of India, Egypt, and Greece, were always painted; which is equivalent to acknowledging that the epochs of civilization which really possessed schools of sculp-



ture of their own, did not think that that art could entirely dispense with the aid of painting.

We must, then, recognize that sculpture as applied to architecture, has possessed two distinct systems of composition; the one belonging to Asiatic races, to the Egyptians, and even to the Greeks; the other belonging to our own art of the Middle Ages.

But whichever of these two systems we may prefer, it is quite certain that the name of monumental sculpture should only be awarded when all the parts are allied to architecture as much by general plan and principle as by the execution of details. The sculptural styles of Egypt, of Greece, and of the Middle Ages, all bowed to this unchanging law, but in different ways and degrees. The latest of the three in date, that of the Middle Ages, perhaps affords the greatest possible variety of expression, and does so without any sacrifice of principle. From the middle of the twelfth century to the end of the thirteenth, French artists produced works of architecture in unequalled abundance, in which the sculpture, though possibly mediocre in execution, possessed a grandeur of effect which cannot be denied. We may cite as examples the doors of the Abbeys of Moissac and Véselay, the side porches of Notre-Dame at Chartres, of the Cathedral at Bourges, of the Church of St. Severin at Bordeaux, the portal of Amiens Cathedral, and the whole façade of Notre-Dame at Paris. Who does not know, who does not possess engravings or photographs of these wonderful conceptions, at once architectural and sculpturesque, conceptions whose iconography is so well defined, whose proportions are so skilfully determined?

Upon some of the buildings which we have named, these statues are not to be counted by hundreds, but by thousands; and are all so conceived and arranged as to add to the force of the whole. And, being completely satisfying, clear, and easy to understand, this whole reacts, in its general excellence, on each of its details; and thus individual members which might be considered mediocre if taken singly, do not destroy the harmony, but fill their own part with pleasure to the eye. Nothing is absent that should be

present: neither intimate connection with the architectural lines upon which the statues are placed, which they support rather than contradict; nor their true proportionment so as to enhance the artistic value of the whole. In such buildings sculpture is no ornament dragged in from without, no afterthought, no piecing together of details brought from the studio; it bears a similar relation to the architectural design as the structural parts themselves do.

This principle was so universally understood and admitted that it is to be found in all the works of Middle Age artists. Look at the vignettes in manuscripts, and it will be found that whenever they contain any representations of monumental architecture, they give additional evidence of the intimate union of the two arts.

It did not require either a sculptor or an architect to see as much as this. It was sufficient that these men were imbued with a true instinct of art, and that they had the buildings of the time in which they lived always before their eyes. No such idea ever entered their heads as that sculpture and architecture would eventually dispense with each other's aid.

Matters are very different now; each art goes its own way and works entirely for itself—a fact which accounts for the utter want of harmony between the two. M. Viollet-le-Duc has left nothing more to be said upon this important point, and from him we borrow the following paragraphs in their entirety. They give some curious details, drawn from actual experience, of the existing connection between sculpture and architecture.

“When a monumental building is to be erected in which sculpture has to play an important part, the architect thinks out the design, gets it approved, and sets about carrying it out; and it is not long before he is overwhelmed with requests from sculptors anxious to take part in the work. Of course he refers them to the authorities, who undertake to give out the commissions all in good time. Meanwhile the building is gradually rising, and the architect is left to prepare the places to be filled by the work of the sculptor.

Whose statues are they to be? He does not know, neither does he very much care; they are to be two metres high, that is about all he has to do with it. Here he must have a bas-relief—but what is it to represent? That can be thought about some other time. Upon these acroteria or before these piers, a group or two—what shall they signify? Industry, Agriculture, Music, or Poetry?—there is plenty of time to decide the question. At last the day arrives for the commissions to be given out, and for the artists to get to work. Now is the moment of excitement. This artist has received an order for one statue. He is furious with his more fortunate *confrère* who has received an order for two. The latter in his turn abuses the authorities because they have commissioned a group from M. X—; and M. X— is enraged because his group is to be less favourably placed than the one ordered of M. N—. If the architect be in the good graces of the *Administration*, his friends among the sculptors will be well off. If, on the other hand, he be out of favour, even his advice will be dispensed with; it will merely be notified to him, by means of official letters, that MM. So-and-so, having been commissioned to execute certain statues, bas-reliefs, and groups, he is invited to put himself in communication with those gentlemen on the subject. In such distributions of patronage as these, the artists who are rejected or forgotten are not much more dissatisfied than the majority of the successful. One who, perhaps, is a member of the Institute, thinks it a scandal that he has only obtained an equal share with that given to a sculptor who is outside it; he considers himself insulted and clamours for redress. Another, who, possibly, has betrayed his possession of independent ideas to the authorities of the Academy or of the Government—no matter which—only obtains the execution of a few plaster medallions for the interior, or one of those busts which, in our public buildings, form the small change which they grant to young artists, or to those who, though eyed with little favour, must not be allowed absolutely to die of starvation. The secretary to the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* is fond of quoting Phidias; would that he would get him to tell us what

he thinks of our mode of proceeding in this matter of the decoration of our public edifices. Each sculptor sets to work under the condition that his sketch must be submitted to the architect; or, as is more usual, to a committee—whose approval must be obtained before anything more is done. Of course each artist makes his sketch in his own studio; he has his subject and the dimensions to which he has to conform. As for the style of the building, its situation, or its final effect, these are matters entering but little into his thoughts. If his work is to be well placed, he hopes to annihilate his colleagues and to produce something—startling! If his commission be only of secondary importance, he gets out a sketch neither very good nor very bad, simply to obtain his order to proceed. It may be a Muse or a Season, or anything else founded upon reminiscences of some antique statue. There are plenty of women among these official statues, but very few men! Glory, War, Faith, Charity, Peace, Physics, Astronomy—these are all feminine. And if we wish to symbolize Commerce, Spring, Summer, or Autumn, women too must fill these rôles. Two or three thousand years hence, when the grass is growing on the sites of our great buildings, and the learned antiquaries of the day make their excavations, they will certainly conclude, on finding so many female statues, that some law or religious dogma forbade us to make sculptural images of men; and as a matter of course long discourses will be written on the subject, to be read in the academies of the future—possibly to be crowned. But at last, the sketches are approved. We must remember that a sketch one-twentieth, or even one-tenth, of the proposed size, tells absolutely nothing as to what will be the artistic value when placed on or in a building. Little models in clay or plaster give nothing, even to the most skilful artist, beyond an idea of the composition. He cannot from them form any trustworthy opinion as to the effect which they may produce, when enlarged with the most strict fidelity to their leading features, and placed in their destined situations above or in front of their architectural setting. They are approved, however, and no more is to be said. The sculptors

retire again with their sketches, each to his own studio, and do their work separately."

"A few—I have known some myself, but they are the exception—like to consult with their *confrères*. Generally, they refrain from seeing each other, in case they should come under some influence which might take away from the individuality of their works. Those who have been intrusted with the execution of groups or of bas-reliefs, erect, in front of the spot to be embellished, the lean-to boarded huts which everyone must have noticed, and set their journeymen to work at a model, usually to a half-scale. You may believe that there is very little visiting between one hut and another, for the reason above stated. At last the boards are taken away, waggons bring the statues which are to stand free in their niches and upon their pedestals; and these works, which separately may contain much solid merit, in combination form a very queer assemblage. The statues, produced in the atelier, at a distance from their destination, now appear poor and attenuated; for the groups destroy the effect of everything near them, both sculpture and architecture. This bas-relief has too much shadow; that is nothing but a glaring spot of light. Each artist leads his friends up to his own work, and they look at nothing else, just as if they were still in his studio: but they soon get tired of it; the public does not understand much about it; and those critics who do not happen to be partisans, will have no easy task when they attempt to disentangle some ruling idea out of the whole business!"

"Too many of those upon whom the responsibility for the construction of our public buildings devolves—from the members of the Government to the executant artists, but more especially the former—think more of personal considerations than the question of art. The Institute, and those connected with it, must be propitiated: a patron must be carefully treated here; a delicate condition of things in another quarter must be tenderly manipulated. Everything must be arranged confidentially, and as many people satisfied as possible, so that personal importance may be enhanced and a crowd of suitors and grateful adherents collected;

men of talent must not be disgusted, but the mediocrities who form the majority, must also be rendered content. It would be but natural that an architect, commissioned with the construction of some public building of which statues are to form an important part, should also be charged with the choice and direction of the sculptors to be employed. But for such an arrangement to be possible, it would be necessary to have architects capable of giving directions, and sculptors willing to obey them: two conditions which at present are very far from being fulfilled. It must be acknowledged that there are but few architects who are in a condition to give a well-considered critical opinion upon a work of sculpture; very few could put upon paper their notions on such a subject, even supposing that they had any. If, however, they were allowed to select a single sculptor, and to intrust him with the execution of the whole of the statues, &c., for the decoration of a façade or of a hall, taking all its risks and perils—although the resulting works might not be in complete harmony with the architecture, they would, in all probability, be in accord among themselves. Such a mode of proceeding would take responsibility from the Government, and the happy and successful candidate would have enough to do in defending himself against all the hate and recrimination that would be levelled at him. As things are now—judicious architects avoid when they can, all provision for sculpture upon their buildings. Those who are bold enough or inexperienced enough to expect it to fill an important part in decoration, generally have to repent their temerity."

The picture which M. le Duc here draws, is not flattering to our vanity, but nevertheless it is felt to be a true one. After reading it, we understand why our monumental sculpture is steadily declining, while the other branch of the art is as steadily progressing. A persistent separation of architecture and sculpture must render the decadence more marked every day that passes, by taking away from our sculptors the habit of conforming to the special requirements of the case.

Monumental statues do not demand such minute detail as those

which are to be placed immediately under the eye of the spectator. The greater their scale, and the higher their situation, the more simple must be the treatment. Upon this point all nations that have had a true conception of monumental sculpture, are agreed.

The colossal statues cut from the living rock, which form the entrances of the great rock-cut temple at Abousambul, on the banks of the Nile, in Nubia, present only main leading characteristics, without any minute details; whilst the execution is of extreme delicacy, and the modelling at once exquisite and large. This simplicity of execution must also be observed in attitude and gesture. No approach to contortion or *tortillement*, should be allowed for a moment, especially in such a climate as ours. The dampness, the moss, and spottiness, the fogs and diffused lights, with which open-air statues have to contend in this country, destroy all proper force in any figures or groups placed upon a monument in involved or complicated attitudes or arrangements. At Athens, under the perennially clear sky of Greece, Phidias was able to make use of artistic means which, in France, would be quite without effect. Again, we must not forget that the Greeks availed themselves of another means to add relief and force to their sculpture, which we, for some unknown reason, seem to have entirely abandoned—the habitual use of colour. They painted the grounds of their metopes and tympana; the figures also—sufficiently prominent one would think, from the luminous and dazzling whiteness of their marble—had their effect heightened, and their lines accentuated by ornaments and accessories of paint, of gold and other metals. We are hardly able to realize the amount of thought which the ancient Greeks brought to bear on the question of fitting their sculptures for the places which they were destined to occupy. They considered thoroughly both the intensity and the direction of the light; knowing well that a work of sculpture looks very different in a direct light, and in one which is merely reflected. They did not believe, and therefore did nothing to uphold, the convenient

but inartistic theory of "absolute form" as opposed to the "accident of colour"—a notion invented to justify an absurd disregard of both colour and light.

The Greeks themselves, in contradiction to the doctrines and assertions of those who, while claiming to be their disciples and interpreters, were influenced by that strange fancy of the seventeenth century which placed Athens upon the banks of the Tiber, believed that light modified the appearance even of form; and that the execution of a statue or of a relief should be governed, to a certain extent, by the amount of light which it was destined to receive. Many interesting and convincing proofs that this was so are to be found in the Parthenon. In the case of the friezes under the colonnades, which could only be lighted by reflection, and would be seen from below and from some little distance—the surfaces which would catch the light so as to show the shape, are often inclined or depressed in a way totally different from that which absolutely truthful modelling would demand. The caryatides of the Pandrosium, which are in full light, are so treated that the parts which accentuate their pose, present large, plain, and, therefore, very luminous surfaces; while those which require to be subdued, are so fully charged with detail as to keep them in comparative shadow, from whatever point the light may chance to come. The same remarks would apply to the fragments of the small Temple to the Wingless Victory, which also was exposed to the open sunlight.

It is obvious that, seeing what precautions the Greeks thought it necessary to take to insure the proper effect to their monumental sculpture—we, who live in so infinitely less favourable atmospheric conditions, are not only unable to dispense with similar precautions, but must employ them in increased numbers and with augmented care, if we are only to equal the results which they obtained.

However, we are now following the very opposite course. That which our Academies know so little about, was thoroughly understood by those poor "master masons" and modest "carvers of



images," whom the privileged directors of our modern taste and art regard with so great disdain. Our sculptors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries knew perfectly well that coloured backgrounds were not sufficient to afford the requisite relief to their figures, if those figures had not received qualities enabling them of themselves to stand out properly; or if they had omitted to give to the background, by means of honeycomb work or otherwise, an individuality of its own. Therefore, whenever it was possible they covered the unoccupied surfaces of the groundwork with various kinds of this work, so as to throw it into shadow, and give the figures increased relief.

From the writings of M. Viollet-le-Duc, who has spent most of his life in the study of our buildings of the Middle Ages, and has brought to that study a singularly sagacious and penetrating spirit of analysis, we take the following remarks:—

"Those old artists saw that any statue isolated in front of an extensive plain wall, in such a climate as ours, soon put on, in consequence of the wet, a much more sombre colouring than that of the wall itself; and thus, instead of standing out as a point of light upon it, became a dark and disagreeable spot. They very seldom, therefore, put statues in such a position; and, in cases where it could not be avoided, they were careful to surround them with niche, canopy, and corbel, so as to receive both shelter from the weather, and the colour and shadow necessary to make them stand in clear relief. It is possible to conceive that statues, placed along a bare wall and deprived of anything to provide them with a shaded background, might have some effect, because the shadow which they themselves would throw on the wall would afford some little relief. But what effectiveness could anyone hope to obtain by placing solitary figures in front of a wall pierced with arches, for instance? Such statues—spotted with the damp, having no plain surface upon which to throw their shadows, intersected here by a pier, there by void—would look, when seen in perspective, like a confused mass, disagreeable and painful to the eye. This unhappy result is only too evident on the interior façades of

the new buildings of the Louvre, over the portico ; and we may be sure that the architecture would gain by being deprived of a decoration as inappropriate as it is costly. The execution, at least, of figures to be placed in such a situation should have been simple in the extreme, that they might thus present large plain surfaces to the light. But the artists to whom they were intrusted, have not considered it necessary to submit to such conditions ; and the architect, preoccupied with other cares, has not thought fit to impose them."

It is not, then, enough to secure success to possess a platonic admiration for antiquity, nor even talent. Sculpture, in its relation to architecture, must take account of a great number of conditions which can only be disregarded under pain of certain failure ; and until it resigns itself to an absolutely necessary state of subordination, it will never in this relation take its proper place among the arts of our time.

## CHAPTER IV.

## PAINTING.

§ 1. *Drawing and colour—Colour and chiaro-scuro—“Value.”*

THE first difference to strike us when we compare a picture with a statue or work of architecture, is the fundamental dissimilarity between their respective processes. The lines and forms which go to make up the work of the sculptor or architect, are at once both visible and tangible; while painting, on the contrary, only addresses itself to the eye—its forms have no more than a conventional existence. Reliefs and hollows in a picture are obtained upon an absolutely plain surface by an artifice which combines the effects of light and shade, in such a way as to give the sensation of form; and at the same time, the arrangement of lines and proportions is so modified as to produce the effect of perspective.

Perspective and colour: these are the two essential constituents of painting. Colour distinguishes one object from another; perspective puts each in its proper place.

Drawing itself is nothing but the immediate result of the differences of colour.<sup>1</sup> It is the ideal line which bounds coloured

<sup>1</sup> “Drawing is to the art of painting what time is to that of music. What would time be without sound? Emptiness, nothingness. Time is but the frame of sound, as drawing is that of colour. . . . .”

“It is said of Prudhon that, unhappily, he was unable to draw. It is true that in this respect he was excelled by his rivals. But if his aim and procedure were very different, his achievements were very preferable to theirs. While David and his followers were content to draw exterior features, under the impression that when they had mastered the geometric lines bounding the figure, they had indi-

surfaces, and makes them stand clearly out from the sky or from neighbouring surfaces.

Relief, which is here called modelling, is also indicated by colour. It defines by variations in its strength and brilliancy, the portions which project towards or retire from the eye. The lines which bound such projections are just as real as those of contour.

Again, we know that the light of the sun is white. Absence of light produces black. White light, however, is a complex matter. Its decomposition results in a certain number of fundamental colours, which, by various combinations, are able to produce all the others. All colours, then, are virtually contained in white, which is the colour of light. The colours of different substances are regulated by their chemical composition, *i.e.*, by their power to absorb or reflect certain luminous rays. Those which are quite impermeable to light, repel it altogether: such substances appear quite white to us. Objects which absorb all the rays and reflect none, appear black; while, between these two extremes, must be placed the innumerable multitude of those which possess modified powers of absorption—modifications which not only produce the sensations of the various colours, strictly speaking, but also of all their countless shades. It must also be understood that colours are never isolated. To those which result from the direct impact of the sun's rays, must be added the numerous re-

lated its internal character, he, on the other hand, began with great masses of light and shade, the direct modelling of forms." (Thoré, *Salon de 1846.*)

In his *Salon of 1847* he returns to the question. "Chassériau," he says, "made use of M. Ingres' mode of proceeding after he had completed the *internal* modelling of his figures; while the proper system consists in the indication by one geometric line of external shape—such line to be afterwards filled up with the just proportions of light and dark colour. Chassériau, however, began by defining the form of his figures and objects by their modifications of colour and illumination; and when he had completed this operation, he marked their contours by lines of bistre drawn with no uncertain hand."

In his *Salon of 1866* he writes again: "True painters do not isolate their figures by linear contours, after the manner of the more pretentious academic draughtsmen. They define their forms and model their internal reliefs by the preservation of just gradations of colour and light."

reflections communicated by neighbouring and differently coloured objects. The intensity of these reflections, again, is, governed by the chemical nature and the arrangement of the surfaces which receive them. From this it will be perceived that we possess an absolutely inexhaustible source of distinct sensations, the limits of which can never be determined. We have already had occasion to observe that microscopic analysis has enabled us to distinguish about three thousand separate fibres in the auditory nerve; a fact which entitles us to believe that an appropriate course of training would render the human ear capable of seizing musical combinations infinitely more complicated and more numerous than those which have been as yet offered to it. The study of the phenomena belonging to the organs of sight, has not as yet been carried to an equal point of development; but still we know enough to justify us in drawing somewhat similar conclusions.

Strictly speaking, then, we might say that in painting there is nothing but colour. We might suppress all the distinctions more apparent than real, between light, colour, drawing, contour, modelling, and such things. But we should not gain much by doing so. It is more convenient to restrict ourselves to the terms in ordinary use, on the one condition that their real signification must be thoroughly understood.

Colour, in painting, is looked at from two points of view. On the one side we have *chiaroscuro*; on the other colour, properly speaking. By colour is meant the management of tints other than black and white; by *chiaroscuro*, the special composition of light and shadow.

Our first concern is with the latter.

The expression *chiaroscuro*, or *claire-obscur*, is not a very definite one. It is often used to express, in a special way, the unusual use of light and shade made by a few great masters—Rembrandt for instance. For their benefit the somewhat fantastic term of *chiaroscuro* was invented. Eugène Fromentin says:<sup>1</sup>—

“To surround, to envelope all, even the sun itself, in a shadow

<sup>1</sup> *Les Maîtres d'Autrefois*, p. 254.

bath; to manage the great luminary so as to make it seem more distant and more brilliant; to surround its central light by graduated waves of shade, which must be carried lightly here, in darkling masses there, preserving transparency through the half shadows into the deepest obscurity, and giving even to the deepest colours sufficient permeability to prevent them from becoming black,—such are the first conditions, such are some of the difficulties of this special kind of art. We need not say that if any man has excelled in it, that man was Rembrandt. He invented nothing, but he perfected everything which he touched, and the process, of which he made better and more frequent use than any other man did, still bears his name. It is easy to foresee the consequences of such a way of looking at, of feeling, and of rendering nature and life. They put on a peculiar appearance. Outlines become weakened and gradually vanish. Colour loses its force. Modelling, no longer confined within a rigid contour, becomes more uncertain in its profile, more undulating in its surfaces; and, when carried out by a skilful and sincere hand, displays an extreme vivacity and reality, because it contains a thousand little skilful artifices, which give it a kind of double life—both that which comes from the facts of nature represented, and that which springs from the lively emotions of the artist. In a word, there is a peculiar method of so managing the canvas, or panel, as to make it convey at one and the same time ideas of distant space, of long perspective, and of close proximity; in fact, to preserve the realities of nature, whilst yet overwhelming them in warmth of imagination. This method or power is an art—the art of *chiaroscuro*.”

But, besides this special signification of the word, it has another, more usual and more correct. *Chiaroscuro* means simply the employment of light and shade, the arrangement of lights and shadows; in fact, the art of relieving a picture.

This art is one of the most important points in painting.

To begin with—to it do we owe the power of modelling, which, indeed, we might almost say is inseparable from it. Modelling consists essentially in the indication of relief, in the giving of salience

to the different parts of an object, which can only be marked by the varying amount of light thrown upon the different surfaces in view. Thus it happens that it is very difficult to model anything in the open air. The gradations become so delicate and slight, that only a most practised eye can perceive them, and it necessitates a rare knowledge of "values" to carry them out. Without such skill and knowledge any brilliantly-illuminated surface will be made to seem absolutely flat.

Again, it is by variation in the amount of light and shade that the painter makes his figures stand out, the one from the other. By it, too, added to perspective, he indicates his various planes; that is, after having modelled each of his figures and objects, the proper employment of *chiaroscuro* models his picture as a whole. To do this well is one of the conditions of success. It would be no use to give to each part of a body its proper degree of relief, if the separate reliefs were not kept in due relation to each other. A painting should be looked upon as forming an harmonious whole, an *ensemble* of parts duly bound together, possessing a well-determined centre of illumination; which latter should generally, at least in historical pictures, coincide with the centre of interest. As the light travels from this centre it gradually loses its brilliancy, giving rise to various reflexes till it finally falls upon the most distant figures, whose remoteness is partly indicated by its diminished lustre. All this is a part of the law of composition; a part, too, which the painter cannot neglect without giving rise to a state of confusion which is eminently disagreeable, even in those pictures in which the various details are modelled with the most practised skill. It would seem that this method of utilising light and shade was unknown to the ancients. They were reduced to an arrangement of their personages in a kind of echelon, one behind the other; as may be seen in their bas-reliefs, in representations of cavalry, or of cities as viewed from neighbouring heights.

Thanks to *chiaroscuro*, the painter has an advantage over the sculptor and architect, in that he is not obliged to modify his

ideas by the variations of natural light and shade. He is master of the sun, as it were; and therefore is able so to arrange the scenes that he wishes to represent, as to expose the different parts to a more or less intense light, in accordance with his notion of how they should appear in the picture. The chief thing is to choose the focus of light judiciously, and, once this is done, to follow inexorably the laws of optics. The effect of a statue or of a building depends largely upon conditions of light which are not only beyond the control of the artist, but which change continually with the seasons of the year and the hours of the day. The painter, on the other hand, chooses his own moment—that in which the light seems most fitting for his purpose—and fixes it unchangeably on his canvas. Not that he is indifferent whether the external light strike his canvas from right or from left, from above or from below; but the distribution of *chiaroscuro* which his picture displays, which was chosen by himself, is enough to indicate the exact angle from which day-light should be thrown on it by those who wish to view it favourably. The possession of this power of indication is to a painter a most important advantage.

This question of the employment of *chiaroscuro*—simple enough in itself, at least in theory, when confined to the class of works which the English include under the term “black and white”—becomes singularly complicated in painting by the intermingling of the principles of colour with those of relief.

We have said that coloured objects derive their actual tint from the power to absorb certain rays and to reject others. A red fabric, for instance, absorbs all rays but red ones, which it rejects. But it does not absorb them so much as to put a total end to their existence. In regard to this point there is one fact which must by no means be neglected, if we wish to establish harmony between the colour-principle and *chiaroscuro*. A satin fabric and one of velvet dipped in the same dye, will not produce the same effect in a picture, neither by their own general tint, nor by those borrowed by reflection from neighbouring colours. And this is not all: colours in themselves, leaving out of account all ques-



tion of material, vary much in their affinity both to white light and to shade. It is this affinity which is spoken of in the technical language of painting as "value." A colour note, or tone, may be considered from two points of view; from that of its intensity or tint, or from its affinity to white light, or value.

This is one of the most delicate points in the management of light and shade. It is easy enough to see, for instance, that bright yellow has more value than violet; but such discernment becomes infinitely more difficult when we have to deal with the broken and subdued colours more commonly employed by painters. Complications sometimes arise which baffle the most subtle analysis. Can it be considered waste of time to take so much trouble to understand distinctions which are, in truth, almost imperceptible? Of course the inquiry would have but slight importance for the general public; yet any violation of these subtle and almost indemonstrable laws, is sufficient to deprive a picture of part of its charm and to distress the delicate eye of a true connoisseur. The connoisseur probably might not be able to lay his finger upon the exact cause of his discomfort, but it would be not the less real. The eye, like the ear, is the seat of the most strangely delicate refinements. When we reflect that to give pain to a practised ear, it is enough to deprive a note of a very few of the many million vibrations per second which go to make up its proper sound, we can feel no surprise that the eye should be an equal sufferer by a very small mistake in the value of a colour note. It is obvious, however, that the ear of the musician does not count the 4752 vibrations of which the high *ré* of the piccolo is composed; nevertheless when the total is not correct, the result is suffering sufficient to destroy the pleasure of a whole performance. The same thing exactly takes place in painting, although we do not understand its laws with equal accuracy. But our scientific ignorance does not affect the sensibility of our organs, although it may embarrass the critic when he endeavours to give reasons for the shortcomings of which he is conscious.

### § 2. *Complementary Colours.*

Another question affecting the art of painting, which only in modern times has received a satisfactory solution, is the question of the complementary colours.

Every painter is aware that a colour is never absolutely self-contained, but is always more or less modified by its neighbour or neighbours. In this fact we find a fertile source of trouble to the young painter. A tint mixed on the palette with the greatest care becomes, on transference to the canvas, quite unfitted for its intended place; not only from the point of view of value, which is affected by conditions of relief, but even from that of its colour, which may seem totally changed. Tasters know that the flavour of a wine may be very considerably modified by the nature of the food taken immediately beforehand. An analogous transformation takes place in painting. Colours may be either brightened or subdued by neighbourhood to others.

Until quite recent times, painters, in search of harmony, were compelled to depend either on experiments or personal experience. In 1812, for the first time, Charles Bourgeois having made a study of the phenomena, gave an explanation to the world, which has since been taken up and completed by M. Chevreul in his book upon the laws which govern simultaneous contrasts of colour.<sup>1</sup>

We will endeavour to present it in a few words :—The prism decomposes the white light of the sun into six colours—yellow, red, blue, violet, green and orange. The three first are called the primitive colours, because it is impossible to obtain any one of them by any mixture whatever. The three last are called composite or secondary, because violet can be produced by the mixture of red and blue, green by that of yellow and blue, and orange by red and yellow. In the intervals between these colours come the infinite series of intermediary shades.

The following table, arranged by M. Helmholtz, gives the

<sup>1</sup> *De la Loi du Contraste simultané des Couleurs et de ses Applications*, by M. E. Chevreul.

	Violet.	Indigo.	Pure Blue (Cyanique).	(Greenish Blue.	Green.	Yellow Green.	Yellow.
Red.	Purple.	Dark Rose.	Whitish Rose.	White.	Whitish Yellow.	Golden Yellow.	Orange.
Orange.	Dark Rose.	Whitish Rose.	White.	Whitish Yellow.	Yellow.	Yellow.	
Yellow.	Whitish Rose.	White.	Whitish (Green.	Whitish Green.	Yellow Green.		
Yellow Green.	White.	Whitish Green.	Green.				
Green.	Whitish Blue.	Blue of Water or Sky Blue.	Greenish Blue.				
Greenish Blue.	Blue of Water or Sky Blue.	Ditto.					
Pure Blue (Cyanique).	Indigo.						

results of the various mixtures of the prismatic colours. The colours used in combination will be found in the first vertical column and in the first horizontal one ; the colour at the intersection being the result of the mixture in each case, as in the table of Pythagoras.

But this table, whilst giving the scientific result of the mixture of the prismatic colours, does not furnish accurate information for painters. These obtain their tints by the mixture of coloured substances formed of small solid particles, which absorb part of the luminous rays—the result being a certain annihilation of light ; and mixed powders, especially when they are somewhat coarse in quality, almost always give darker tints than those which pure science would demand. Cinnabar, for instance, and ultramarine, give a grizzly black, in which very little violet is to be found. The mixture of blue and yellow, from which painters obtain green, will from the two prismatic colours simply produce white.

By the table we see that the complementary colours—that is, those which, when united, produce white—are, 1st, red and greenish blue ; 2nd, orange and pure blue ; 3rd, yellow and indigo ; 4th, yellow-green and violet. Prismatic green has no simple complementary : its complementary is purple, a compound of red and violet.

But these theories are of little use to painters as aids to the preparation of tints, because the coloured powders which they employ are unfitted for their application. They are however a great help to the comprehension of the effects resulting from the juxtaposition of different colours. Whenever complementary colours are placed side by side, they enhance each other's brilliancy. Yellow-green attains its maximum of intensity when placed next violet, orange when bounded by pure blue, yellow when bounded by indigo ; moreover violet appears more violet, and blue more blue, when in immediate contact with yellow and orange.

For a similar reason, when non-complementary colours are brought together, they diminish each other's beauty and effect : too lively a red is lowered by the neighbourhood of blue ; violet

in contact with yellow becomes almost rose. Let the painter who wants to arrive at some such result, cast his eye upon M. Helmholtz's table, instead of attempting to subdue over-bright tints in a hap-hazard fashion.

We have stated the facts as established by scientific experiment: what is their explanation? This we are obliged to guess more or less; but observation fortunately has collected a few data which may help to start us upon the right road.

In his *Conversations de Goethe*, Eckermann relates that one day in 1829, while they were together looking at some crocuses of a very intense yellow, they both noticed that the earth around them seemed all at once to be covered with violet spots. Monge, in his *Géométrie descriptive*, mentions a similar circumstance:—"Suppose," he says, "that we are in an apartment exposed to the direct rays of the sun, in which the windows are protected by red curtains. Let us make an opening in these curtains of three or four millimetres in diameter, and receive the rays which will stream through it upon a white sheet of paper; it will be found that upon the paper these rays have formed a green spot. If the curtains were green the spot would be red."

Another fact, noticed by M. Ch. Blanc: Eugène Delacroix was occupied one day in working upon a yellow drapery, and was in despair because he could not give it the brilliancy which he desired. At last he said to M. Blanc, "How did Rubens and Veronese manage to get their yellow so beautiful and brilliant? . . ." He determined to go to the Louvre to find out, and sent for a *voiture*. It was in 1830, and in those days many of the Parisian cabriolets were painted canary-yellow: one of these cabriolets was brought to the door. Delacroix sallied out, but just as he was mounting the yellow vehicle he stopped short, noticing, to his great surprise, that the shadow cast by it was violet. He at once discharged the coachman and returned to his studio rejoicing, to put in practice the law which he had just discovered—that the shadows of an object always display more or less of its complementary colour; a fact which becomes more per-

ceptible when the sunlight is not over strong. Our eyes, indeed, as Goethe says, have some power of their own to see complementary colour.

M. Chevreul, in his explanation of the law of complementary colours, remarks that when a canvas is partly covered with colour, the unoccupied space at once assumes that colour's complementary. A red circle becomes surrounded with a pale halo of green, brightest where the colours touch; an orange circle is surrounded with a blue halo; a yellow one with a violet halo, and *vice versa*.

For this reason—leaving reflections and the modifications of the atmosphere out of account—the discords of colour are usually less violent in nature than in art.

Whence come these halos and this seeming presence of non-existent colours? Obviously from our eye. Even though it does not decompose colour in the same way as the ear decomposes sounds and analyses their harmonies, still we find in the synthetic impressions of our sight something which resembles an effort at analysis. An English savant, Thomas Young, has even asserted that a luminous impression is always divided into three parts; that the eye possesses three classes of nervous fibres—the first sensitive to red, the second to green, the third to violet. We certainly are quite unconscious of any such division, says M. Langel,<sup>1</sup> but the ordinary ear is also unconscious of the resolution of a sound into harmonies. No anatomical confirmation of Young's opinions has yet been discovered—at least so far as men are concerned—but it appears that a German anatomist, Max Schultz, has succeeded in tracing upon the retinas of certain birds and reptiles, fibres, some with red, and some with green terminations.

Several of the graver maladies of the eye have been mentioned as tending to support the theory of Young. It sometimes happens, for instance, that a person is quite insensible to red without losing any of his sensibility to green, yellow and blue.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Optique et les Arts*, page 37, Library of Contemporary Philosophy.

From this it would seem that one class of nerve fibres may be paralysed, while the others retain their normal powers.

The study of these questions is being carried on indefatigably. We have already known for some time that, in a normal state, all the different parts of our visual field are not equally fitted to perceive all colours. That which makes the most extensive impression upon our retina is blue, then comes yellow, then orange, red, green. Violet is only perceived upon a very restricted space around that point upon which the sight is fixed.

M. Landolt has recently made some very interesting observations relating to this subject, which have clearly established the order of succession which we have just laid down. At the same time he has shown that the visual field of each colour becomes larger as its luminous intensity increases.

M. Charcot has remarked that with some kinds of invalids—notably with women subject to hysteria—there are difficulties in perceiving colours which go far to confirm the laws of which we have spoken. Such difficulties of perception are not permanent; but, on the return of the sufferer to health, the different colours reappear in the inverse order of their disappearance.

The same observer states that in certain maladies the sensation of red is preserved when that of yellow, or even of blue, has become quite extinct. We have here, then, two separate types in the distribution of colours upon the field of vision; each type, however, being constant in one individual.

We must add that, as the malady becomes still more intense, all sensibility to colour disappears, and the patient sees nature in black and white, like a picture in monotone or a sepia drawing.

M. Galezowski has made some observations upon certain facts which have considerable analogy to those of which we have just been speaking. There are some forms of illness which render the sufferer incapable of perceiving colour at a little distance. When tinted papers are gradually brought nearer to the eye he will suddenly become sensible of their colour. In the case noted by the learned oculist it was at a distance of only from 20 to 30

centimetres from the eye that the perception of colour began ; blue being always the first to appear and violet the last. In some diseases of the nervous system, other than hysteria, M. Galezowski has ascertained that the first colours to vanish are green and red.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. Bert has lately laid before the *Académie des Sciences* an account of two series of observations, of which we give the résumé printed in the scientific column of the *République Française*, of the 29th January, 1878.

“ If we observe, from some little distance, the green light resulting from the intermixture of blue and yellow rays—such, for example, as that given by the lamps of a Paris omnibus—we perceive that its colour increases in blueness as its distance becomes greater, and *vice versa*. If the omnibus be approaching the observer, a moment will arrive when, with a sort of wrench, the real colour becomes suddenly apparent. This result is not however absolutely constant : certain conditions seem to be necessary, of which the most important is the presence of a given amount of watery vapour in the air. It will then be readily perceived that, of the two colours which compose the green light, blue is the more persistent.

“ M. Bert seems to have ascertained from other and less careful observations, that, in the case of the colour violet, when seen from a distance, the red dominates over the blue ; again, orange gradually sinks into red. From all this it would seem that the most persistent of colours is red, after which comes blue, and, last of the three, yellow.

“ We know that there are some painters, and by no means mediocre ones, who make some favourite colour predominate in their works even to exaggeration : with one it is yellow ; with another violet, &c. It is commonly said of them, that they only see yellow or violet. This favourite colour sometimes varies with the succeeding epochs in the life of one and the same painter : so Decamps painted everything lilac in the later years of his life, until people were driven to look upon it as the consequence of some physical modification in the sensory apparatus of his eyes.

“ In order to investigate the bearings of this interesting fact upon physiology and upon the history of art, M. Paul Bert painted a number of coloured spots, in plain tints, upon a blank canvas. He then got one of his friends, a painter by profession, to copy these spots. But first it was arranged, not only that he should use spectacles of various colours, but as an additional precaution, the colours were arranged upon the palette by a strange hand, so that the painter, not having his usual arrangement before him, was obliged to examine carefully the composition of the tints which he had to use for his copy.

“ This experiment confirmed the *à priori* conclusions. The painter seeing through the same glasses both the spots to be copied and the colours upon his palette, committed the same error in his appreciation of the former and his mixture of the latter. Consequently, he was not satisfied with his work until it seemed to be really similar to his model. Looking through the coloured glasses had no other effect than to increase the difficulty of the imitation.



Whatever theories may be deduced from all these observations, and others that have still to be made, it is certain that the aureole of which M. Chevreul speaks does exist; and that, if we place a grey drawing successively upon white, black, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet mounts, our eye perceives eight different greys, caused by the projection over the drawing, of the colours complementary to those of its eight successive mounts. Anyone who was unaware of the existence of this phenomenon, would certainly, when seeing the drawing upon its various mounts, take it to be really different each time; but it would suffice, to dispel any

“Two exceptions, however, must be made to the latter statement. Suppose the colour of the glasses to be green. If with them the painter examine the various shades of green, he will not appreciate them with his habitual justice; and this is easily to be understood, for they all seem to be more or less bathed in that colour, so that the green tones in the copy suffer. The error, however, becomes still more marked in the case of red. The various shades of this colour, which is the complementary of green, have a tendency to black when looked at through a green light; as a consequence, the compound tints in which red predominates become embrowned, lowered in tone, whilst their delicate gradations escape comprehension.

“In the case of blue spectacles, it is the shades of blue, and, still more, of orange which suffer. To speak generally—the mistakes in the copy mostly arise when the various shades of the same colour as the spectacles, and in a still greater degree, of its complementary, are in question.

“If, then, we suppose the case of a painter who really sees things with a violet tint either by his natural disposition or by some alteration in his visual organs, it is not, as is generally believed, by a predominance of violet that his infirmity is recognized, but by insufficient variety and delicacy in the shades of violet and of yellow.

“If he saw a predominance of red and had to represent a nude figure in a landscape, there would be a disagreeable monotony in his flesh tints, in the gradations of red which the painter would be unable to distinguish exactly, and, above all, in the various shades of green in the landscape.

“We may remark in passing that there is much interest in watching a painter who is copying either nature or a picture after he has made use of a quantity of santonine, a substance which makes everything put on a violet tinge.

“It is certain, however, that the exaggerated employment of favourite colours by particular painters, is caused not so much by any change in the organs of sight as by reasons of an intellectual kind. The experiments which we have just described show, moreover, how interesting an examination of pictures from this new point of view would be. If there be some who err in their representations of the two classes of tints derived from the complementary colours, we can only attribute such errors in execution to some modification of the organ of sight.”

such belief, to cover the mounts with a piece of white paper cut to fit the drawing, when the changed appearance would instantly disappear.

M. Helmholtz attributes this result to the weakness of the retina, which very easily becomes fatigued. It has only to receive the colour red for a short time to become less sensible of its rays, whereas its sensibility to green rays will be in no way lessened. It soon begins to see green spontaneously, because the total impression to which it is accustomed is white light; and naturally when it loses one of the elements of that light, it supplies it by an exercise of a habit which has become a necessity.

In this we see a real act of reconstitution, forcibly indicating the existence of an antecedent analysis, which is none the less real because unconscious. From this spontaneous reconstitution spring many consequences which afford an explanation of what we have already said.

First :—When two colours placed in juxtaposition are not complementary, the complementary halos which they cause to be visible around them, affect and falsify both colours at once. We can easily understand what inharmonious results may spring from such transformations when they are neither foreseen nor desired, because they may operate in direct contradiction to the wishes of the artist.

Secondly :—When the two colours in juxtaposition are complementary, the halo which surrounds them is made up of the same colours, and, as it naturally adds its own intensity to theirs, it increases their brilliancy to a maximum. This enhanced effect may also be explained in a different way. If it be true that the spontaneous appearance of the complementary aureole is due to fatigue of the retina, produced by the isolation of primary colours—we may be permitted to believe that the juxtaposition of complementary colours directly augments the power of the eye, by suppressing the cause of fatigue, and so procuring for it a more durable and more complete enjoyment.

It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that it is necessary

to make only such combinations as red with blue-green, orange with pure blue, yellow with indigo blue, or yellow-green with violet. It is enough that the complementary aureole be sufficiently and effectually challenged by the addition of the proper tint. Hence arise simultaneous contrasts of all kinds, which are striking in proportion to their freedom from common elements. We may remark that the pictures which are most admired for their colour, are those which contain the boldest contrasts carried out in the most facile and most simple manner. Even the crudest and most glaring colours can be harmonized to a considerable extent, by the one precaution of attending carefully to their transitions.

The reciprocal influence of colours produces, in application, some very remarkable effects. M. Ch. Blanc relates that, on one occasion of a visit to the Palais du Luxembourg, he was much struck with the marvellous effect obtained by Eugène Delacroix in the painting of the central dome. As this cupola is without a proper supply of light, the artist was reduced to overcome its obscurity and illumine the concave surface upon which his work was to be done, simply by the artificial brilliancy obtained from the management and play of his colours. Among the figures which compose the decoration, M. Blanc particularly noticed one semi-nude woman, seated under the shade of trees, whose carnations preserved, even in this double shadow, the most delicate, transparent, and pleasing tones. While he was lost in admiration of the rosy flesh-tints, a painter who had been a friend of Delacroix and had seen him at work upon this cupola, said to him with a smile, "You would be rather surprised if you knew what colours were used to produce the rosy carnations whose effect entrances you. If you saw the tints separately they would seem to you as dull and wan, *Dieu me pardonne*, as a street fog." Delacroix, impelled by his singular and intuitive knowledge of the simultaneous effects of different colours, had not hesitated to work over the naked torso of this female figure with hatchings of decided green; which, when modified and transformed by the proximity of its

complementary—rose—formed a fresh and broken tint only to be appreciated at a proper distance.

This system of producing a third colour by the simple juxtaposition of two tints is called, by painters, an optical mixture. It is an expedient of the very greatest utility, because, by having recourse to it, an artist can give the impression of a colour which does not exist upon his palette. Delacroix made continual use of it; and this is why his pictures are the despair of copyists, who always attempt to place directly upon their canvas the colours which they fancy they see upon his. But the laws of this optical arrangement are still but very slightly understood; and a painter who is without the marvellous natural gifts and patient power of observation of Delacroix, will very often arrive at unexpected results in the endeavour to make use of it. We cannot here enter into the infinity of technical details. We have said enough to convince painters that colour does not exist internally in colour itself, but that it is the result of a combination of physical, chemical, and physiologic connections, whose laws are, as yet, very far from being fully explored. In the present state of science, however, the most important part of the art of colouring depends upon the aptitude, instinct, habits, surroundings, and personal caprices and intuitions of the artists.

Fromentin, who has spent much time over questions relating to colour, has said that, when reduced to its simplest terms, the problem might be stated thus: "First, to choose colours beautiful in themselves; secondly, to arrange them into appropriate, scientific, and beautiful combinations." It seems to us that the truth would be expressed more accurately by the transposition of these terms. The arrangement and juxtaposition of colours would seem to have an importance equal to, if not greater than, the choice of each separately. Such was the opinion of Delacroix, who, more than anyone else, has a right to an opinion on the subject.

§ 3. *Combination and harmony of colour—Expression by colour and relief.*

We have seen how great care on the part of a painter the composition of colour demands. The arrangement of subject, the disposition of objects and figures, the progressive developments of relief (or light) which give modelling and depth to a picture considered as a whole and complete creation—all these are of an importance scarcely to be exaggerated. But the combination and arrangement of values (*valeurs*)—as I shall call the scheme of colour—are not less essential.

It may be looked upon from two different points of view. From the point of view of the theme, or subject, it has, for its object, the addition of a fresh meaning to the general impression of the work; a meaning the force of which may even transform the logical signification of an action. We have seen an instance of this in the case of Rubens. From the point of view of the eye, its effect is to bind together into intimate relation, to direct into one channel, all the impressions which spring from colour. We have already seen that light and shade may be so distributed that the whole picture shall appear a single mass; having its reliefs and its hollows, all in such gradation that it will seem easy to grasp the whole series of projections and retirements of its guiding line, from its extremities to its central and salient point, and from that again to its extremities.

A similar unity obtains in everything which belongs to the colour of a picture. All its parts must be combined by well understood management of tints, reflexes, and transitions. To delight the eye these must be fused into one progressive, concordant, and well graduated impression, that will constitute unity, or, if you prefer the word, harmony of colouring. "Keeping" is the studio term for the pictorial result.

For the sake of illustration we might compare, from this point of view, two very different works by one artist, the picture of the *Fight between the Romans and Sabines*, and the admirable portrait

of *Mme. Récamier*, both by L. David. In the former, the linear composition is logically and academically conceived ; but here it ends—the work of composition is carried no further. The personages, historically connected, indeed, by the parts which they played in one common action, remain otherwise perfectly isolated in their individual proceedings. Romulus and Tatius, concerned only about their own attitudes, do not seem even to dream that they have anything else to think about. The mothers with their children are equally indifferent to what is passing around them, and even to their infants themselves. They are all simply academy models, academically drawn and posed, who find themselves brought together by the chances of history and the freaks of the painter, but who are not the less on that account isolated in reality.

This deficiency of *ensemble* in the action is quite as striking in the scheme of colour. Each figure is coloured, as it is drawn, for itself alone, without regard for its companions. The result is that neither in action nor in colour can the picture be called a composition in the true sense of the word ; it is a mere juxtaposition, without unity either for eye or intellect. The same may be said of its *chiaroscuro*, which is as conspicuous by its absence as the other qualities which go to make up a picture. For a picture it is not ; it is but a bas-relief.

The *Portrait of Mme. Récamier*, on the other hand, is an admirable example of this desirable unity. The background is in perfect harmony with the flesh tints and the colours of the drapery. Each part of the picture combines in a perfect harmony which makes the whole unique among the works of its author. None of the other portraits by L. David, notwithstanding their incontestable superiority over his historical pieces, can sustain a comparison with this one. It is true that it was never finished ; and how can we be sure that the painter, if he had carried it to completion, would not have taken away that which now constitutes its principal charm ?

Though this question of *enveloppe* (or “keeping”) obtains so little consideration from the public, we should not on that account

conclude that they are insensible to its existence. Although there is on their part no question of a minute analysis of impressions, there is no doubt that the masterly exercise of this unity has great influence with them. Among the more or less conscious sensations which combine to form their opinions, it is a latent but an efficacious factor. It attracts by a secret charm, which analysis might refer indeed to other and even absurd causes, but which is not the less real on that account. That this should be so, is quite legitimate, and quite in harmony with the principles of *Æsthetic* pleasure. It is therefore very important from an artistic point of view, that this element of attraction should not be lost sight of; especially as it is no more and no less than the application, to the completed picture, of the general laws which govern the employment and mutual relations of colours.

As for precise rules, we need not here consider them.

Nothing is more vague and difficult to be defined than the harmony of the colourist.

While the eye experiences intense pleasure in regarding the contrasts of the complementary colours which exalt its visual power, it obtains almost equal enjoyment from the softness and sweet uncertainty resulting from the skilful juxtaposition of very similar tones. It never tires of the prismatic colours of Rubens, nor yet do the varied greys of Velasquez disgust it. Again, some say that the total impression should be such as we feel before the works of Paul Veronese, almost white. After looking at his pictures for hours at a time, the eye carries away the sensation of that white light which brings all its visual power into play equally, and so preserves an equilibrium, to the exclusion of all sense of fatigue.

This, however, is not all. Everyone seems to be agreed upon the point. A painter, to deserve the name of a colourist, must be able, as Fromentin has said, to preserve to every colour of his scale—whether it be high or low in tone, broken or the reverse, compound or simple—its just value, its full power, and its proper

place ; and so preserve it everywhere and always, in shadow and half tint as much as in high light. We distinguish masters and schools by the measure of their success in this. Take any painter you please ; examine his local tones, see what they become in the high lights, and whether they are carried fairly into half-tint and into deepest shadow—you will then be able to say with certainty whether or not the picture is the work of a true colourist ; you will know to what epoch, to what country, and to what school it belongs.

In connection with this subject, there exists, among technical terms, a formula which we may here conveniently notice. Whenever any colour undergoes all the changes of light and shadow without losing any of its constituent qualities, it is said that light and shadow are of the same family ; this means, they must both preserve, under all circumstances, the most easily grasped relationship with the local tones. The ways of using colour are very various indeed. From Rubens to Giorgione, from Velasquez to Veronese, there are varieties of practice which prove both the extraordinary elasticity of the art of painting and the extraordinary freedom in choice of means which, without compelling them to change their final aim, is yet open to men of genius. One law, however, men of genius have all observed and they alone, whether they belong to Venice or Parma, to Madrid, Antwerp, or Haarlem—the law that governs the relationship between light and shade, and preserves the identity of local tint through all the changing incidence of light.

It would seem, then, that in this matter all men have been agreed ; that the rule we have quoted has never been denied. It is not so, however. One painter—certainly one of the greatest, if not the greatest of all—openly disregarded the practice and traditions of the colourists, trampling under foot the laws they respected and have by their authority imposed on us ; a painter moreover who carried research into all the facts which bear upon light farther than any man before or after him—Rembrandt.



Instead of wedding colour to light, he divorces them. In his lights everything is white, in his shadows everything is brown. He aims at value of tone, and to obtain it perpetually sacrifices colour.

One of the most observant painters of our time, whose eye has the finest perception, and the surest, of the infinitely minute and delicate variations in the play of light and shade, Meissonier, does not hesitate to follow the example of Rembrandt in this method. In his high lights he mercilessly suppresses all local tint, as if it were devoured by the luminous rays falling upon it. That bright light diminishes colour we knew; but we had hardly ventured to make it cause its complete disappearance. A new school of painters, which has applied to matters of colour the same direct observation and unflinching sincerity which contemporary realism has long demanded in the choice of subjects and the representation of form,<sup>1</sup> proclaims, as one of the chief articles of its programme, this principle of the discolouration of tints when in full sunshine, and claims to have discovered it, although it has long ago been demonstrated by science. Just as white light, when decomposed by the prism, resolves itself into the sequence of colour, so these different colours, when exposed to the direct rays of the sun, may, under certain conditions, become re-fused into their primitive unity, with the result of a unique impression, namely, *light*.

We can easily understand how this fact escaped the observation of artists accustomed to work in the daylight of the studio, always more or less diffused; for a like reason it was sure to strike the attention of those who were in the habit of working in the open air.

<sup>1</sup> This does not imply any intention to accuse the realists of indifference to questions of colour or of relief. Far from this being the case, their processes deserve attentive study from this very point of view. But, although they arrived at some very instructive results, it must be acknowledged that their deliberate energies were not directed to any reform in colour and *chiaroscuro*. The contrary is true, however, of the members of the "open air" school. Their chief aim is truth in whatever relates to colour and the effects of light.

We have dwelt on this question of colour at some length. It is, in fact, the foundation of the art of painting. Combinations of line and form are common to sculpture and architecture also, but colour belongs to painting alone; and, notwithstanding anything which those members of the Academy who insist upon considering it as a merely ornamental accessory may say, colour has, as well as drawing, its power of moral expression, and lends itself with an equal facility to the manifestation of an artist's personality.

The power of expression possessed by colour is indeed incontestable. It has even been asserted as a reproach against colourists, that they have completely transformed the significance of the scenes which they have undertaken to represent. Of this there are two often-cited examples, the *Erection of the Cross* and the *Martyrdom of St. Liéven*, both by Rubens. A great many critics have spoken with strong disapprobation of the contradiction between the sentiment of the colour and that of the subject. If colour be so entirely without moral expression as they assert, how can it be guilty of any such contradiction. Its enemies admit, by their reproaches, a practical recognition of its importance, looked at as a means of interpreting moral impressions.

The colour of the *Erection of the Cross* is startling as a trumpet call; its brilliancy seems at first more suited to a triumph than to a scene so solemn. Neither Orcagna, nor Caravaggio, nor Ribera formed such a conception of the event; though this is hardly a good reason why we should accuse Rubens of want of logic. Certainly E. Fromentin, who studied his works with the most scrupulous care, did not think so. "Before all this," he says, "we forget the torture and the shame, and look upon the whole scene as a triumph. Such was the peculiar logical purpose of its brilliant author. It has often been called a contradiction; it has been called melodramatic, devoid of gravity, majesty, beauty, or solemnity—almost theatrical. It is saved by the very pictorial qualities that might have destroyed it. A powerful imagination

pervades and elevates it. A flash of true sensibility illumines and ennobles it. Something like eloquence purifies its style. A happy but indescribable warmth of inspiration makes this picture just what it ought to be—a picture both of ordinary death and of apotheosis." An ordinary death, if the manner of arranging the subject be looked at; an apotheosis, if we regard the brilliant and luminous colour, which causes Fromentin a little further on to call it "*Une gloire et un cri de clairon.*"

He gives a similar explanation of the *Martyrdom of Saint Liévin*. "Look only," he says, "at the white horse prancing against the white sky, the golden cope of the bishop, his white stole, the white and black spotted dogs, the four or five black and two red hoods, the turning visages with their red beards, and in every direction on the vast surface of the canvas, a delicious concert of greys, of tender blues, of silvery lights and shadows—and you will see nothing but a sentiment of glowing harmony, the most admirable and the most spontaneous which, perhaps, even Rubens has made use of to explain, or, if you will, to excuse, a scene of horror."

These contrasts exist in the very nature of colourists. When they choose a subject, we may be sure that it is its capability for colour which has taken their fancy. Again, it is by their power of colour that they redeem shortcomings in other ways. Rubens is the chief instance of this. "He is more worldly," says Fromentin, "than any of the painters who can be looked upon as his equals. He comes to the aid of the designer and of the thinker and redeems their work. Many, indeed, cannot follow him in his bolder flights. They feel suspicious and distrustful of an imaginative power capable of so great abandonment; and only comprehend those parts of his art which attach it to what is really common and low—its exaggerated realism, its display of coarse muscles, its redundant and careless drawing, its heavy human types, with their ruddy skins, and ensanguined flesh. They fail to perceive that consummate unity, style, and even ideal feeling, to be found in all the productions of his palette."

Even when the colourist confines himself to the mere manifestation of his own personality as a colourist—to the manifestation, that is, of the peculiar *ensemble* of natural qualities which makes him look upon light as his own native element, upon the glowing hues of his palette as his proper means of self-exaltation, and upon the interpretation of nature in all her force and glory as his chief end and aim; qualities which cause him to see all things in the blaze of light and colour which is his highest joy—does he not give us reason enough to declare that colour is *not* deprived of all moral significance?

Besides, it is not correct to say that colourists are bound of necessity to sacrifice drawing. Rubens, Veronese, Titian, Rembrandt, Giorgione, Tintoretto, Correggio, Delacroix were none of them the mediocrities in the matter of drawing which too many would have us believe. All that we can say with truth is, drawing was not their exclusive pre-occupation.

It would even be easy to prove that, from some points of view, and those perhaps the most important, the drawing of the colourist is superior to that of the masters who professed to make design the chief object of their studies. The modelling of the former is truer and more lifelike; and, to me, it seems undeniable that the fused and undulating line with which he marked his contours, is much nearer nature than the cutting and harsh one with which Ingres and the painters of his school used to make their figures stand out, as if punched with a die.

The pretended indifference of colourist and colouring to the moral character of the events depicted, is founded upon an incomplete and superficial observation of the works of a few painters—Paul Veronese, and Rubens, for instance—in which the magnificence of the colour blinds most people to their other great qualities. We are even told that these painters only aimed to dazzle our eyes. This assertion is true of only a very small number of the canvases of Veronese; and we have already shown how in the case of Rubens it was refuted by M. Fromentin in his

observations upon the *Deposition in the Tomb* and the *Martyrdom of Saint Liévin*. The example of Delacroix seems to us to be enough to show the great danger of these generalisations. In his case it would be very difficult to find any justification for them. No one will deny that he was one of the greatest of colourists; yet he always and obviously devoted himself to reconcile the splendours of his palette with the moral character of the subjects that he treated; and more, to make the general tone and colour of his pictures declare their character in advance, and, so to speak, to give it emphasis. When at a distance from one of his works, while we are still unable to appreciate the figures and incidents, our eyes are fascinated by the power of expression, whether brilliant or sombre, which seems to condense and summarize the motive of the subject itself.

Théophile Sylvestre, one of the three or four really competent art critics who have appeared during the present century, justly remarks of his *Christ on the Cross*: "In order to give the utmost effect to his work, Delacroix has not forgotten to agitate external nature. The earth trembles, the sky is darkened, the sun casts its lurid gleams across the black clouds, which a rushing wind drives down upon the earth like a tattered pall; while the awestruck people, enveloped in the unnatural darkness, recognize the death of the Just One, and the anger of God. The great and ambitious genius of the artist would move all nature with his own emotion. In the *Pietà* which now hangs in a dark Paris church, the landscape is as desolate and sombre as the soul of the mother weeping over the corpse of her son. In the *Shipwreck of Don Juan*, the poor unfortunates are between two eternities: the ocean about to engulf them, and the sky rolling its gloomy depths over their devoted heads. . . . Not only does the painter give infinite greatness to the heads of his heroes; he also, by some indescribable magic of his own, makes us see them clothed in colours which of themselves seem to express both their external features and the aspirations of their souls. By his blue and green he expresses all the immensity of sea and

heaven ; his reds are like notes of a war trumpet, his violet seems to breathe melancholy. His colour is as expressive as the music of Mozart, of Beethoven, or of Weber."

We might contend, if we wished to go into such refinements, that the moral expression of a picture has less to do with the colour itself than with the amount of light and shadow which it contains ; and, upon this distinction between colour and light, we might attribute to *chiaroscuro* properly speaking, part of the impression made upon us by the works of the colourists. Such a contention would be quite fair, provided it were not carried too far. It is at least certain that black and white, by its proportions, arrangements, and contrasts, exercises a very singular power over us. So great is this power, that an engraving is capable of rendering a large part of the effect of a picture. Upon the principle underlying this, is founded the practice of the *chiaroscurists*, who, as in the case of Rembrandt, often almost entirely dispensed with colour in order to get the strongest possible effect from light and shade.

This practice is no more than an exaggeration of the ordinary duties of *chiaroscuro*. *Chiaroscuro*, as we have already said, is the art of giving relief or light to the picture. This definition really gives the widest meaning of the phrase. But, for the painter who is an acute observer of the nature of things, every object is of course enveloped in air ; which air, however transparent it may be, possesses a colour of its own not to be overlooked. Its interposition has the effect of attenuating, and, as it were, vapourising colour in a degree varying according to distance. A mountain in sunshine, when close at hand, seems to be enveloped in a kind of luminous dust ; when seen from afar, it appears deep blue. The more dense the intervening atmosphere becomes, the more numerous are the accidental and picturesque effects of light which spring up. Modifications in shade and shadow, in sharp relief and hazy distance, are suggested. Everything seems bathed in a quasi artificial medium, whose mysterious veil puts colour through a number of changing aspects, and makes it more useful

to a poetic fancy, by the facilities it offers to employ the effects and contrasts of light and shade.

Rembrandt invariably made the greatest use of these facilities ; and sometimes he even pushed his practice so far as to become nearly unintelligible. This is shown very strongly by an examination of the conditions under which he painted his famous picture which has so long passed under the name of the *Ronde de Nuit*, or *Night Watch*. These names alone are enough to shew what exaggerations of *chiaroscuro* the painter indulged in, for in reality the scene is meant to be a daylight one.

Exaggerations so great as to demand a general transposition of the luminous principle are, then, as we have seen, extremely perilous, since the painter *par excellence* of the various effects of *chiaroscuro* has himself been sometimes wrecked upon them. But when the effect is successfully obtained, its power is extraordinary ; whether we look at the brilliancy given to light, or at the mystery added to the shadows and half-tints. In the first case, we are conscious of an intensity and plenitude of sensation which almost exhaust our powers of perception ; in the second, the very mystery of the forms and colours, bathed in half-transparent shadows, attracts the eye and the imagination, and holds them bound in a most tender if melancholy reverie.

Nothing is more fitted to render moral impressions than *chiaroscuro* as thus understood ; nothing lends itself more readily to individual fancy or to poetic modifications of fact. It is an incomparable artistic element opening an infinite field for the expression of personality. How does the personality of Rembrandt make itself felt ? By research into physical beauty ? by accurate imitation of fact ? by accuracy and vigour of drawing ? No one would dare to say so. By the novel but human character of his religious scenes ? by the intense life which animates his figures ? Certainly yes. But also and above all, by his peculiar use of *chiaroscuro* in his subtle pursuit of light through the midst of shadow, and by the powerful expressiveness with which he endowed it.

§ 4. *Drawing—Irregularities caused by movement—Draughtsmen of line, and draughtsmen of movement—Physiological demonstration of the superiority of the latter.*

We have been obliged to go into the important question of colour and light, or relief, at some length, because its importance has been contested. Nevertheless we are very far from denying the importance of drawing. Provoking in their Byzantinism<sup>1</sup> as are the arguments of the pretended classicists who do their best to demonstrate the superiority of drawing over colour—we have yet no intention to uphold the opposite thesis, or to be led to declare that drawing is nothing, simply because there are those foolish enough to say that it is everything.

<sup>1</sup> They have even extracted arguments to support their contention from the reciprocal influence of colours when placed in juxtaposition to each other. "Colour," say they, "is relative; form is absolute." This proposition is doubly false. That which is relative is not colour, *it is our eye*. Whatever may be its neighbour, colour changes neither chemically nor physically; that which does change is our visual power. Again, this modification takes place just as much in the case of form. Without going into any question of *anamorphosis*, of foreshortening—we may ask, is it not sufficient to bring two forms together to exaggerate or attenuate the impressions of grandeur, size, suppleness, thickness, curvature, stiffness, grace, &c., which either of them might produce if isolated? It is quite certain that the æsthetic value of form may be essentially modified by juxtaposition and comparison; and this æsthetic value is the only one of which we need here take account.

Another argument equally astonishing is that embodied in the assertion that "as we ascend the scale of creation, colour gradually loses its importance and gives way to drawing or design." That is, we are to accept as a fact that colour diminishes in splendour as we go from mineral to vegetable and from vegetable to animal; and that the most inferior in colour of all animals is man; of course, after the monkey. They have been good enough to allow that birds are an exception, "being still gorgeous in their tints." There can be little doubt of that fact, because there are not only many birds, but insects as well, whose colouring is infinitely more brilliant and more varied than that of the great majority of minerals. But to compensate for this admission, which impairs the symmetry of their argument, they say that "the more intelligent birds are the least decorated." The nightingale compared with the peacock, for instance. Is not this enough to refute the most obstinate of colourists? If it be not, surely the next startling assertion will convince them: "The human body is the work of a great draughtsman and not of a colourist?" Here we have the Creator himself enrolled among the champions of drawing! He despises colour, and colourists must do without his aid!



Neither do we mean to say that it is the "honesty of art" (*la probité de l'art*), because, to tell the truth, we are not sure that we know what this rhetorical aphorism means. Moreover, we have no wish to try to assign to each its respective rank, because it seems to us clear enough that a picture without colour is not painting in our sense of the word, and that colour without form is no art at all. We are content to look upon form and colour as the two essential elements of painting, since painting is defined to be the coloured representation of form.

We shall be justified if we pass over drawing without entering much into detail, for we have gone over almost the same ground in our remarks upon architecture and sculpture. We may, however, observe that pictorial design has a peculiar importance of its own, because painting allows the expression of gesture, of attitude, and of physiognomy to be carried much further than in the case of sculpture. A picture, by the facilities which it affords for grouping, and, by perspective, for the comprehension of extended spaces, enables us to give an intensity and energy to action which an isolated figure would find it very difficult to support. Violent and even far-fetched gestures, fleeting attitudes, hardly to be approved in a work of sculpture, are perfectly in place upon canvas, because there they are surrounded by what is wanted to explain them and their connection with the rest of the work. It is not at all our wish to disallow movement in sculpture, and especially in groups; but the very material employed, lends itself badly to the contortions quite permissible in the pictorial representation of violent action.

These contortions, which are frequent in the works of certain artists, full of fire and impetuosity, whose aim above everything is life<sup>2</sup>—such as Rubens and Delacroix—constitute of themselves an

<sup>2</sup> Drawing, in the true and complete meaning of the word, is a quite inseparable part of the impression. Burger, in his *Salon of 1861*, wrote: "It is said that our present school is perfect in process and handcraft; that every one of our painters knows how to paint; and that, although there is some want of inspiration, of intelligence, and of poetry, the practice of contemporary art equals that of the

important difference between the design of a painter and that of a sculptor. It is easy to understand that a painter, having at his disposal only a single moment of time, attempts to obtain all the effect possible by borrowing, so to speak, a little both from the past and the future of the particular gestures of his personages. Gesture is not an arrested movement; the latter being in fact an attitude: it is a movement which is going continuously on. The painter not having the means to reproduce this continuity of movement, is obliged to make it felt, by adding to the forced immobility of the attitude which he has to substitute for gesture, something of what has immediately gone before and also something of what is about to follow.

We know well enough that this *multiplex attitude* cannot exist, at one and the same moment, in the material reality; but we allow the painter to make use of it, simply because, far above the purely material immobility of the moment chosen by him, there is the superior truth of vitality, through force of which this immobility becomes only an imperceptible point in a series of movements. In the same way we may look upon a circle as a series of very short straight lines attached to each other by an infinite number of obtuse angles. If we were to assign to each of those straight lines some appreciable dimensions, the circle would disappear and would be transformed into a visible polygon. If, again, the lines should be reduced to points, the angles formed by their arrangement would become imperceptible, and the circle would be restored.

In the same way, if the painter, under the pretext of accuracy, were to represent his personages petrified in the momentary attitude in which he is obliged to take them, he would destroy their vitality, and, by this very scrupulous adherence to realism, greatest schools of former times. We have here a very self-deceiving mistake. The truth is imagination, high conceptions and convictions, real love of art itself, are wanting even in our most famous artists; and, *as execution cannot exist without a true and life-like impression*, they are incapable of drawing, modelling, or giving proper effect even to the insignificant images which they so painfully devise to flatter the bad taste of a wearied public."

would take away the most real thing about them; their movement, life, and action. In order to give them full truth and power of expression, he is obliged in some measure to ignore the extremely narrow limits of the one attitude to which logic would restrict him, and to add a little both of that which went before, and that which is about to follow.<sup>1</sup>

This is what the cold designers of "absolute form," that is, of immobility, can never forgive in the great draughtsmen of movement. While the latter make life their aim, the former are completely taken up with the study of line. Compare Rubens and Delacroix with L. David and Ingres. It is impossible to conceive

<sup>1</sup> All great draughtsmen have devoted their attention to movement—Raphael, whom our "princes of design" have taken for their patron, as much as others. Constantin, in his *Idées Italiennes*, has remarked that "the rapidity and suddenness of movement on the part of the mother of the demoniac child in the *Transfiguration*, is such that her draperies have not had time to follow the impulse of her body; she alone has turned. Her girdle, *left behind* by her movement, seems to be placed awry; but we soon perceive that if she were to return to her former attitude, it would be in its proper place." We have here, evidently, an example of license which, if it were found elsewhere than in one of his works, the worshippers of Raphael would condemn very strongly. The same author remarks again, "Raphael always leaves around his figures the space necessary to indicate the position in which they were at the moment immediately preceding that chosen by the painter, and is very careful not to fill up the void which they have thus left behind them. Attention to details so minute would perhaps be laughed at in these days; but Raphael gains by paying regard to them. Do the artists who condemn these apparently insignificant but logical precautions obtain such an effect as he does? I may cite two examples which throw light upon the question. The first is the figure of the young apostle who leans forward towards the sister of the demoniac boy; the space which he occupied is behind him and empty. The second is furnished by the father of the sufferer. . . . We see here how Raphael succeeded in giving to his figures that spontaneity of movement and true and serious grace which leaves an impression so powerful upon intelligent and sensitive minds." Théophile Sylvestre quotes some remarks of Delacroix relating to this study of movement: "Rubens," said Delacroix, "Rubens is the king of painters; he is as great as Homer, and like him, breathes his own soul into everything to which he puts his hand. We feel a thrill when, in reading Homer, the poet brings Achilles and Hector on the scene; so, too, we shudder before the canvas of Rubens, as the Roman soldier strikes his lance through the bleeding side of Christ. That lance thrust had, for me, a power of expression, a Homeric force, which I shall never forget."

a more complete antithesis, not only from the point of view of colour—of which we have said all that we think—but also from that of design. While the smallest figures of the former men seem instinct with a vitality so lively and strong that they seem to be ever on the point of rushing out of the canvas; those of the latter, in their coldness and immobility, seem statues in repose. And, in fact, they are statues, being both conceived and executed in the spirit of sculpture. In spite of all that academic and conventional admiration may say as to these two men being the first of modern draughtsmen, I am not afraid to assert it can easily be demonstrated that their reputation is singularly exaggerated; or, at least, that it rests upon a strange piece of confusion, which proves how little account their admirers have taken of the fundamental differences between the two arts of painting and sculpture. I am quite willing to acknowledge that no one could excel L. David in the production of admirable academy studies;<sup>1</sup> that is, of attitudes, of immobile statues. But Ingres has not even this merit: we could, without very much trouble, point out a large number of errors in the works of this corypheus of drawing. But even if we admit that Ingres could draw attitudes as well as L. David, one thing remains quite certain—neither the one nor the other could draw gestures and movements; neither the one nor the other seems ever to have thought it possible for art to catch life on the wing, so to speak, fix it on canvas, without first reducing it to the immobility of death. It is impossible to look at their pictures without being reminded of the frames in which entomologists fix their unfortunate beetles and butterflies with pins through their bodies. The figures of these masters of drawing bear each in its heart an invisible pin which long since has destroyed their life.

<sup>1</sup> I need not say that I am as little likely as anyone to include the portraits of L. David and of Ingres in the sweeping condemnation of their other pictures. Their portraits—especially those of David—often possess a startling vitality. This very fact doubly proves the falsehood of their theories on the matter of drawing. The actual presence of a model to be copied makes them forget their academic doctrines, and so prevents their application; again, the immobility of the model helps to hide their incapability to represent life in movement.

They no more resemble living figures than do the dried flowers of the botanist resemble those blooming in the fields.

The reason is not far to seek. The ideal of both these artists was the Greek ideal, the ideal of sculpture.<sup>1</sup>

Originally obliged to admire the solitary masterpieces of the sculptor, they have come to take these as models and rules for all the arts. They despise colour, because sculpture does not require to be coloured, being also unaware that in former days statues were always painted. They have made the elaboration of line the almost exclusive object of the painter, because to sculpture it was necessary in consequence of the relative immobility which the nature of it imposes. Moved by the same idea, and guided by the same logic, they have made absolute confusion between pictorial drawing, which consists of a combination of several attitudes, and sculptural drawing, which has to do with one only.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ingres, like David, was less a painter than a sculptor. The same characteristic was the mark of all his school, as has already been observed by M. Guizot in his *Salon of 1810*. The latter was much struck with "this influence of sculpture upon a school of painting formed upon statues. Masters teach their pupils to paint by giving them casts for models. Can they avoid becoming cold and grey in their colour?" He says also, and with equal justice: "The care which the present French school (1810) devotes to form at the expense of colour, clearly shows that it is *not alive to the peculiar domain of painting*, and that it follows too closely the practice of sculptors."

<sup>2</sup> This is one reason why their sketches are generally so much more life-like than their finished works. Of this we have seen a very striking example in recent years. The *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* has published fac-similes of certain original sketches by M. Paul Baudry for the decoration of the great *foyer* of the New Opera. In them we find an amount of life and animation which, in the painted work, has almost entirely disappeared. Gesture is not wanting in M. Baudry's pictures; we might even say that it is exaggerated, and yet there is no stir. All his personages, notwithstanding their great arms and outstretched legs, are fixed in an immobility all the more disagreeable because seemingly in contradiction with their apparent movements. To what must we refer this disastrous transformation from the original sketch? To the fact that, in the sketches, the gestures are vaguely indicated by a multiplicity of features all leading to one impression; in them figures are made animate by having several movements, several successive attitudes, simultaneously hinted at: while all this blending of succession and simultaneity completely disappears in the definite precision of the attitude finally fixed upon.

The theories of those who approve immobility in drawing have received a death-stroke from a recently discovered scientific fact. It has been clearly demonstrated that the image impressed upon the retina, remains there during an appreciable space of time. Consequently, gestures, though passing continuously through an unbroken series of changes, for a time, and especially when the movement is rapid, remain unchanged in the eye; and thus succession is transformed into a practical simultaneity.

Now, which should the painter prefer, reality as it is, or reality as it presents itself to our visual sense? The latter, evidently, unless he wish to reduce his art to the condition of photography.<sup>1</sup> To deny this—that is, to compel the artist to represent arrested movement, actual momentary attitude, under the pretext that it alone exists for the painter, who has to do with a single instant of time—would be hardly more intelligent, than to forbid the recognition of the mutual changes in tone and tint to which the juxtaposition of colours gives rise. The critic who should dare to advise artists to consider each colour on its own merits; to reproduce them in their true reality, without taking heed of others in their immediate neighbourhood, on the pretext that colour has an isolated existence only, and that the mutual influences by which it is modified, result merely from an infirmity of the eye: would be at once repudiated by all painters who realise that one of the first conditions of art is the recognition of the physiological nature of man; that painting can no more place itself in antagonism to the eye, than music to the ear—unless, indeed, the former be meant for the blind and the latter for the deaf.

We are brought, then, to conclude, that in the long and absurd quarrel which the exclusive partisans of drawing have waged against the colourists, the former have succeeded in de-

<sup>1</sup> Photography is unable to render movement, simply because it is only able to seize absolutely stationary attitudes. This is one of the chief of the disabilities which will always effectually prevent it from usurping the place of art. It is also the reason why draughtsmen of the school of L. David and Ingres, who substitute photographic for pictorial reality, must always remain imperfect.

monstrating that, if they are wanting in colour, they are no less wanting in drawing—by which I mean, drawing considered as the interpreter of life and movement. What they condemn as an error is nothing more than the unconscious, but perfectly legitimate, result of a superior artistic realism; a very different thing from the realism of a photograph. They despise colour, because it is beyond their reach. They console themselves by maligning it, and by pluming themselves on their fancied superiority in the art of design, properly speaking. I regret to deprive them of their satisfaction; but the discovery of the prolonged duration of the image upon the retina, forbids us to leave them in the enjoyment of a belief which, we do not hesitate to say, they have too long abused.

No one doubts that they have erred in good faith. But their error has been absolute, and science has upheld the instinctive convictions of that genius which, from the heights of their superb infallibility, they have treated as a mistake. They have now but the alternative of resignation to the sentence passed upon them by physiology, through the discovery of the persistence of the retinal impression.

§ 5. *Malformations caused by light—Line and contour—Arabesque of a picture—Linear and aerial perspective.*

The malformations or modifications of form produced by movement are no more extraordinary than those caused by light<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> I borrow from M. Ph. Burty's book, *Maîtres et petits maîtres*, the following very significant passage relating to this question of contour and the changes in form produced by light: "Théodore Rousseau on one occasion showed me in the most striking manner that form in itself does not exist by contour, but solely by its salience. He pointed out to me a landscape in which the trees received a strong light from the front—that is, from the same side as the spectator—which obliterating all details, gave them large and simple forms. The effect was both powerful and natural. Again, he had carefully transferred the forms of this landscape to another picture; and this one he illuminated with a sun almost setting in the background. The rays penetrated through the foliage in a thousand little tongues of fire, cutting the great masses which had been bathed in the broad light and

perspective. It is obvious, however, that these latter are only changes in appearance. Neither aerial nor linear perspective can really cause any change in the actual condition of things. A long avenue of poplars has really the same height and width at one end as it has at the other. The stature of a man does not in reality diminish simply because you see him a hundred yards off. These are purely subjective phenomena of which the advocates of drawing and of colour alike are obliged to take account. They have found it more difficult to realise that the mere incidence of light imposes infinite modifications upon form, but they are now gradually beginning to confess that it is so. They will end by acknowledging that gesture and movement, also, have their visual laws, which cannot be set at defiance without substituting immobility for movement, and death for vitality.

We call the attention of all artists to this, a fact, which, we believe, is destined to exercise considerable influence over their procedure. And as we have but to announce it, to furnish another argument against the pretensions equally vain and ill-founded of a coterie, which gives itself out to be the sole depository of artistic truth, we think that we have not given either our time or our trouble uselessly.

We have a like observation to make on the question of contour. Contour, as we have already said, is the imaginary line bounding the juxtaposition of one colour with another. In itself it has no real existence; and it is therefore a mistake to circumscribe a figure with the hard and rigid line of which the majority of academic "draughtsmen" make use. This line possesses another inconvenience: it destroys aerial perspective, the natural effect of which is to soften the contours of objects, in a greater or less degree, in proportion to their distance from us.

We have shown it to be doubly false; it will be seen to be triply

shade of noonday into hundreds of little crisp silhouettes, and so changed the contours of the trees and the general appearance of the scene as to make it hardly recognizable.



so when we consider that man, having two eyes, sees in duplicate the limits of bodies which are near to him and possess appreciable thickness. Such a boundary as this cannot possibly be traced by a single black line. It is in fact a certain amount of space, on which, as on other surfaces, white exercises its usual influence. The suppression of this space constitutes an untruth by which not only the contour itself suffers, but also the modelling; for this, as it begins at the further of the two lines, is truncated by the amount of the interval comprised between them.

Over accentuation of contour implies a surface without depth, at least upon its edges. It destroys that sensation which enables us to perceive that an object has substance, and that the sides which are turned away from us have also their relief. It is quite vain for an artist to lavish his powers of modelling upon the face of an object which is immediately opposite to his eye; because modelling does not really begin there, nor is it possible by such means to do away with the impression that the surface at the back is quite flat.

Théophile Sylvestre remarks apropos of this point, that, so far from encircling their figures with the rigid linear contours so dear to Ingres and his school, Murillo and Correggio almost lost their outlines in surroundings; while "Paul Veronese, Rubens, and Rembrandt indicated it with free strokes of the brush, even carrying it beyond the limits of their figures, thus giving them extraordinary relief and vitality."

Upon the fact, so important from the point of view of relief and salience, that when we look at an object with two eyes we see the vertical lines which form its boundaries in two different places at once, was founded the invention of the stereoscope. The ordinary photographic image, being the production of a single objective or lens, represents bodies without depth or thickness, just as we see them in the pictures of Ingres. To give them their proper relief it was only necessary to place side by side two photographs taken from angles of view slightly differing so as to correspond to those of our eyes; and also to arrange that the two images could be

simultaneously inspected, the one by the left, the other by the right eye. The slight displacement of the vertical lines gives the required depth and modelling.

Here, then, in this question of contour, we again find ourselves face to face with a physiological and scientific fact; and again, as in the case of the dislocations caused by movement, do we find the despots of the rigid line and punching-out system convicted of flagrant ignorance and error. And these are the men who have substituted sculptural for pictorial drawing, under the empty pretext that "form is absolute."

We shall not enter here into the moral significance of each different kind of line. What we have already said is enough for our present purpose; any further analysis would carry us too far. We need only remind our readers that the general line which governs the mass of a picture is a very important part of what we term its *composition*. It is called, in technical language, the *arabesque* of the picture. This *arabesque* must, of course, develop itself in conformity with the general sentiment of the work, whose impression may vary very much according to the direction in which such development may proceed. This *arabesque* occupies a very important place in Italian paintings, and especially in those of Raphael.

Perspective is another of the essential elements of pictorial convention. There are two distinct kinds of perspective, linear and aerial. The former is founded upon our visual organization, which sees objects at an angle obtuse in proportion to their proximity. We need not go into the technical part of linear perspective, which belongs properly to geometry, but will consider it only from the art point of view. Its principles must be rigorously applied, whenever such application does not entail any consequences destructive of æsthetic sentiment. Cases might be mentioned where it has been absolutely necessary to choose between æsthetic fitness and geometric truth. Instances are to be found in the works of Raphael, Paul Veronese, N. Poussin, and many others.

In the fresco of the *School of Athens* there are two points of sight;<sup>1</sup> a low one for the architecture, and another, higher up, for the figures. If the figures had been arranged from the same point of sight as the architecture, they would have presented a disagreeable aspect. The heads of the persons placed in the background of the picture would have been much lower than those of the philosophers in the foreground. We may judge what the effect would have been from the figures of the disciples who surround Aristotle and Plato. The architectural point of sight coincides with the left hand of Plato, in which he holds the book. Suppose the personages to be all of about the same height, and draw a line to this point of sight from the head of Alexander, who is the first of the group to the right of Plato, and it will be seen how small the last figure in the picture would have been.

In order to hide the anomaly as much as possible, Raphael has been at much pains to bring his more distant groups together, so as to conceal the ascending lines of the pavement.

If he had made use of the same point of sight for his architecture as for his figures, the painter would have lost the fine effect obtained from his far-reaching vault. This would have become comparatively mean, and would have lost much of the majesty which Raphael has managed to give it by an artifice, which is so far from shocking us, that it requires considerable attention to discover its existence. Analogous reasons explain the two horizons which Paul Veronese's great picture, the *Marriage at Cana*, con-

<sup>1</sup> The point of sight is an imaginary point upon the horizon, always at the same height as the eye of the spectator, and to it, converge all the vanishing lines of such cubes as have one of their surfaces parallel to the face of the picture. In a building, for instance, the line of the roof seems to descend, and the base line to ascend to the horizon, in such a manner that the two lines, if sufficiently prolonged, would finally meet at the point of sight. Let us suppose a straight and flat road, many miles in length and enclosed on either side by a wall—to a spectator placed at one end of such a road, midway between the two walls, the lines on each side of him would seem gradually to converge until they fell into one point at the horizon. That point is the point of sight. Its height is always determined by that of the horizontal line, which cuts a picture in two where the converging lines from above and below meet each other.

tains. By means of them the painter has avoided the necessity of making the vanishing lines of his architecture too sloping. We must say, however, that such pieces of artistic licence are much more allowable in pictures composed of separate groups, than in those which contain a condensed representation of a single action.

As for the choice of the point of sight, and consequent determination of the direction of vanishing lines, it is entirely regulated by the nature of the subject and the individual taste of the artist. As perspective is nothing but the science of appearances, it is the artist's business to fix upon an arrangement that shall give the greatest prominence to the facts upon which he wishes to insist, and the most natural concealment to those least necessary to obtrude. It is obvious, for instance, that Leonardo da Vinci would have been guilty of a great error if, in his *Last Supper*, he had chosen such a point of sight as to cause his personages to hide the figure of Christ himself; or even such as would have failed to give an importance to this figure far above that of all the others. In truth he has taken great care so to dispose his work that the head of Christ itself forms the point of sight. To it, all the lines of the perspective converge, so that it helps to accent the artistic idea of the work.

Aerial perspective is founded upon the fact that the interposition of the atmosphere softens all forms in a greater or less degree, in proportion to their distance from the spectator. Not only does the object which we look at from a distance of a hundred yards seem much smaller than one only ten yards off; but the image imprinted by it on our retina is infinitely less clearly defined. All the accidental reliefs disappear, and we in reality see nothing but a more or less brightly-coloured spot detached from the horizon by its own contour. Any painter who, in a picture possessing a certain depth of perspective, should give to the figures in his extreme distance and to those in his immediate foreground an equal amount of distinctness, would violate the laws of aerial perspective; just as he would violate those of linear perspective,

were he to disregard the convergence which this imposes upon vanishing lines. This very convergence explains, in a certain degree, the gradual obscuration of the image, and the suppression of detail.

It is not at all intended to apply these remarks to miniature painting. That branch of art reposes upon a species of convention which takes no note of the laws of linear perspective, and when it seeks to be diminutive, it is with no wish to represent distance. Miniature work is but painting on a small scale. It maintains all the characteristics of the more important art, except that, as it has to be looked at very closely, it need not be afraid to accumulate details—far beyond what would befit a picture of greater dimensions—so long as each occupies its proper place and rank.

§ 6. *Methods of execution : examples from Delacroix, Théodore Rousseau and Rubens.*

Must we here speak of practice, methods of execution, and touch? May we not put these on one side as being purely technical, and unfit for examination in a treatise upon æsthetics?

Doubtless we might so conclude, and, doubtless, many will say that it is so. It is quite certain that neither Plato, nor Kant, nor Schelling, nor Hegel, nor Jouffroy, nor Cousin ever thought of entering upon such an inquiry. Pure philosophy despises such realities, as pure beauty spurns any alloy of human passion! Those metaphysicians who inhabit a world peopled with beings of their own creation,<sup>1</sup> a world which, with provoking irony, they

<sup>1</sup> In appearance metaphysics is but a kind of algebraic language. It does for abstract ideas what algebra does for abstract quantities. But there are capital differences at bottom. To begin with—algebra works with absolute certainty in accordance with scientific laws, whereas metaphysics has science only in appearance. Besides, it has to do with living ideas, subject to progress and change. Having borrowed these from real life, it is first obliged to denaturalize and crystallize them into lifeless formulas; and when thus deprived of life for the sake of immobility, they are resuscitated to receive an anthropomorphic and purely fantastic existence.

call the world of intelligence, can only support their absurd philosophy upon grandiose phrases which but ill accommodate themselves to accuracy of detail. The subject upon which I am about to enter is, then, quite unworthy of treatment as grandiose æsthetics; but I believe it is not less interesting from an artistic point of view, and this seems to me the principal thing in such a treatise as this.

We must here not forget that not only is the character of the complete publication of which this volume forms a part, one of reaction against those antique habits of thought which academic tradition, contemptuous of fact, has propagated with so much care, and, unhappily, with so much success; but also that practice and handling have a peculiar importance in painting.

We must stop here for a moment, to give the examples and precepts of a few artists sufficiently illustrious to justify us in receiving their practice as authority.

Let us take first Eugène Delacroix. Théophile Sylvestre, who knew him well and has seen him at work, gives us a very clear account of his mode of proceeding:

“The first sketches of Delacroix were very free. As he saw things quickly and in their *ensemble*, in the best state for a rough sketch, each of his pencil strokes was characteristic, generalising and determining the volume and relief of bodies and the direction of their movements.”

“An example is necessary. Take for instance a statue in a reclining position and half-plunged in water. The part that rises above the water and can be seen, is certainly not a mere collection of contours and detached lines, but a salient mass. What then is to determine the importance to be given to its lines or contour? Is not line in drawing, as in mathematics, nothing more than an hypothesis? The chief preoccupation of Delacroix is therefore with the volume of his objects, the analysis of their thickness. So he built up his figures, by putting together their parts in proportionate masses until their modelling was complete. Gros proceeded in the same way until he was turned from his natural bent

by an excessive respect for the principles of David. Gros gave a condensed representation of the frame of a horse by a few ovals properly arranged. Géricault obtained his energetic relief in the same fashion. When a painter has established the correct salience of his objects, he will not have exceeded that imaginary limit, which is called their line or contour, but which in reality is their *finish*. What would you think of a sculptor who, having a medallion to produce, a head in profile, should execute it by simply drawing the features upon his board, and then filling in the circumscribed space with clay? He could not really convey, with his traced line, the real projections of the living figure. The procedure of Delacroix had much in common with that of sculpture. His large touch resembles the powerful brushwork of Géricault in the *Raft of the Medusa*, or the thumbwork of sculptors upon soft clay. He first marks the culminating point of his projections with his most luminous tone, and then surrounds it with one more sombre. This gives at once an indication of the concavities and protuberances of the topography of the human figure, land-marked by lights and shadows."

"After the example of Titian, of Paul Veronese, and of Rubens, Delacroix commenced by sketching out his subject in black and white, so as to arrive simply and rapidly at a determination of the general effect. He never wasted time in taking up first one part of a picture and then another—here a head, there a hand or an arm, details which dilettanti painters, like gourmets, are fond of calling titbits. He always devoted himself to the life and dramatic effect of the whole. If you take each of his figures separately, you will be astonished at their excessive development, at times even monstrous; which, however, the artist has decided are necessary to give energy of movement and intensity of expression. Though we do not perhaps find such disorder as this in nature, we do find it in our own imagination, to which the painter specially directs his appeal. Delacroix has declared that 'painting is the art of producing an illusion in the brain of a spectator through the agency of his eyes.' This is why his heroes seem to dislocate them-

selves as they cut and thrust in the headlong mêlée ; why the horses, driven giddily forward, fall and die at our feet, reeking and bloody ; why the eyes of his furious warriors start from their orbits, and the conquered stretch their arms to heaven in all the violence of despair. The hand which calls to revolt, which commands punishments, or adds emphasis to malediction, is endowed with supernatural size and power ; the brush-strokes which form it are like the strokes of a sword. The desired end is more than attained, it is overpassed."

"Nature itself sometimes seems to be subject to these intensifications. Look at the people at the moment when a carriage or waggon is about to run over a child or a woman in a crowded street. A tragic thrill seems to run through the air. Fright, anger, pity, flash in the eyes, play on the lips, cause hands to be wrung, and eager heads to be thrown forward upon the shoulders. All anatomic equilibrium is destroyed ; and alike vanish regularity of proportion, and that cold and hard limitation known as line or contour. But the majority of artists exaggerate this contour just where it is most hurtful to the rotundity or movement of bodies, and do not look upon it merely as a useful, though somewhat brutal, method of detaching figures from their background."

M. Ph. Burty has given us, in his book, *Maîtres et Petits Maîtres*, some valuable information as to the practice and particular processes of Théodore Rousseau, communicated to him by an old pupil of the well-known landscape painter.

"The first study which I showed him," writes M. L. Letronne, "was not considered a success. He explained to me that drawing did not consist only in the accuracy of the silhouettes, such as the bounding outlines of trees ; that, in fact, a tree is not an 'espalier' ; that it has 'volume,' like hills, fields, water, or space ; that the canvas itself is the only thing that is flat : and that from the first stroke of the brush every effort must be made to do away with the sense of such untrue uniformity. 'Your trees must embrace the earth upon which they stand, their branches must come forward out of your canvas and stretch back



beyond it ; a spectator of your picture must feel as if he could walk round them under their shadow. The form is the first thing of which to make sure. In order to render it truthfully, your pencil must take account of the meaning of the objects which it imitates. Not a touch should be laid on without meaning ; the final result must be constantly before you, and everything which you do should lead up to it.' He always insisted strongly upon the observance of principles, and never spoke to me much about colour. One day he said to me : ' You think, perhaps, that, as you have come to a colourist, you will be allowed to neglect drawing.'

"On looking over another study of mine, he observed that a rough sketch need not largely partake of the special nature of a study, the object of which is to lead to a certain amount of facility with the brush—which facility, indeed, would come soon enough. I promised to finish more carefully : ' As to that word, finish,' he said, ' what finishes a picture is not the quantity of details put into it, but the truth or completeness of the final result. A picture is not bounded only by its frame. No matter what its subject may be, it is sure to have one principal object upon which your eyes will rest ; all others which it contains being merely its complement. These others interest you comparatively but little. After the one chief object, there is nothing to catch your eye. Here, then, you see the real limit of the picture. This principal object or figure should be made to have the same powerful effect upon everyone who looks at your work. You must therefore return to it continually, and strengthen its colour in every possible way.' He enumerated a few works of the great masters which bear out this theory. He particularly mentioned Rembrandt, who comprehended it more clearly than any other painter. ' But, on the other hand,' he added, ' if your picture contain the most exquisite detail spread over the whole breadth of the canvas, people will look at it with indifference. It will be all equally interesting ; or rather it will all be without interest. It will have no real limits ; it might be prolonged indefinitely in any direction without affecting its character. You will never come to the end of it, so you will

never finish it. A picture is finished when the effect of its *ensemble* is complete. Barye's magnificent lion at the Tuileries has every hair of his mane in greater perfection in reality, than if the sculptor had laboriously carved them one by one.'

"He often spoke to me of the work of Rembrandt, Claude Lorraine and Hobbema. Once while I was at work copying a Van Goyen in his possession, he said to me: 'He had very little need of colour to render the idea of space; at a pinch you may do without colour, but you cannot dispense with harmony.' One day when I spoke of copying a picture by Huysman of Mechlin, he said, 'You had much better go and paint at Montmartre or Barbizon. That would not hinder you from going to the Louvre to see how the great masters treated nature.'"

M. Philippe Burty adds: "This remark of Rousseau's upon the subordination of colour to harmony, even in monochrome, is most important. He returns to the point very frequently in his conversations. I possess a small panel of his on which the first painting is in mummy.\* He said to me, 'A picture should be first completely conceived in the brain. The painter should not build it up upon his canvas, he should successively raise the various veils which conceal it.' Then he placed upon the panel in question a sheet of tissue paper and the smaller details at once disappeared. He added a second sheet, and the outlines became dim and confused. With the addition of a third, nothing remained but the broad values of light and shade, the transitions having disappeared. The skeleton of the picture remained in all its robust nakedness! 'When I wish to carry out the conception of my brain,' he added, 'I go through the inverse of the operation which I have just shown you. I successively strengthen my lights, and disengage objects gradually from nothingness, which is obscurity, just as a man becomes visible step by step in ascending a ladder out of a vault. Colour is a mere matter of ocular observation and organization, and must always be in abeyance until the end. . . .'"

"To see him sketch out a picture is something wonderful.

\* mummy?

First, he will take up the white chalk, next it may be a piece of charcoal; then he will work away with mummy or Indian ink, drawing in, all the time, the principal lines of his composition, both of the sky and the earth; next, upon his horizon, he will develop the silhouettes of his trees, the shapes and slopes of his rocks, the voids and solids, if we may call them so, of his clouds and masses of foliage. It is in the management of these almost incorporeal lines, or at least of the masses that they bind together, in which his high skill in drawing is chiefly displayed. Next he indicates the rough plan of his minor masses—often with chalk. Of this part of his practice some magnificent examples were seen at his sale. The complete details of his work come with successive circumstances—as dawn, storm, or twilight, whichever it may be, develops into completeness by almost insensible stages. Here we have the explanation of the subtle but close relationship that exists between his most momentary sensations and the most laborious of his works. You might carry off the canvas upon his easel at any moment; you would be sure to have a picture.”

Rubens' mode of work possesses an equal interest. We will give it here as analysed by a man who has studied it very closely and with extreme care. He had the good fortune to see the *Miraculous draught of fishes* “placed upon the ground, leaning against a plain white wall, under a glass roof which afforded an abundant light, without frame, in all the crudity and brightness of its first condition.” He profited by the occasion, as we in our turn must now do.

“Examined by itself from above, and so at some disadvantage, this picture,” says M. Fromentin, “is not exactly gross, because its workmanship gives a certain elevation to its style, but it is *material*, if that word can express what I mean—its construction, if ingenious, is narrow in intelligence, and its character vulgar. . . . As for the two nude torsos, the one bending towards the spectator, the other turned into the picture, the shoulders of both being most conspicuous, they are celebrated as being among the finest ‘academic’ studies in the whole range of the great Fleming’s

work; the free but absolutely sure handling, indicating plainly that the painter finished them in a very few hours without going twice over any part—laying on every tint broadly and clearly, with an impasto neither too thin nor too thick, a modelling neither exaggerated nor slurred. . . . The fisherman with his Scandinavian head, his beard streaming in the wind, his golden hair, his bright eyes and rubicund visage, his great sea boots and his scarlet night-cap, is marvellous. And, as is often the case in Rubens' pictures, where an excessive amount of red is employed as a sedative, this flaming individual tempers everything around him, and so acts upon the retina as to dispose it to see green in all the neighbouring colours. The most extraordinary thing about this picture—thanks to the peculiar circumstances which enabled me to examine it closely, and to follow its structure as easily as if Rubens had painted it before me—is the facility with which it surrenders all his secrets; a facility almost as astonishing as total concealment would have been. . . .”

“Our difficulty is not to find out how it was done, but how, being so done, it came to be so excellent. The means are simple, the methods are absolutely elementary. Primarily there is a good, smooth, and white panel, upon which the most magnificently facile, adroit, sensitive and certain of human hands has been at work. The impulse and passion which it displays spring from the feeling of the artist, and not from any fault in his method of painting. His brush is as calm and sure as his feelings are warm, and as his intellect is quick and penetrating. In such an organization as his, the sympathy between eye and hand is so perfect, the latter is so immediately and implicitly obedient to the former, that the habitual rapid workings of the directing brain, seem rather to be sudden leaps on the part of the instrument itself. Nothing is more deceptive than this apparent excitement, resulting from the most profound calculation, and served by a mechanical power skilled in every device. The same observations apply to the sensations of his eye, and consequently to his choice of colours. They are very simple, and seem complicated only from the rôle

which the painter causes them to play. The number of his important tints is very small, and his mode of balancing them, and carrying them through their various gradations, simple in the extreme ; nothing, therefore, could seem less laboured or more unaffected than the results which he obtains. The colours in his pictures are never of very fine quality taken separately. Take his usual red, for instance—and you will see in a moment how he gets it ; it is vermilion and yellow ochre, mixed at once and very little broken.”

“He generally uses ivory black, and with it and white, makes every imaginable combination of heavy or tender grey. His blues are accidental. Yellow is a colour that he feels and manages but badly, except in the case of gold, whose richness, warmth, and pomp he renders to perfection. It, like his reds, however, plays a double part : first, it prevents all his light being contained in his white surfaces ; secondly, it exerts the reflex action by which one colour modifies others, giving, for instance, a sort of violet bloom to a dull grey, which may be insignificant and too neutral as it lies on the palette. All which, it may be said, is nothing out of the common.”

“Low toned browns with two or three more active colours, add richness to his vast canvases. Grey medleys of pallid tints form his middle stages between deepest black and highest white. So, with few pigments he obtained great splendour of colour ; at little cost, a great display ; plenty of light without too much glare ; extreme sonorousness with a limited orchestra ; neglecting three-fourths of his keyboard, yet he embraces the whole by leaping at will from its one extremity to the other—thus, in language borrowed from both music and painting, do we sum up the practice of this great master of execution. He who has seen one of his pictures knows them all ; and he who has watched him paint for a day, has seen him at work at almost any moment of his life.”

“His method never changes. The same calmness and deliberation, the same cool and skilful premeditation, regulate his most

spontaneous or accidental effects. We hardly know whence comes his audacity, or how it seizes him. . . .”

“The simultaneity<sup>o</sup> of the execution is wonderful, and pervades nearly the whole of the picture. We see it in the lightness of the touch, especially in the figure of St. Peter, and in the transparency of the darker tints—such as those of the boats and the sea, and of whatever partakes of their brown, bituminous, and sometimes greenish colouring. We see it, too, even in those parts which require a more studied, though not less rapid method; the parts where the impasto is thicker and the handling more patient. The fresh clearness and brightness of tone remain. The white and smooth surface of the panel gives to the tints entrusted to it, the vibratory warmth which colour should always obtain from a bright, hard, and polished ground. If the paint were thicker it would become muddy; if it were less even, it would absorb rays which it ought to reflect, and the painter would have to redouble his efforts to obtain only the same amount of light; if it were thinner and more timid, or less generous in the flow of its contours, it would have that enamelled look which, admirable as it may be thought in some circumstances, would fit neither the style of Rubens, nor his intellect, nor the Romanesque spirit which breathes in his fine works. The two torsos which we have mentioned, rendered, let us suppose, as a nude study for this volume, or under the conditions of mural painting, could not have shown fewer superposed brush strokes. . . .”

“Still more, then, does his hand dismiss hastily and without insistence all secondary parts or those which he wishes to keep subordinate—large spaces of breezy air, boats, waves, nets, fishes, and other accessories. A mighty sweep of one colour, of brown which is brown here and green there, which is warm in the reflexes and golden in the hollows of the waves, descends from the sides of the boats to the bottom of the picture. Across this abundant and limpid pigment, the painter has carried the touches which bring out the real life and shape of his objects. *Il a trouvé sa vie*, to use a studio term. A sparkle or two here and there, a

reflection put in with delicate touch, and we have the sea. In the same way he indicates the nets, their meshes, floats, and corks; the fishes which plunge about in the slimy ooze, and reflect on their still dripping scales the peculiar colours of the sea; the feet of Christ, and the sailors' boots. You would say it was the climax of the art of painting: of painting severe in its purpose to represent, through the mind, eye, and hand of one in whom greatness of style was innate, ideal or epic subjects, whose object was to teach man to act always after the examples which they afford, and to combine the figurative, picturesque, and rapid language of modern times with the austere ideas of Pascal."

"Such, at any rate, was the language of Rubens; it was his style, and was therefore consonant with his own peculiar ideas."

"A little reflection will convince us that what astonishes us in his work is something altogether outside the range of his own deliberate intent—namely, the fact that an idea, no matter what, which occurring to him has not been rejected, that idea should result in a picture which, notwithstanding its neglect of artifice and endeavour, is never commonplace. In fact, we are amazed at the great results which he achieves through apparently the most simple means. If the science of his palette is extraordinary, its sensitive use is not less so; and a quality, with which he is not generally credited, adds to the attractions of all his others,—namely the calculation, and even sobriety, which he shows in a matter so purely external as the management of the brush."

"In these times we forget, misunderstand, or attempt in vain to abolish many things. I am not clear as to where our modern school obtained its taste for thick painting, and its love for that heavy impasto which constitutes, in the eyes of some of us, the chief merit of many works. I have never seen any really important examples of such work, except among the acknowledged painters of the decadence, and occasionally in the case of Rembrandt, who, though as a rule he did his best to avoid it appa-

rently was not always able to do so. Such a method was happily unknown to the Flemings; and as for Rubens the accepted master of passion, the most violent of his pictures are often the least charged. I do not say that he systematically starved his lights, as was too often done up to the middle of the sixteenth century; or, on the other hand, that he laid on his deeper tints with a thick impasto. His method, exquisite as he used it, has had to undergo all the changes brought into it by the demand for 'ideas,' and the multiplex necessities of modern art; but however far removed from archaic practice it may have been, it was equally far from the practices which have come into fashion since the time of Géricault—to instance a lately deceased and illustrious artist. His brush glides smoothly; is never choked; does not drag behind it that sticky mass which, accumulating on the salient points of everything, gives a look of relief which makes the canvas itself seem to stand out. He does not load, he paints; he does not build, he writes; his hand glides lightly over the ground, coaxing a little here, strengthening a bit there: with thin and limpid drag he spreads a broad glaze, suiting its consistency, degree of breadth or finesse, to each separate passage of his work. He makes economy of material or its prodigality, depend entirely upon local necessity; so that in the weight or marvellous delicacy of his touch, he finds an efficient ally to show us what we should dwell upon, and what we should dismiss with little attention."

I have ventured to give the whole of this quotation in spite of its great length, because nothing can be so useful to painters as accurate details and exhaustive explanations coming from a competent man who has had the opportunity of close inspection. To the public they are useful also, as enabling them to understand the great importance of that material labour of which, as they have never experienced it, they take so little heed; of which indeed artists, too many of them, are neglectful, as though they held the hand, that principal agent of the intellect, in undeserved contempt. People often seem to think that the whole work of a painter is merely to fill in with colour the space enclosed by



a couple of lines, and that the method of the work matters very little indeed.

I should much like to know what such sceptics as to execution would say if—when invited to hear some great orator—they should find his place filled by some worthy gentleman who, after explaining that the discourse was a written one, takes it for granted they would have no objection to hearing it read by a substitute; and then sets to work to declaim it after the approved fashion of the students of a certain learned university? How could they complain? They would have presented to them the complete work of the orator, with his arguments, composition, ideas and style. What could they need more? Nothing—but action, intonation, accent, tone of voice: in fact just those things which correspond to execution and touch in painting. They would, however, spare their ears by closing them; in the fashion in which they pass the pictures they theoretically admire with heads turned the other way, because these are wanting in gesture, intonation, and accent.

We can even, to a certain extent, judge the character and intelligence of a man by the way in which he carries his head, holds his arms in walking, or places his feet—and yet the hand of the painter is to be denied the power of manifesting the sentiments and emotions of his individual soul! Sometimes after hearing a man talk for a few minutes, even when we do not understand what he is saying, we can form, from his tone and accent, from the *timbre* of his voice, a close notion of his moral temperament. We can discern that concord and harmony between the different parts of him, which is so strongly marked in everyday life that we need do no more than glance at a passer-by in the street to decide his class, even if he do not belong to that section of mankind, whose nature and profession alike it is, to be more impressionable and more harmonious in their constitution than their fellows. For artists, male or female, are artists, simply because each emotion which seizes them, or each impression which strikes their senses, so entirely occupies them for the time being,

as to subdue or elevate their vitality, as though it alone had any power over them.

§ 7. *Handling and touch from the point of view of the artist's personality, and the individuality of his objects—Rubens—Franz Hals—E. Delacroix—Faults of academic teaching.*

Such a contention has absolutely nothing to rest upon. It is evident to every one that the work of the hand is in direct sympathy with the sensations of the eye and the operations of the intellect; of which it is, in fact, the immediate expression. A contrary idea would be, even theoretically, unintelligible. There are many people who profess to be able to decide the character and habits of a person from his handwriting. In such a matter there must, of course, be a great element of uncertainty in the mere fact that many handwritings are quite without significance, because many people are commonplace, and devoid of character. But even this insignificance is not devoid of meaning. Every man of observation must have often remarked how handwritings seem lively, hesitating, precise or vague, energetic or smooth, calm or impetuous, elegant or vulgar, in close accord with the temperament and salient characteristics of the writers. The mistake of "graphology" lies in its pretence to divine the complete character, and to paint an exhaustive portrait of a man from a few written lines. To do so, is manifestly impossible; but the study, when confined within proper limits, does certainly rest upon a solid basis.

For similar reasons, and under analogous restrictions, we may assert that a general sympathy exists between the handling and temperament of an artist, so long at least as the former is spontaneous and sincere. It is evident that when, from prejudice, a painter substitutes an acquired, imitative and commonplace manner for that which is natural to him, he places himself on a level with the poor copyists who force their hands to the exact reproduction of the stiff, ordinary specimens of calligraphy, the *æ plus ultra* of writing masters.

This calligraphy of touch is one of the characteristics of Italian painters. They blend, fuse and polish, with unremitting care. The first school to inaugurate a different system was that of Venice. But it is in the Flemish and Dutch schools that touch or handling is to be found in all its glory, boldness and individuality.<sup>1</sup> It is in these that we must look for the power of the

<sup>1</sup> After speaking of the mistakes of the modern painters who neglect handcraft under the idea that their imaginings can be worked out as well by one instrument as another, Fromentin goes on to observe, with great justice: "To this misconception the able and gifted painters of Holland and Flanders have replied in anticipation by their handcraft, which is the most expressive in the whole range of art. The practice of Rembrandt, too, protests against the same error, and possibly with a better chance of obtaining attention. Take away from the pictures of Rubens the spirit, variety and appropriateness of their touch, and you deprive them of a necessary phrase and indispensable feature; you strip them of the only spiritual element which they possess to transfigure their materialism and their frequent deformities: because, in so doing, you suppress their delicate sensibility, and, to go back from effect to cause, you kill all life and purpose by producing a picture without a soul. I would even say that the absence of one touch may destroy some artistic feature. This principle is so unailing that in one kind of production, no work which is thoroughly and truly felt, can fail to be well painted; and every work in which the author's hand is happily and honourably visible is, from the fact alone, one which both springs from the intellect and appeals to it. Upon this point Rubens sets an example which I commend to the notice of anyone who is tempted to sneer at deliberate intention in brushwork. There is not, even in the great works of his which appear sometimes so free and even coarse in manner, one single detail, great or small, which is not inspired by sentiment and instantly rendered by the happiest mechanism. If the hand were less rapid, it would be left far behind by the fancy; if the imagination were less quick to improvise, the life infused would be diminished; if the execution were more hesitating or more difficult to comprehend, the personality of the work would suffer in proportion as its heaviness increased and its spirit diminished. Moreover, we must remember his unequalled facility and dexterity in playing with obstinate matter and rebellious instruments, the fine management of his tools, the graceful fashion of disporting himself over his surfaces, his fire and spontaneity; in sum, the power and magic of execution which, with other men, degenerates sometimes into mannerism, sometimes into affectation, sometimes into pure but mediocre intellectualism,—but with him, as I repeat for the hundredth time, is the direct expression of an exquisite sensibility, resulting from the union of an eye of rare power and balance with a sympathetic and submissive hand; and not least, from the possession of a great, happy, and confident soul kept freely open to every impression. Throughout the immense catalogue of his works I defy any man to discover one which is entirely perfect; but it is equally impossible

brush carried to its full legitimate extent, and sometimes even beyond it. There are artists who are equal or even superior to Franz Hals, but in handcraft no one has excelled him ; he gives it such a commanding personality that it takes the place of genius. The infallibility of his hand and eye are extraordinary. He launches his brush upon the canvas, and that with so great certainty and address, that it always falls upon the precise spot where it is wanted, and never remains there one moment longer than absolutely necessary for the production of the required effect. His canvases have all the appearance of improvisation, and all its advantages. We cannot conceive him deliberating over, retouching or correcting his work. He carries out his idea at once and never returns to it. His free, audacious handling gives to his works a strangely energetic appearance, which compensates for the want of thought, and the absence of all the superior qualities of imagination and poetic feeling which great artists possess, but which he has not. He evidently cannot be placed so high as either Rubens or Rembrandt ; but this does not prevent our deriving a great deal of pleasure from his works, in which their powerful individuality is the most important factor. His touch in itself betrays so clearly the character and temperament of the man, that we can easily imagine him as he sat at work ; at work so interesting, fascinating and individual, that we leave it with the greatest regret.

We have now got far enough away from the theory which places perfection of art in that which it represents, and primarily requires the artist to sink himself in his work. Judged from such a point of view, no pictures could be more defective than those of Franz Hals. Not only does he always put himself forward, never allowing himself to be forgotten for a moment, but we must also acknowledge that he does so with an amount of insistence and

to avoid the conviction that in the eccentricities, faults, ay, even in the fatinities of this noble spirit, is to be found the mark of an incontestable grandeur. This outward mark, the final seal upon his work, constitutes his sign-manual." (Fromentin, *Les maitres d'Autrefois*, p. 71.)

freedom which is a little brutal, and not without an appearance of excess which must scandalize over-fastidious purists. Such a fault, however, does not shock us in the least; it only springs from a little exaggeration, and we prefer it greatly to that affectation of impersonal perfection which modesty extols—for others—but which possesses no comprehensible utility. When the workman is allowed to sign his name at the foot of his finished work, it is absurd to forbid him to imprint his handwriting upon its body.

Of course we do not wish artists to imitate the manner of Franz Hals; all imitation of what belongs to another man's personality is not only bad, but leads directly away from the desired goal. But no other example which we can think of, shows so clearly the great importance of technical skill, especially of that part of it which is called handling. Indeed chiefly through it, Franz Hals was a great painter; it is the principal and determinant cause of his fame.

Manner in painting is not to be considered as a manifestation of artistic personality only. It has also great importance from the point of view of the individual expression of things. Colour alone will not render the whole nature of objects. Besides form and tint, every object possesses a density, lightness, softness and durability of its own. How are you to render by one and the same touch the elasticity of human flesh, the rigidity of stone or metal, and the suppleness of woven fabrics? Silk, satin, velvet, wool and linen—has not each its own peculiar texture? Must not the bloom on the peach, the granulation of the lemon or orange be taken into account? Does not the furry coat of the hare require a different treatment from the plumage of the bird? Is it not true that all these differences can be made known to the eye by an undefinable something, of which the painter must make himself master, if he do not wish to leave us in doubt as to the essential nature of the objects in his pictures?

His touch must be made to agree with the constitution of things, and it must also accommodate itself to the character of

the subject. It is possible to paint with a besom; on the other hand, a miniature requires the lightest and most tender handling. A picture which has to be seen from a distance must be carried out in a bold and energetic manner, with those vigorous brush-strokes which give power and accent to a painting; whilst too much softening or fusion would cause the tints to seem emasculated and insipid to a fatal degree. We have only to look at the pictures of Guérin and Girodet to become alive to the faults of too soft and enamelled a surface. The eye finds no repose in the uniform and monotonous planes, over which it glides without encountering anything able to arrest it. Without approving of that thickness of impasto which makes some of the works of the romantic school look like relief maps, full of valleys and mountains, we are sure that a certain amount of variety is necessary in order to prevent undue fatigue of the retina, so liable to occur.

The eye possesses strange susceptibilities, the effect of which is felt long before we are conscious of them, and still longer before we have discovered their cause. We all know how cold and monotonous a perfectly-regular design, drawn with the compass, appears to us. The same design, when drawn by hand, at once appears more lively and interesting. Why? Simply because an absolutely straight line, the continuity of monotony, annoys and fatigues the eye by the mere absence of variety. The same line, traced by the hand of man, becomes more artistic in character, just because it is geometrically less perfect. The most careful imitations of ancient jewellery and furniture are comparatively valueless, because, in these days, the hand of the art-workmen is ordinarily replaced by the unerring action of machinery. Whence comes that peculiar charm of Greek architecture, never to be found even in those monuments which have been constructed after the most exact measurement of the most admirable remaining models? The causes of it are many; but there is one which escaped observation until, as has been said, an English architect, Mr. Penrose, bethought him to take careful measurement of every part of the Parthenon—when he discovered that, instead of straight lines,

curves were everywhere used. Almost imperceptible as these were, they were yet sufficient to create that peculiar consciousness of grace and variety, which is the property of this treatment.

Diversity and multiplicity of handling produce an analogous effect in painting, while too much blending produces one quite opposite.<sup>1</sup>

For a similar reason, oriental stuffs and vases have a peculiar harmony and "vibration" of their own, even when they are of one colour. The Chinese and Japanese, who possess so delicate a feeling for colour, always take care slightly to graduate even the tints that are apparently the most uniform, by placing one shade over another in its pure state; blue upon blue, yellow upon yellow, red upon red. Thus they obtain a diversity of value which prevents the eye from becoming wearied. M. Ch. Blanc, in his *Grammaire des Arts du Dessin*, informs us that Delacroix made use of a similar practice.

"Alive to this law, either through study or intuition, Eugène Delacroix never attempted to spread a tint uniformly upon his canvas, even when smoothness of surface—in sky or architectural shadow for instance—was required. Not only did he break up his surface by the use of superimposed tones, but he added to its broken appearance by his peculiar mode of working. Instead of laying down his tints with a sweeping brush, he dabbed them on over more even preparations of the same colour; and the latter being more or less visible throughout, produced unity of impression when seen at a proper distance, whilst giving to the colours, so self-modulated, a singular depth and vibratory power. For want of a comprehension of this law, many distinguished painters have portrayed African skies by a wide expanse of tinted paper coloured and softened according to rule, but stretching from left to right in desperate monotony, and dis-

<sup>1</sup> This observation is universally applicable, even in printing. There are some kinds of type which quickly fatigue the eye, and they are the most uniform kinds. The Elzevir type is not at all fatiguing, because it is so varied and even irregular.

playing nothing but the pretended fidelity of the *procès-verbal*. Compare with these flat, cold and unbroken skies, that in the hemicycle of Orpheus in the library of the Corps Législatif, or those in *Demosthenes haranguing the sea* and the *Crusaders entering Constantinople*, at Versailles. We need not go so far as this, but simply compare the paintings in the library with those in the cupolas, where some decorator has achieved skies after the ordinary formula, and the distance between a colourist and he who does not care to become one, will at once be seen."

I will now transcribe, from Thoré's *Salon de 1847*, an observation suggested by the *Odalisque* of Delacroix: "Besides style and quality of colour, Delacroix manifests another peculiarity of execution which is nowadays very rare even with the most skillful executants; his touch, his way of placing colour and managing the brush, is always regulated by the forms on which it is employed, and helps to mark their relief. As the modelling turns, his brush turns with it; and the impasto, following the direction of the light, never breaks the rays which fall upon the picture. Supposing a statue were carved against the grain; whatever mathematical exactness of form it might possess, it would never look right. But in painting we do not in practice think so much of a system so unbending; most painters work as pleases them on their canvas—often contradicting, without knowing it, the geometry of nature and the natural construction of objects. In building a wall we may use the trowel as we like; but in caressing the face of a mistress we do not commence with the chin."

We may then, it seems, look at manner from two distinct points of view: one relating to the personality of the artist and necessarily varying with it; the other, to the objects rendered and the vibration of colour. It would be mere loss of time to attempt to teach energetic and vigorous handling to a man of feeble and vapid temperament. We cannot transform men. An ideal education is one that teaches every man to develop to the utmost, the good faculties that he possesses. Nothing will ever turn an imbecile into a man of talent.



But there is one thing which may be taught, and that is a good method. This both the Dutchmen and the Flemings thoroughly understood. Compare those amongst them whose individuality has hardly any mutual resemblance—such as Terburg, Metz and Peter de Hoogh—and you will be considerably surprised to find that their processes are identical, that their education was the same, and yet that it has not hindered each from preserving his separate personality in its completeness.

This is what should be taught in the official *atelier*, instead of the suppression of natural aptitude and intellectual tendency. What sense is there in allowing young artists to grope in the dark after methods of doing what has been so often done, to commit themselves to pernicious practices, to waste a large part of their time and their energy, and often to acquire faults from which they never recover? Would it not be a thousand times more reasonable to teach them at once, how acknowledged masters did such and such a thing, and to leave them in their turn to make use of the methods taught for the free expression of their own ideas; instead of effacing all their originality, infusing superannuated traditions, and leaving no outlet for their personality but in the search after methods which they might have learnt at first not only without danger but with very great advantage?

The worst of it is—our professors themselves do not know much more than their pupils about the processes of the great masters of execution. They have either never studied them closely, or have deemed themselves to be the better examples; and they are all more or less impregnated with the retrograde spirit of the academies to which they belong. They are academic by nature, education, habits and profession; and so, of course, they teach academic principles—imitation, docility, narrowness of spirit, compact theories, predetermined admirations and dislikes, the dangers of spontaneity. They care about nothing else. They absolutely reverse the true order; neglecting the practical teaching which might be usefully given without danger to that artistic personality which should meet with the most conscientious respect—because

it is the germ of all art—and reserving all their eloquence for the explanation of what they call the immutable laws of the beautiful, the eternal principles of the (academic) ideal.

§ 8. *Monumental painting—Its conditions—Its decadence.*

This question, like that of monumental sculpture, has been so exhaustively treated by M. Viollet-le-Duc in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'Architecture Française du onzième au seizième siècle*, that it is not possible to epitomise the article. His observations are often so precise and so full of significant technical details, that more than once we shall have to content ourselves with literal transcription; simply eliminating anything that may not seem to be absolutely necessary to the object we have in view.

The differences between monumental and easel painting are easily comprehended:

1st. An easel picture displays a scene which must be looked at through a frame, as if through an open window. It must be carried out with the intention of being viewed from some one point; it must have unity in the direction of light, and unity of general effect. The one point from which such a picture can be well seen, is always to be found upon a perpendicular line drawn through that point upon the horizon which is called the point of sight.

2nd. Easel painting has arrived at a most remarkable perfection of technical skill. Great artists are able to reproduce the most delicate effects of light, and to concentrate the attention of the spectator upon the point that is the chief object of their efforts, and which they isolate from all its surroundings with the utmost care.

3rd. Easel painting always seeks more or less to deceive the eye. It must of necessity do so, as its aim is to produce the effect of relief upon a flat surface. If a palace has to be represented, its different planes must be shown; and we must be able to see at a glance that the columns of a peristyle, for instance, are not at the same distance from our eyes as the rest of the building.

These three observations will serve to mark very clearly the principal obligations imposed upon the monumental painter.

1st. If unity of point of view be a *sine qua non* in a picture, how comes it that we allow a scene—depicted according to the laws of perspective, of light and of effect—to be so placed that the spectator is forced to look at it from a position four or five yards below its horizon, and possibly a long way to the right or left of this correct point? This has to be tolerated whenever monumental painting makes use of the processes proper for easel pictures. In the great epochs of art such enormities were forbidden. During the Middle Ages, in pictures painted upon walls at all kinds of elevations, painters never took into account either horizon, locality, effects of perspective or the rigid laws of light. Again, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they resolutely grappled with the difficulty by composing the scenes to be represented in proper perspective; placing the personages and objects to be painted exactly as the things or people would themselves appear in the same situation. So we see, in the ceilings of that epoch, people who show hardly more than the sole of the foot, and others in which the knees hide the breast. Such boldness resulted in a great success. It is obvious, however, that if, in such a method of decoration, the horizon be supposed to be placed at a height of two yards from the ground, there would be only one point of sight, and that two yards above the floor of the room, for the whole horizontal surface. Now, so soon as the spectator shall move from this point of sight, the perspective of the whole decoration will become false; all the vanishing lines begin to dance, and to give a feeling of sea-sickness to people who are accustomed to trust to the perceptive power of their eyes.

This system, nevertheless, can give good reasons for its existence, since it had its origin, at least, in a reasoned-out principle. It possesses a disadvantage in that it condemns the whole scheme of decoration of a room to appear true to one person alone, he who happens to occupy the proper point of view. Yet we cannot altogether condemn it.

But what are we to say of that so-called system of decoration, which places flat, painted ornaments side by side with scenes in which truth of effect, of light and shade and of perspective, is aimed at? Representations, in which reality of appearance is produced by the use of relief and varying planes, are altogether out of concord with these flat embellishments. We must acknowledge, then, that those artists have reason on their side, who contend that monumental painting, whether it depict scenes or compose mere ornaments, has to deal with plain flat and solid surfaces which should be so treated as to produce not illusion, but harmony.

But in any case, even if we admit both methods, there is one fact which is beyond all doubt; and that is, that the *choice* must be made, because it is utterly impossible to combine the two.

2nd. As for this said choice—it seems to us to be easily made, when we take the trouble to reflect upon the rôle which painting should play when allied to architecture. It is beyond dispute that the effects which form its legitimate aim, are effects of *ensemble*, in which the architecture should preserve its proper importance. When the two arts are only brought into juxtaposition for the sake of mutual destruction, it would be very much better to keep them apart. They can only work together harmoniously through mutual concession. Should the painter pretend to be indifferent to the architectonic nature of his work, and concentrate all his efforts upon his own particular department—as if he were working on his own account—real decoration would become impossible, as such conditions could only make it result in discord. We have seen this very clearly, ever since pictures executed in studios replaced wall pictures carried out on the spot. Since that change took place, the true fundamental conditions of pictorial decoration have been completely overlooked. The fault had already become conspicuous in the best works of monumental painting even in fresco of the Renaissance. The better traditions of the past were forgotten. When Michael Angelo decorated the vault of the Sistine chapel, he never gave a thought to the building itself. His vault is

splendid in its unity, but what of the room which it covers? The master cared nothing about it, and his paintings altogether destroy the architecture.

There has been no lack of artists who have been seduced by this example, and who have acted as if the two arts were only combined for mutual annihilation. In these days, the painter and the architect work quite independently of each other, and every day the abyss which separates them becomes wider.

This divorce of two arts which for so long were wedded, has become more accentuated by the very efforts which have been made in recent times to bring them together. It is obvious that in the majority of such attempts, the architect has made no effort to foresee the effect which paintings carried out upon the surfaces prepared by him would really have; and that the painter has only looked upon such surfaces as canvases stretched in a less convenient studio than his own, and has never troubled himself about the surroundings of his work.

To make the combination fit and complete, the painter must cease to look upon his picture as an isolated piece of decoration. He must condescend to allow his art to play the part of an auxiliary; and, consequently, must impose upon it such restrictions as may be necessary in order to render harmony possible.

One of the most imperative sacrifices which he is called upon to make, is the abandonment of any attempt at realistic illusion. When easel pictures enter into a struggle with the realities of nature, we do not condemn them, because they are only acting after the law of their kind. But in the decoration of a building, such attempts are out of place; because even partial success is impossible, on account of the disabilities imposed by perspective, which makes everything seem untrue to such spectators as do not happen to be placed immediately in front of the point of sight.

Any kind of painting which aims to deceive the eye—such as the imitation of ornaments in relief—is equally out of place, and for a similar reason. No attempt can be made to reproduce in their true relative dimensions the real modelling and appearance of

reliefs, of mouldings, of columns and their capitals; their forms must be interpreted in such a way as to bring them within the reach of paint. Indeed, when an effort is made to reproduce, by means of colour, the modelling of such a thing, for instance, as a stone arcade—even if we allow that from one standpoint a certain amount of illusion is the result, a sidelong glance will at once destroy its reality; will cause its non-salient but unaccountably visible parts, its mouldings and profiles, which refuse to accommodate themselves to the laws of perspective, to produce a most disagreeable effect.

In the decorative painting both of ancient times and of the middle ages, the greatest care was taken to avoid everything which seemed to be an attempt at impossible illusion. The chief object was always to please the eye; never to deceive it.

We may divide monumental painting into two categories: the representation of subjects and purely ornamental work.

Of the first kind we have very few specimens left to us from antiquity. But the paintings upon the so-called Etruscan vases discovered in the tombs of Corneto, are carried out after the same manner as the Byzantine pictures of the eighth and ninth centuries, and those on French monumental structures of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In subject pictures, each figure is in the form of a dark silhouette standing vigorously out from a light ground; or, *vice versâ*, a light figure relieved upon a dark ground—its features, the folds of its draperies, its muscles, &c., are merely indicated by dark lines. Accessories receive hieroglyphic treatment, the human figure alone being developed in its real shape. A palace is rendered by two columns and a pediment; a tree by a stem topped with a few leaves; a river by a serpentine stroke of the pencil, and so on—like those landscapes which serve as backgrounds in many of the productions of the Italian Renaissance.

We may say, then, that artistic races have regarded monumental painting as illuminated and but slightly modelled drawing; and that when it gives us good design wedded to harmonious colour, it has done all that we should expect. The difficulty is no doubt

great, and the result considerable. It is by the use of these apparently simple materials, that the great successes in coloured decoration have been achieved that are impressed so strongly on our memories.<sup>1</sup>

We will give M. Viollet-le-Duc's observations upon this point in his own words, premising that he has devoted fifty years of his life to the study of French monumental art.

“Harmony in monumental subject-painting is always regulated by essentially decorative principles. It changes in quality of tone, but it always remains equally applicable to subject or ornament. Thus, for instance, in the twelfth century it was absolutely similar to that of Greek painting. Backgrounds were kept light, figures and ornaments were put in with full local colour instead of with what we call demi-tint; reliefs were light, almost white, in their most salient parts; modelling was carried out in brown for every tint alike; finishing touches, in light colour upon the dark and sombre parts, and in dark colour upon the light parts, corrected any spottiness in the *ensemble*. Colours were always broken, at least in broad light surfaces; black was sometimes used to mark relief; gold was admitted in brilliant parts, such as embroidery and the nimbus of a saint, but very rarely or never as a background. The dominant colours were yellow ochre, light red, greens of various shades; and, secondarily, rose-purple, light

<sup>1</sup> M. Viollet-le-Duc, in the before-mentioned article in his *Dictionnaire de l'Architecture*, establishes two important facts which are very creditable to the French artists of the middle ages. First, after the eleventh century we find, in the decorative designs of our artists, a truth of expression and gesture which is never seen in the Byzantine artists of the same epoch; they freed themselves entirely from priestly tradition and sought their inspiration in nature. French artists possessed truthful powers of observation in everything that related to drawing, to gesture, composition and expression, and emancipated themselves before their Italian contemporaries. The paintings and vignettes in such manuscripts of the thirteenth century as have come down to us, prove that France possessed, fifty years before the time of Giotto, men who had already achieved that progress in art which is generally attributed to the pupil of Cimabue, and to him only. Secondly, as early as the eleventh century they made use of colours ground with pure linseed oil.

violet-purple, and light blue. A brown line was always interposed between neighbouring colours ; whilst we very seldom find that the sense of harmony in twelfth century painters, allowed them to place, in immediate juxtaposition, two colours of equal values—they introduced between them some tint of value inferior to both. Thus, for instance, between a light red and a green of equal strength, we find yellow, or very light blue ; between a blue and green of equal values, a light rose-purple. The general appearance is soft, without harshness, but brilliant, and with a great look of firmness resulting from the use of brown outlines and white reliefs. Towards the middle of the thirteenth century a change in the quality of tone took place. The primary colours begin to prevail ; more particularly blue and red-green are no longer used except for transitions ; backgrounds become dark, reddish brown, deep blue, sometimes even black, and sometimes gold—the latter always diapered. White appears no more but in delicate lines for the sake of relief ; yellow ochre is only employed for accessories ; modelling is carried out in local colour. Tints are always separated by a very dark brown or even a black line. Vestments and draperies are in gold which is always either diapered or relieved with brown. Carnations are fair and bright. The general appearance is warm, brilliant, evenly sustained ; and sometimes it would be sombre were it not relieved by the employment of gold."

"Towards the close of the century another change took place. Tones became harsher. Black, reddish-brown heightened with black, and deep blue were frequently used for backgrounds. Vestments, on the other hand, were carried out in bright colours, —rose, light green, reddish-yellow and very bright blue ; gold was less often seen. Draperies of white, especially of greyish and greenish tint, were frequent. Some of them were polychrome, having transverse bars of red embroidered with white, black and gold. Carnations became nearly white."

"In the fourteenth century the dominant colours were different tones of grey, grey-green, light green and light rose ; blue never



appears in a pure unmixed state except in backgrounds, which are kept light. Gold is rare; backgrounds of black, reddish-brown or yellow ochre, are most common. The brown outline is strong, the modelling very weak and feeble; white reliefs disappear, but those in brown or black are frequent. Flesh tints are very light. The general aspect is cold. The colour is sacrificed to the drawing, as if the painters feared to diminish the effect of the latter by the proximity of brilliant tints."

"Towards the second half of the fourteenth century backgrounds begin to be carried out in various colours, like mosaics in which many tints are damasked into each other. Draperies and flesh-tints remain light; black disappears from backgrounds, and is only used to define form; gold still exists in the mosaic of grounds; accessories are light neutral tint relieved with light colours and ornaments of gold. The general aspect is soft and brilliant. Colours are much broken, whilst at the beginning of the fifteenth century they appear in broad, intense masses. By the latter time modelling is very much neglected, and the direction of the light very vaguely determined. The most salient parts are the lightest in colour, which is in obedience to the principles of decorative painting. But in backgrounds and accessories—such as trees, palaces and buildings generally—we already find traces of a more realistic manner; linear perspective is sometimes attempted, but aerial is not yet thought of. Fabrics are skilfully rendered, and flesh delicately modelled. Gold is used more or less everywhere; it is found in draperies, hair, in the details of every adjunct, and we find none of those sacrifices which are rightly looked upon as necessary in painting a picture. The most insignificant detail is depicted with as much care and is endowed with as much light, as the principal character. This indeed is one of the conditions of monumental painting. Upon the walls of a saloon, of necessity always viewed obliquely, that which the eye demands is a well-sustained general harmony—a surface equal in its solidity and richness, without imaginary hollows or blank spaces, which, though meant as a foil to the surrounding beauties,

derange the proportions, and destroy the meaning of their architectural framework." <sup>1</sup>

This is one of the principal inconveniences resulting from the substitution of ordinary studio pictures for monumental painting. How is it possible to reconcile the series of planes, of reliefs, and of hollows, and of various distances, with the preservation of an architectonic character? We may refuse to admit the reality of the optical illusion which is the object, more or less, of painting, and we may not be carried away by its artifices; yet it cannot be denied that the impression conveyed to the brain from a picture, is sufficiently like that which results from the reality, to make its intrusion into the midst of architectural calculations, and across the lines and surfaces of a monument, a cause of great inconvenience.

The simplification in the method of execution demanded by monumental painting, has necessarily considerable influence over the conception of such works. In an article upon Jean Goujon, Gustave Planché expresses his astonishment that the artist in question should have given to his caryatides in the *Salle des Cent Suisses* heads of so realistic a type, copied directly from models, and therefore full of individual vitality.

They certainly do convey a regrettable feeling of contradiction and unfitness. Women when reduced to act the part of supporting pillars, are evidently called upon to abandon their characteristics as individual women. We do not require them to bring to the performance of their new function anything but variety and suppleness in the leading lines of their figures. Differences of character, of temperament, of intelligence, all that is outwardly made manifest by modifications of physiognomy, can have no place in this peculiar mode of employing the female form. These, therefore, should be carefully eliminated; not because life and reality are vices in sculpture, as Gustave Planché seems to insinuate, but because a caryatid is rather an architectural member than a statue in the proper sense of the word.

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'Architecture Française*, t. iii. pp. 67, 68.

We might interpret in a similar sense what the same critic has elsewhere written on the subject of religious painting. He declares that the principal merit of the Virgins of Raphael is their want of vitality, seeing that, in his opinion, "life would profane them!"<sup>1</sup>

In reality there is no question of anything of the kind. The truth is—monumental painting, whether religious or not, is pre-

<sup>1</sup> Here is the whole passage (*Portraits d'artistes*, I. pp. 215-6); it is very curious:—"To every man accustomed to the study of living nature, it is evident that the Madonnas of Raphael do not and could not live. The lips, so refined and pure, could never talk; the chastely downcast eyes could never look up; the cheeks, whose contours excite our utmost admiration, never glowed with such blood as runs in our veins. That this is true, is the chief reason that Raphael was the greatest of religious painters; if life be impossible for the beings whom he created, it is not because he has stupidly omitted one or many of its elements, but because he has simplified, through his own powerful will, the forms in which life makes itself known to us. In order to bring the human face within the true harmony of lines of which he dreamed, he eliminated those petty details which nature presents to us, with which actual life cannot dispense, but which, nevertheless, are not absolutely necessary in a picture. He subdues that lively colour which indicates rude force and health; he softens those muscular masses which explain and produce movement; he effaces the folds of the eyelids: and all this perpetual simplification of the lines of the human figure, far from being an evidence of ignorance or want of skill on the part of the artist, serves to signify that he has conceived and is realising a form more pure and elevated than that of ordinary humanity. His knowledge enables him to abbreviate; his wish for generalization causes him to simplify. Again, all the Madonnas of Raphael address the soul rather than rejoice the eye. There reign in their eyes an innocence and a sincerity so divine, that life, should it touch them, would but profane. They are, it may be, incapable of movement, but then motion is not necessary for their celestial reveries. They do not breathe the same air as we do. The words which their mouths might pronounce would not have the same sound as ours. Although they resemble the women of earth, we know that they were not born among us." We ourselves are far from sharing in the opinions, which are here quoted, of Jules de Goncourt; we must, however, express our pleasure in the fact that Gustave Planche has not carried his admiration of *dead* painting into subjects which have nothing to do with religion. In the sequel he explains very learnedly that, though M. Ingres did well to borrow the style of Raphael in his treatment of religious subjects, he deceived himself when "he attempted to generalise particular truths; he misunderstood the history of the art which he professed, when he attempted to treat the ordinary run of subjects after the Roman manner." He recognises, in fact, that outside religious painting, truth and life resume their rights; and he reproaches Ingres in that he failed to understand so much.

eminently decorative, because its alliance with architecture forbids it to be anything else ; and under such conditions, any attempt at exact and minute reality would be out of place, and inconsistent with the sacrifices of all kinds which such subordination imposes.

The painting of ornament or coloured decoration independent of any subject, also possesses great importance, and in many cases is only properly applied with very great difficulty, because its laws change with every variation of place or object. As M. Viollet-le-Duc very justly observes, it may increase the size of a building or reduce it ; it may make light or darkness ; it may break up proportions, or give them additional value ; it may bring things near, or bear them away ; it may give either pleasure or fatigue, division or unity ; it may hide faults or exaggerate them. Such art is a fairy who may be lavish either of good or evil, but is never indifferent. By its aid pillars swell or grow thin, grow tall or short ; at its will, vaults are lifted or brought close to us ; surfaces are extended or curtailed, our eye is charmed or offended, our impressions concentrated into one dominant thought, or all sense of unity destroyed. With one stroke of the brush it can ruin an ably conceived work ; but also it can turn the humblest buildings into attractive dwellings ; it can make a bare and cold saloon put on such an appearance that thenceforth it is remembered as a bright and cherished spot.

Must we then conclude that the application of decorative painting requires colourists of undoubted genius, and that no man should venture upon its practice unless he be a Veronese or a Titian ? Certainly not. The difficulties which seem so formidable, and really are so to us, were the most simple things in the world to artists who had before them the traditionary examples of nations accustomed to paint the interiors, and very often the exteriors, of all their buildings, within certain well understood limitations. There is no necessity for colourists such as the Venetians or the Flemings ; the Thibetans, the Hindoos, the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Persians are equal to all that we want. None of these races require artists of genius to enable them to produce porcelain,

carpets, and shawls of marvellous colour. They do their work naturally, and with the greatest possible certainty; their processes are childish in their simplicity. Let us examine a Persian carpet or Cashmere shawl. "Leaving on one side the choice of tints, which are always sober and delicate, we see that, out of ten colours, eight are broken, and that the value of each comes from its juxtaposition to another. Take an Indian shawl to pieces, thread by thread; separate its various tints and you will be surprised to find how little brilliancy they individually possess. There is not one of the wools but would appear very dull beside our dyes; but so soon as they have passed through the skilful hand of the Thibetan weavers and have become fabrics, they excel all our tissues in the perfection of their harmony. Now this quality depends entirely upon a thorough knowledge of the reciprocal power of tint, upon the correct arrangement according to the influence which each exercises upon the other, and above all upon the relative importance given to broken tints. They do not attempt to achieve a startling combination, in which as many crude colours as possible are brought into inharmonious juxtaposition; they aim to give some one point as much value as possible by surrounding it with neutral tones. A square centimetre of turquoise blue upon a large surface of reddish brown, will acquire so great a value and depth that at a distance of ten paces it will still appear blue and transparent. Multiply its size by five, and it will not only itself become dull and undecided, but it will also cause the warm brown which surrounds it to appear heavy and cold."

M. Viollet-le-Duc, who has given as much care to the study of this class of decoration as to that which has been previously mentioned, thus sums up the result of his observations:

"There are only, as everyone knows, three colours, yellow, red, and blue—black and white being merely two negations: white being uncoloured light, and black the absence of light. From these three colours all the multitude of tints is derived by means of infinite commixtures. Yellow and blue produce greens; red

and blue, purple; red and yellow, the various shades of orange. In these colours and their various complications, the presence of black and white gives increased or diminished light. Just because black and white are two negations, and are foreign to the idea of colour, their proper destiny in decorative work is to bring out the values. White is luminous, and black both develops its luminousness and acts as its limit. The decorative painters of the middle ages, either from instinct or more probably from tradition, always introduced either black or white, sometimes both, into their scheme of colour. Arguing from what is simple to what is complicated, we shall be able to arrive at an explanation of their methods. We only intend to speak here of the decoration of interiors, where the light is diffused. During the whole period of the middle ages, when monumental painting played so important a part, we observe that the artist always began by adopting a key of colour, to which he adhered throughout the complete work—church or whatever else it might be. Now these keys of colour (*tonalités*) are not at all numerous; they may in fact be reduced to three: 1st, that obtained by yellow and red; 2nd, by red and blue; these necessarily include the intermediary tints, such as green, purple, and orange, always used with black and white or black alone; 3rd, the key obtained by the use of mixtures of all the three colours, gold and black being used to extend its compass, the former replacing white in the luminous reflexes.

“Now let us suppose that the value of yellow is represented by 1, that of red by 2, that of blue by 3; by mixing red and yellow we obtain orange, value 3; yellow and blue produces green, value, 4; red and blue, purple, value 5. Suppose, again, we wish to place colours upon any surface in such a way that their harmony shall not be injuriously affected, and that we have to begin with red and yellow. We must make the yellow occupy at least twice as much surface as the red. If we then add blue the harmony becomes more complicated; its presence necessitates either a proportional increase of the red and yellow surfaces, or the use of green and purple tints to give them strength; and these two tints

must not occupy less than a quarter and a fifth of the total surface respectively. These elementary rules of harmony were always observed by the decorative painters of the middle ages. They very rarely made use of all the colours and tones which were at their command, on account of the innumerable difficulties resulting from juxtaposition and the relative importance as to surface of each tint—a matter of rigid rule. When all three colours and their composites were made use of, gold became indispensable; it was charged both with the completion and, if necessary, the reconstitution of harmony. Going back to the most simple principles—perfect harmony may be obtained by the use of yellow and red (red ochre), especially when heightened with white. It is impossible to obtain harmony with yellow and blue, or red and blue, except by the aid of intermediary tints. Should you wish to decorate a hall with red and blue, or yellow and blue ornament upon a white ground, you would find harmony quite impossible; for yellow (yellow ochre) and red (red ochre) are the only two colours that can be brought together without the mediation of other tints.”

Obedience to other equally elementary principles is no less indispensable. The same ornament apparently has dimensions which vary according as it is carried out in dark upon a light ground, or in light upon a dark ground. If, of two pilasters of similar height and bulk, the one be decorated in vertical lines and the other with ornamental bands, the former will appear, at a little distance, both the taller and the thinner.

We need not go further into details of the kind. We will content ourselves with recommending those who are interested in the question to study the article, to which we have more than once referred, in the *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'Architecture Française*.<sup>1</sup> It is a veritable treatise upon chromatic harmony by a man thoroughly master of the subject. It contains a multitude of facts

<sup>1</sup> Article *Peinture*, t. vii. The engravings after drawings by M. Viollet-le-Duc are examples to the point.

as interesting as they are little known. They who read it will see that the laws of the harmony of colours can no more be grasped by mere instinct than can those of musical harmony; that attentive, exclusive and long-continued study is necessary; that the excellent decoration of the monuments of antiquity and of the middle ages, and our modern ill-success in the same branch of art, are due, the former to careful study, the latter to absolute neglect of the laws of which we have been treating. Our artists have lost their grasp of the true tradition; nor is this the worst, they imagine they can supply its place by chance inspirations and individual instincts. What would they say of any good fellow who, in blissful ignorance of the laws of harmony, thought he could compose symphonies equal to Beethoven? They would call him an idiot. Yet nothing will prevent us, in our almost universal contempt for science, from treating as a matter of individual taste the often peculiarly-complicated problems of the harmony of colours. There is much discussion at the present moment on the subject of decorative painting. Attempts are made to decorate *hôtels de ville* and palaces of justice. We hope, in case these projects are followed up, that those who are invited to carry them out will be asked to begin their task by the study of the essential conditions of monumental painting. But no, to be strictly truthful, we do not indulge in any such hope. Every report and circular handed about or published upon the subject, shows clearly enough that there is no desire for monumental art. A certain number of more or less famous artists, ill or well chosen as chance may direct, are requested to furnish a certain number of grand studio pictures, referring in a greater or less degree to certain given subjects, and of a predetermined size: when these are finished they are paid for, and incontinently stuck on their destined place on the wall, without one thought as to whether they agree or conflict with the surrounding architecture. So the thing is done; and this in modern France is called *the protection of art*.

We cannot tell whether historic art will, or will not have



reason to rejoice at such a state of things. But one thing we do know, and that is that monumental painting, in the true sense of the word, will only gain from it an additional proof of the contempt in which it is now held, from sheer ignorance of its first and last principle.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE DANCE.

THE dance, like music, is a result of the reflex action of the nerves of feeling upon the muscles.<sup>1</sup> Any moral impression, such as joy, or any physical one, such as that caused by strongly marked music, gives rise to an excitement which seeks interpretation in gesture, movement and attitude.

The union of the two causes made dancing one of the arts. The primary element is the movements and gestures resulting from moral excitement. As may be supposed, the variety of these is as infinite as that of the feelings to which they owe their birth—anger, joy, fright, sorrow, admiration, and enthusiasm are outwardly expressed by very different signs. Other modifications, again, spring from the general characteristics of nations, or from the particular characteristics of individuals.

These disunited circumstances would never, if left to themselves, have produced an art; it was first necessary that they should be regulated and bound together by that common bond of discipline which is called rhythm.

Each complete group of movements or attitudes, the expression of some definite sentiment, had to be brought into subordination to some particular rhythm, with the effect of combining all its particular and individual manifestations within a common limit, and condensing similar emotions so as to produce a single

<sup>1</sup> We shall explain this action more fully in the succeeding chapter. The dance occupies so inferior a place among the arts of our day, that we have not thought it necessary to consider it in detail, notwithstanding its great importance in ancient times.

and unique result : expressive power is increased by the banishment of discord, and the concentration of movement is a potent factor in the development of its general features.

This fact is very clearly seen in the case of those races with whom the dance still subsists as a manifestation of collective sentiments. National, war, and religious dances, are all essentially expressive.

But, besides these spontaneous dances, there are the spectacular, introduced into our operas under the name of ballets. These do not necessarily exclude all idea of expression ; but their chief aim is to delight the eye by grace of form, of movement, and of attitude—and thus they may fairly be called decorative dances.

As for the dancing of the drawing-room—we do not mean to speak of it, because to us it does not seem possible to establish any connection between art and such mere rhythmic promenades, which no more resemble national dances than a modern procession resembles a dance of religion.

We may regret that this is so. The dance might, even in our day, possess some of the utility which it could boast in former times. It might become an efficient aid to physical, and even to moral education. But how can we dance so long as we are expected to invite three thousand people to do so in a space that will barely hold five hundred ? There can be no doubt that the general tendency of the time is to avoid the great crowd of pretended duties which resolve themselves into formal ceremonies and a mere matter of bowing. Clubs supersede balls ; everywhere we hear the same complaint—the difficulty to find dancers. It is not impossible that dancing may come into fashion again some day in this western world, but this cannot be until it has undergone some vast modifications, which shall do something to reinstate it in its ancient position as one of the arts.

At one time the dance was a real art, having a serious import of its own. Greek tragedy itself was the offspring of the sacred dances of the Dionysia, the traces of which lingered to a late date in the dramatic chorus. Dancing is to be found in the first rank

of the arts among all the peoples of antiquity. Up to the twelfth century it was preserved by our ancestors in their religious ceremonies in churches and cemeteries. Its life was prolonged even to the seventeenth century in certain districts—near Limoges for example. They footed it gaily at the court of Henry IV. ; whilst at that of the *Grand Monarque* the measure was almost grave. But now, apart from ballets, the dance has lost its significance in France, so far as the fashionable world is concerned ; if it may be said that character dances are still found in certain country places, and in the public casinos of some of our great cities.

Pantomime, necessarily included in any definition of the art of movement, may be considered in connection with dancing, though the association would seem to be founded upon analogies more apparent than real. Pantomime is almost always a mere corruption or exaggeration of dancing—in the sense that it too often strains the natural signification of movements in the attempt to make them convey ideas which would be much more easily and clearly expressed by words. This, it need not be said, is a complete violation of the first rule of art.

*Tableaux vivants*, which for some years have enjoyed considerable popularity, may also be looked upon as hybrid productions devoid of artistic value. In fact, their first condition, immobility, places them in absolute contradiction to the definition of dancing. Neither do they fall within the same category as painting or sculpture, for of these, the essential characteristic is the interpretation of life by means of purely conventional processes. Besides, in most cases *tableaux vivants* are nothing but pretexts for the exhibition of women in different degrees of nudity ; a fact of itself sufficient to place them without the limits of art. The impressions which we receive in looking at the Venus of the Louvre, have nothing in common with those inspired by the sight of a naked female. Such spectacles may be in complete accord with the habits and sentiments of the society which has brought them into fashion, as, too, may be the short petticoats of the ballet girl ; but these things, or the like, are happily entirely foreign to our subject.

## CHAPTER VI.

## MUSIC.

§ 1. *Brief review of the History of Music.*

THE music of savages usually consists of the mere infinite repetition of one movement, which, if varying in rapidity, is always regular. With the negroes the number of singing notes is limited to four, when there are no external circumstances to cause modifications. Melody is but vague in form and without variety. The monotonous dwelling upon a single note satisfies them; the rude rattle of the drum forms their most lively enjoyment.

The Mongolian races, particularly the Chinese, are very superior to the negroes; but they, too, seem long ago to have reached the limit of their capacity for progress. The imperfection of their artistic organization is manifested by their want of skill in perceiving and rendering delicate gradations.

The gradation and harmony of sound are as unknown to Chinese musicians as those of colour and perspective are to their artists. Their scale is composed of but five notes. What is still more surprising is the fact that having learnt, both theoretically and by the experience of their instruments, the use of the chromatic scale, they still refuse to employ semitones, without which no musical art is possible. They sing but little. Like the negroes they prefer the sound of instruments to that of the voice; and, in sound as in colour, loudness is the quality which most delights them. It is impossible for a European ear to

discover whether there be a key note or not to govern the different parts of a Chinese air. Their composers seem to begin, continue, and end by the help of pure fancy rather than by any rules. They have no notion of harmony. To produce their melodies, they use wind and stringed instruments, contrivances made of sonorous stones, bells and sheets of metal or of wood, while drums mark the time. At the caprice of the conductor, trumpets and cymbals, gongs and tom-toms overwhelm all melody with tempests of deafening noise.

So far as we are able to trace the past, we see that the music of the white race, although also springing from the desire for rhythm, has a very different character from that of negroes and Chinese. Its chief characteristic seems to have been a vague and dreamy sentiment; its movement was measured and even slow, although in the dance it became accelerated into an extreme rapidity. The pictures which have been recovered in the most ancient Egyptian monuments, indicate the predominance of song by the presence of singers in the act of beating time. And besides—the important part played by the harp, the lyre, and other instruments of soft and modulated effect, sufficiently shows how different the music of such a people must have been from that of the Mongolian races.

The most striking of these differences is contained in the fact that the Mongolian races never arrived at either the conception or the employment of semitones. The white races, endowed with more sensitive organs, and therefore capable of grasping and comparing the most minute intervals, exaggerated the number of these semitones in their earliest tonic scales. The most ancient and authentic Sanskrit treatises upon music, divide the scale into seven intervals, and between these again, twenty smaller and unequal intervals are distributed. The Persians admit twenty-four; the Arabs seventeen. The Pelasgic system also, was that of the octave divided into twenty-four quarter tones. A little later, an important modification found its way into the musical system of the Greeks, in the complete transformation of their

scheme, and the creation of the diatonic system. This distributes the succession of sounds into one series of intervals called tones and semitones, which formed the basis of the music of the middle ages and the Renaissance, and began by the substitution of the tetrachord, or series of four sounds, for the simpler division of the octave. In this new system the chromatic style, as it is now called, was first introduced by the supersession of the quarter—by the semi-tone.

In spite, however, of all these modifications, Greek music ever retained its intimate connection with speech. It never emerged from the condition of *melopœia*. Its office was to guide the voice, to mark the rhythm of verse, and to accentuate the ruling character of a poem by that of its accompaniment.

In the Greek dramas each personage sang or intoned his part on a particular note, determined by the prevailing sentiment of his *rôle*, and by the kind of mask which he had to wear; which, in their turn were naturally gay or sorrow-struck, terrible or benignant, according to the individuality represented. Everything had to be kept in subordination to the dramatic situation. Character and its accidental peculiarities were suppressed for the sake of a general and unchangeable type. The number of their masks was very small, and, for the same reason, all their music could be brought into three main categories or styles—the Lydian, expressive of sorrow and complaint; the Phrygian, of violent and excited passion; and the Doric, consecrated to the interpretation of tranquillity, calmness, temperance, manly and dignified courage. The last named is the majestic style, as well in music as in architecture.

Declamation is governed by musical rhythm. This regulates its movement and determines its cadence, with a tyranny so absolute that in these days we should be hardly able to endure it; although in ancient times no man thought of complaint, because rhythm was then universal, even in conversation, and its monotonous cadence grateful to the ear.

We must remember that only within the last half-century, we

have begun to emancipate the Alexandrine from that solemn uniformity both in versification and recital, which, to our fathers, alone seemed worthy of tragedy, or in keeping with epic dignity. Even the form of poetic works was once regulated by rhythm. It has been quite recently demonstrated that the tragedies of Æschylus are made up of a series of parts which mutually correspond in number of lines, in movement of phrases, and even in choice of words. An anonymous and very ancient Greek manuscript which has been translated by Mr. Vincent, shows us that the Greeks made a distinction between two different kinds of melody—that of prose, produced by variety in the successive accents of a phrase; and that of music, consisting in “the fitting arrangement of consecutive sounds.” The musician “who would well compose a song, need only take account of the natural affinity of sounds and of the quality proper to each.” There is not a word as to sympathy with the sentiments to be expressed; because in the ancient conception, such sympathy was confounded with and formed part of the sound itself—just as the moral impression of an object or spectacle was looked upon as an integral part of it.

This point is of great importance, because it is so completely in accord with what we learn of the Greek genius from the other arts. The theorists of antiquity looked upon their harmonies and their musical styles as different modes of establishing a connection between sounds in general and the musical scale, explaining their moral effects as the consequences of the mutual connections of the various sounds. They looked upon it all as a mere matter of mechanism; as an arrangement of means to an end, possessing as its own special characteristic and inherent property, the power to communicate a certain impulse to the soul—as though the feelings of men were the effect and expression of his moral impressions, instead of being their cause. The creative power of music lies in its ability to recall forgotten impressions; it works in a manner directly opposite to that insisted upon by the ancients. The power of melody does not reside in itself, but in the human soul, which uses it as a means to convey ideas. This perpetual



substitution of exterior effect for internal cause in the theories of the Greeks, is a most important point, and one to be carefully taken into account by anyone who desires to comprehend the extent of the revolution effected by modern artistic science and practice.

Even at the epoch when the Greek system was most complete, it was still much less extensive than ours. The tables of Alipius contain only three octaves and a note, both for instruments and voice; moreover, one of these octaves was entirely neglected in practice.

But it may perhaps here be said that the diagram of Plato contains a system of almost five octaves. True, but Plato, himself, acknowledged that his musical laws were not meant for practical use; they were not fitted for mortal ears, and may therefore be looked upon as purely ideal conceptions. The sentiment of *tonality* was much less pronounced among the Greeks than it is with us; and the employment of simultaneous and different sounds, or harmony, so thoroughly developed in modern music, was with them in embryo. Their only use of harmonic combinations, was in the accompaniment of the voice by instruments.

Greek music, when carried into Italy after its fatherland had passed under the sway of Rome, made no progress, and passed into complete decline in the first centuries of the middle ages; for it fell under the general anathema pronounced against everything attached to Pagan forms of belief. Charlemagne attempted to rescue it from this state of neglect, but in vain; and after his time, all further recovery was prevented by scholastic influence. From the mere fact that it was partly founded upon mathematical calculations, it became the prey of the doctors, who condemned it to the petrified immobility which was the fate of everything that fell under their hands. They found a pious amusement in arranging its notes into rosaries, crosses, ovals and lozenges, without troubling themselves about any useful results from such labours.

After many unsuccessful experiments, then, the beginning of the seventeenth century at last witnessed the establishment of the

diatonic system, with unequally divided intervals between the tones and semitones. When once the modern system was discovered, progress was extremely rapid. Melody, being the direct expression of individual sentiment, naturally took the lead, and for a long time possessed a practically undivided empire—as was the case with line in the arts of design. Then, in the musical drama, as the instruments of the orchestra increased in number, complications were gradually introduced. The Italians led the way in the search after these new vehicles for effect. By their action they gave a great impulse to the development of harmony, although it was not their deliberate intention to do so; for they looked upon it merely as an auxiliary of melody. The orchestra, which, it appears, should be the proper domain of harmony, set itself to sing, and the singer complacently accompanied it. In fine, all the apparent progress made by harmony ended in the triumph of melody. To this end Guglielmo, Paisiello and Cimarosa consecrated all their labours. The genius of the Italian race has never felt itself called upon to penetrate the psychologic mysteries which form the real *raison d'être* of harmony. It makes use of it as a method to enliven or deepen the effect of melody, but never attempts to analyse its power to manifest the tempestuous feelings of the soul. The Italian mind has never conceived that harmony may possess as much dramatic power as melody. It has failed to comprehend that the latter expresses rather the passions that can be defined, reproducing only that side of our nature which can be easily perceived and grasped; while the other, the obscure and shadowy side, that underflow of agitation which eludes definite portrayal and the precise narrowness of expression proper to melody, is the natural domain of the former. Harmony is as a deep and distant echo of the internal tumults that disturb the depths of man's nature. It adds the noise of the tempest to its other effects. Such is its real function in human music. It is so understood by all the great composers—such as Gluck and Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. The Italians have never arrived at a conception of this fact; they have con-

fined themselves too rigidly to the cultivation of the music of the senses. According to their notion, the chief function of harmony is to soften the somewhat dry precision of naked melody; to bathe, so to speak, all over-defined contours, and too rigid lines, in demi-tint, and so to add much to the power of pleasing. It is a kind of glazing to which the artist has recourse for the softening of his colours; it gives them a sweeter tone, acting in fact the part of *chiaroscuro* in painting.

It is not then in Italy that we shall find the real inventors of harmony. The Italian composers invented the orchestra, but only in exceptional cases did they assign to it its proper *rôle*. Gluck seems to have been the first man to make proper use of it. Side by side with the drama which was being developed on the stage, he installed the true orchestra to act as a running commentary. The story of the representation of *Iphigenia in Tauris* has been often told.

When Orestes sings that calmness is returning to his soul, the accompaniment becomes gloomy and tumultuous. When Gluck was reproached with the contradiction, he impatiently answered, "Never mind Orestes! he says he is calm, he lies!" Haydn, at nearly the same period, was an equally powerful agent in bringing about the revolution; but the credit of its complete accomplishment is due to Mozart. Ever since his time, harmony has enjoyed a clearly defined office. All hesitation has disappeared. The orchestra has finally taken its proper place in the action of the drama, developing the characters and rendering them complete. Harmony in the hand of Mozart became a living tongue, indicating the darkly understood enigmas and the undefined obscurities buried in the human soul.

But one man has surpassed him in expressing the mystery of the passions, in interpreting the agitations of the heart and mind. It is difficult to imagine expressive power greater than that of Beethoven. Music has now embarked, like all other arts, upon that psychological voyage of discovery which has been its goal for ages. Harmony has gradually become the equal of melody, and

even threatens to deprive her rival of a large share of such importance as is still left her; that is if we believe a man who adds to the most remarkable genius, musical theories of startling audacity. Such is the programme sketched out by Wagner for the "music of the future." Yet he is too true a musician to fail to perceive, that, if such a programme were pushed to its extreme, it would result in a mutilation of the art and the destruction of one of its chief means of expression. The exaggeration would be quite as bad as that of the Italians, although in an absolutely contrary direction. Because harmony was long sacrificed to melody, is that a reason why the reverse of the process should now take place? What good would be got by it? The answer is beyond doubt, when we examine the constituent elements of music, and enumerate the conditions of its expressive power—which we shall now endeavour to do.

§ 2. *Music both a science and an art.—Signification of sounds.*

Music, like architecture, is at once a science and an art. The internal relations of its elements are mathematical; and, although most musicians omit to study their art from this point of view, it is impossible thoroughly to understand its nature if this consideration be put on one side.

It may be said that music is the art of choosing, arranging, and combining sounds. Such a definition implies, again: first, a knowledge of the meanings and possible relations of sounds; and, secondly, a directing idea to govern the selection and combination of them.

We can only acquire a knowledge of the significations and mutual relations of sounds by observation. This study forms the scientific part of music; the artistic part, on the other hand, lies in the arrangement and composition.

We have not here, however, the materials for a complete definition.

Have separate sounds an absolute signification of their own?

What do we mean by possible relations? These questions must be answered before we go any further.

It is obvious that sounds have no absolute meaning within themselves. They only obtain one by their connection with our perceptions. Their signification is entirely relative and subordinate to the conditions of human intelligence and sensibility.

We may say the same thing of their possible mutual relations. In reality any combination is possible, but some are agreeable to us, and others disagreeable. As music is an art, and one of its duties is to delight the ear, it must perforce select the former and reject the latter.

Hence we must consider the whole question from the triple point of view of physiology, physics, and mathematics, before considering it artistically.

*Signification of Sounds.*—We know that every impression produced at the extremity of a sensory nerve is transmitted to a ganglionic centre, whence it is usually reflected, by the agency of a motor nerve, to the one or many muscles which it has power to contract. This is what is called *reflex action*.

This action plays a very important part in our life. It affects not only the muscles but all the contractile organs. The heart, the circulatory system, and the organs of digestion are all within its province. Every sensation a little more lively than usual, accelerates the circulation of the blood and quickens the action of the heart. Sometimes, though rarely, it produces a contrary effect. Sudden news of misfortune strongly affects us internally. In most cases, when the excitation is moderate, it is merely transmitted from one part of the nervous system to another. A sensation calls up ideas and emotions which again give rise to others. Successive waves, following and replacing each other quite independently of our will, fill us with that consciousness of the unity and permanence of our being, which has been so greatly abused by philosophers ignorant of physiology.

There are three methods through which nerves in a state of high tension may obtain relief: the excitement may be passed on to

other nerves which are not in direct relation with the muscles, and so produce a series of sentiments or ideas ; or it may communicate itself to one or more of the motor nerves, producing muscular contractions ; thirdly, it may excite the nerves of the ganglionic system, and by its rebound stimulate one or more of the vital organs.

It would possibly be more accurate to say that, in the majority of cases, relief is obtained through all the three issues at once. Nevertheless the proportions, as a rule, are so very unequal that the afflux of nervous force may be said, speaking generally, to be localised in this or that part of our organs to the complete exclusion of the rest.

But what has all this to do with music ? This : as every active excitement of the nervous system is manifested by a contraction of some part of our organism, it is but natural that the muscles which contribute to the production of the voice, should not be exempted from this general law. All animals, man included, express their sensations not only by movements of the body, but also by cries of joy or pain, according to the feeling that agitates them at the moment ; and from these cries we can tell the sensation which has caused them.

Mr. Herbert Spencer, the eminent English philosopher, has demonstrated, by a series of experiments, that variations in the voice are the physiological results of changes in the sentiments of the singer. Each inflexion or modulation is the natural consequence of the predominant sensation of the moment ; and he concludes that the human voice possesses a power of expression far excelling that of any instrument, because of the relations existing between mental and muscular excitation. The significance of musical sounds must be studied through observation of this constant mutual connection in the mechanism for rendering our impressions manifest. Our habit of referring every cry and accent of the voice to some particular sensation, has the result of making us unable to hear such sounds without at once being reminded of their cognate sensations. This, then, is simply the result of

association of ideas, founded upon a habit of physiological observation.

We must not attach too much importance to this conclusion. The simple fact that our impressions are almost always expressed by the same sounds, is sufficient proof that we are physiologically predisposed to manifest each emotion by an *ensemble* of particular signs.

There is nothing to surprise us in the fact that we are able to recognize the meaning of such signs, without the aid of much experience or deliberation. The face and voice of an angry man will frighten a child so soon as it is old enough to notice them; indeed such comprehension is so natural, that it is found even in animals.

We do not insist upon this objection, because the observations of Mr. Herbert Spencer hold good in a much more important point: namely, that every moral impression reacts upon the muscles and organs of the voice, giving to the sounds produced, a particular character which conveys a rigidly determinate moral signification, easily recognisable by everyone, whether through natural instinct or experience.

Mr. Herbert Spencer fortifies his theory by a series of examples which show how much moral impressions depend for their manifestation on the clearness, the *timbre* of the voice, on its loudness, and on the intervals and comparative rapidity of its variations. Now these peculiarities of the voice, which are regulated by the excitation of nervous sensibility, form the distinction between singing and ordinary speech. The inflexions of the voice, which are the physiological results of pleasurable or painful sensations, are, in vocal music, carried to their utmost power. The characteristics which to us seem the exclusive property of singing, are simply those of passionate speech exaggerated and systematised.

These resemblances may even be carried farther. Although emotions usually excite and contract the muscles, they may, in some cases, produce absolutely contrary effects. Anger, fear, hope, joy, when they reach a certain point, manifest themselves by a

general collapse of the body; and of this the symptoms most marked are a sudden relaxation of the muscles and consequent tremor. This tremor naturally spreads to the organs of the voice, and affords a method of expression of which some singers make very effective use in passages of extreme pathos. The *staccato*, on the other hand, is suited to passages which express gaiety, *abandon*, resolution, confidence: precisely because these demand from the vocal muscles efforts analogous to those which produce decided, resolute, and energetic movements of the body through the muscles of gesture and locomotion. Tender and peaceful sentiments are expressed by flowing sounds demanding from the singer but a small expenditure of force. The variations of effect produced by changes in the time, are to be explained by the same law. From it, we obtain the different measures which regulate such changes: some slow, as *largo*, *adagio*; others rapid, as *andante*, *allegro*, *presto*. Everyone knows how much the impression of a musical passage may be modified by the substitution of one of these movements for another. The same observation is correct concerning rhythm. Every kind of human effort demands intervals of repose. Such intervals when systematised, result in rhythm.

We may conclude, then, from what has been said, that the choice of sounds, viewed from the point of their moral significance, is never left to chance, as is supposed by those theorists who only see in music the mathematical relations of sound, and reduce melody to a kind of geometrical arabesque. It is quite true that the choice is quite unconscious, and that the composer never dreams of analysing his notes, before combining them, after the fashion of Mr. Herbert Spencer: in this we find the great distinction between art and science. The artist makes use of the materials furnished him by reality, without any other pre-occupation than his desire for a complete manifestation of his ideas: his choice is partly instinctive, and partly guided by experience. The business of the philosopher, on the other hand, is to seek out the reasons of things. He is quite justified in his endeavour to find those



hidden motives of selection to which composers give so little heed. It would be absurd to deny the existence of such motives, simply because they do not always make themselves strongly felt. It would be quite as reasonable to deny the mathematical relations of the notes. Has music only existed since scientific men have been enabled to invent instruments capable of enumerating the vibrations of sounds? Most certainly not. The ear made spontaneous choice of the sounds which suited its construction; and science has had to be content to prove, subsequently, that such suitability was the result of certain numerical relations between the vibrations composing the different notes. The same law will be found governing their moral signification.

### § 3. *Sound considered by itself.*

What we have already said about the discoveries of M. Helmholtz will justify us in passing rapidly over this subject.

Sound is the result of vibration upon the ear. To be convinced of the fact we need only strike a tightly stretched cord. The quicker its vibrations, the higher will be its sound, and *vice versa*. As for *timbre*—it is caused by the fact that a vibrating cord is divided into a series of bands of different lengths, in such a way that, in addition to the fundamental note to which it is tuned, it produces a whole chorus of harmonics of both higher and less intensity. The number of vibrations in these harmonics exceeds that of the fundamental notes four or five times. They will be twice, thrice, or four or five times as numerous, according as the knots produced by vibration divide the cord into segments, decreasing by division into two, three, four or five. The quickness and length of the vibrations always maintain the same relative proportions. And these vibrations go on at once without any confusion or contradiction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The harmonics are not the only notes which have to be added to the fundamentals. When two notes are vibrating together, they give spontaneous birth to two more: the one is called the *differential* note, because the number of vibrations which produce it, equals the difference between the vibrations of the two principal

Every vibratory body becomes the centre of several systems of independent waves of sound, each of which corresponds to a particular note; but all bodies do not possess similar powers of vibration, and this difference is the cause of the great varieties of *timbre* or tone. In musical instruments, strings are the most prolific in harmonics. From them we may obtain as many as sixteen at a time. As for the form of the curves described by vibratory molecules, M. Helmholtz has shown that they exercise no influence on the quality of sound.

Whence comes the pleasure which we experience in listening to the simultaneous vibration of certain notes, whilst, in the case of certain others, we feel only pain or weariness? It would be evidently a mistake to refer it entirely to the numerical connections between vibrations, because we should then have to inquire why, among these connections, some should be pleasing to us and others displeasing. We must look for the reasons elsewhere.

Since the times of Euler it has been believed that the reason why simple concords please the ear is that they suggest ideas of order; while discords excite notions of disorder, of numerical anarchy. Such explanations have been long fashionable, and they have been all the more acceptable from the fact that they really explain nothing. It is a case of metaphysics applied to music. We must not believe, however, that because they have been accepted for so many centuries, such reasonings are no longer in fashion. They are the whole life of official æsthetics.

The real causes of the different impressions are purely physiological. We all know that when we sing above a closed piano, the corresponding strings of the instrument vibrate in concord with our vocal notes.

The three thousand fibres which terminate the filaments of the acoustic nerve may be considered as three thousand separate strings, each of which seizes and reproduces the fundamental

notes; the other, which was discovered by M. Helmholtz, is called by him the *additional note*, because the sum of its vibrations is equal to those of the two notes from which it springs.

vibration to which it is attuned, whatever may be the complexity of the waves of harmony set in motion. But these waves, instead of following one another and combining into a series of parallel movements, mix with and cross the one with the other, causing mutual annihilation at the points of intersection. In this case the nerve cord, instead of receiving a single impulse, finds itself subjected to the influence of two vibrations which, not being in unison, produce intermittent sounds, alternately strong and feeble. These changes are manifested by what are called *battements*, that is, by successive swells and falls. The resulting sensation is most disagreeable to the ear, just as intermittent light is to the eye. The annoyance is greatest when the *battements* are produced at the rate of from thirty to forty per second. Above and below that figure the effect is less unpleasant.<sup>1</sup>

These *battements* do not spring only from discord between fundamental notes. They may be produced by conflicting secondary notes, or by discord between a fundamental and a compound note. In such cases they are less perceptible, but we cannot be sure of their limits; much depends upon the delicacy of the ear affected and the kind of instrument employed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The reason why the irregularities of a lamp fatigue the eye so quickly is that they compel the retina to be continually accommodating itself to the changes of light. The irritation of the ear under similar circumstances is also to be explained by purely physiological causes.

<sup>2</sup> This does not prevent the continual employment of discords in modern music. The note markedly occupying the chief place in the music of to-day is a dissonance serving to contrast and point the tonic, or key-note. In fact, in it discords prevail, acting as does antithesis in poetry, and may be said to be the necessary result of "temperament," as explained by M. Laugel. In the major scale, pure and simple, there are not two intervals of exactly equal length. If the attempt be made to keep a series of octaves *pure*—that is to say, to keep at distinctly true harmonic intervals, the octaves, the fifths, the fourths, and the thirds—insuperable difficulties at once arise. It will unhesitatingly appear convenient to solve the problem by keeping to intervals of octaves, so as to preserve the principle of tonality, and then to subdivide each octave into equal parts. This system, by its simplicity, has done an immense service to music. It lightens the labour both of composition and instrumentation. It admits modulation; that is, the passage from one tone to another with flexibility and ease. Be it understood, nevertheless, that

To the Greeks the third was a discord: some discords which are very disagreeable in singing or in stringed-instruments, are hardly perceptible on the organ, flute, or piano.

M. Helmholtz, after very numerous experiments, has established the following classification:—

Absolute Concords: octave, twelfths, double octave. Perfect do.: fifths, fourths. Medium do.: sixths, major thirds. Imperfect do.: Minor thirds, diminished sixths. Within these there are nothing but discords marked by more or less rapid *battements*.

By this we see that purity of concord depends upon the identity of harmonics; and that the numerical coincidence of vibration between fundamentals is not sufficient to ensure it.

We need not push our examination into the discoveries of this learned physicist any farther. It is enough for our purpose to have shown, that the rules which govern the arrangement of notes equally with those governing the choice of sounds, depend entirely upon the facts of physiology; and that the more or less mystic explanations of metaphysicians, are mere idle fancies without any sort of scientific value.

From these premises we must now endeavour to arrive at such conclusions as, from an æsthetic point of view, they may seem legitimately to bring forth.

#### § 4. *The musical "arabesque"—Expression in music.*

We shall not trouble ourselves to consider the cloudy excursions of those who wish to make music a kind of cabalistic art, in which in this displacement the notes alter; for there is a difference, if a fractional one, between the vibratory relations of qualified and those of true, or harmonic notes. Small though it be, it is sufficient to cause *battements* (one in a second, between the false and the true fifth). It then becomes desirable to compensate on one hand, for the loss in the other of harmonic purity; and the salve of wounded sensibility is to be found in discords. From this spring their influence and rapid, overwhelming growth.

The inconveniences of the system are so patent and grave that M. Helmholtz demands the sacrifice of "temperament," and a return to pure concord. To this end, he has constructed an organ-harmonium. But unfortunately its complication is greater than that of the piano, and must of necessity hinder its success.

a revelation of what they are pleased to call "the infinite" is to be found. This school of declamatory sentimentalism has, happily, seen its best days: it has left its place to another, which, by a reaction, would reduce the musical art to an *arabesque* of sounds.

This latter theory, the offspring of pure diletantism, is perhaps still more dangerous. It acknowledges that "a musical sound has the same internal power of pleasing as a pleasant smell or flavour; and that certain combinations of sound, provided they do not violate the mathematical laws which govern vibration, also afford considerable pleasure to our sensibilities." . . . It admits that the human ear is so constructed as to be able to enjoy certain special delights which have no name in our language, and consequently cannot be explained to those who have never experienced them. These sensations and pleasures consist in the perception, through the ears, of a series or an assembly of lines forming vibrations or sonorous waves, which are superimposed or combined in the atmosphere. "These combinations of sounds and movements are to the ear, what the pure arts of decoration and ornament are to the eye: such as fanciful arabesques, and tail-pieces, flowing designs for stuffs and tapestry. Philosophic ideas, sentiment, imitation, literary illustration—these things have no more to do with music than they have to do with the design of a damask or brocade, or with the decorative painting of our old cathedrals . . . . Such designs as the decorator evolves out of his own consciousness, and carries out with the help of line and colour; are composed by the musician in sounds, which are his materials. Rhythm is his chalk, and harmony his colour-box. A symphony is, in fact, nothing else than a vast decorative painting, in which all the lines are in movement, and in which the different parts of the picture are successively discovered by the ear, instead of simultaneously by the eye. . . . The general impression conveyed by music to the ear, is very similar to that which the eye receives in looking into a kaleidoscope."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Charles Beauquier, *Philosophie de la Musique*, p. 193 et seq.

This mode of estimating music seems to us to have no practical value. At most modern concerts one is sure to hear applause lavished upon the ingenious individuals who can so far falsify, for instance, the sound of the clarionette, as to make it imitate the hautboy and the flute; passing ten times in a minute from forte to piano; swelling its sound only to let it die; picking up a dying note and carrying it to the most tumultuous crescendo. An instrumentalist, who, by force of hard work and the torture of a good violoncello, succeeds in playing in such a way that a blind auditor would believe that he was listening to a mediocre violin, may count upon a complete success before such amateurs: who, to be sure, have reason, for they have learned by experience how difficult it is to teach a bear to dance lightly, or to render upon an old shoe the effects of the piccolo.

Side by side with the virtuosos who transform concerts into musical gymnastics, we must place the composers, who, instead of devoting themselves to the expression and development of the motives and sentiments which form the natural domain of music, attempt to extort our admiration of their dexterity by the fantastic arrangement of notes, and by the manufacture of musical fireworks.

Is it necessary to say that these are nothing but musical puerilities, caprices always more or less inconsequent and absurd, idle follies only acceptable to irrational dilettantism; anything rather than music?

M. Beauquier does well to admit that music exercises an influence over our feelings which we can hardly ascribe to the kaleidoscope: "Impressions caused by music are physically agreeable on account of the general activity which the vibrations induce in the nervous system. It is, so to speak, an access of life resulting from a shock, and the sensation is all the more pleasurable that the movement is regular, governed by the general laws which render matter appreciable by the senses. . . . As an immediate corollary of this sensation, we go through a certain condition of activity, bringing in its train feelings which may be

described in general terms as, of joy or sadness, of comfort or uneasiness, of energy or languor."

These concessions are not sufficient ; there is something in music over and above all this. That something is expression. We have no desire to look upon music as a language, in the complete sense of the word, after the fashion of the times. We believe that the author of *Alceste* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* was ill-advised when he endeavoured to find in music a power which it does not possess—namely, that of analytically expressing the passions of humanity. A language should possess an amount of precision which is totally wanting in music, not only for the expression of ideas, but even for the manifestation of sentiment. There is one fact, however, which is striking and undeniable—the marked analogy existing between the works of all our great composers and their own individual characters, their habits of thought and distinctive feelings. Mendelssohn, who was characterised by a broad and cultivated intelligence, wrote to a relation of his who asked him to set some descriptive poem to music : "Music for me, you must know, is a very solemn matter ; so solemn that I do not feel myself justified in trying to adapt it to any subject that does not touch me heart and soul. I should almost look upon it as a falsehood, because notes really possess a meaning quite as determinate as that of words, if it cannot be interpreted by words."

Perhaps this is saying rather too much. But, without going to this extreme, we may safely say that, between a certain number of sentiments and certain combinations of musical sounds, an undoubted connection exists. The remarks of M. Beauquier would apply to keys, considered from a general point of view. The minor and major keys affect us in two ways entirely different. But it would be going too far to reduce all music to impressions so vague and general. We must take account of the more definite impressions which result from the choice and combination of the individual notes. For without these, the whole art would resolve itself into a mere question of technical skill ; every *morceau* in a minor or major key would be, in its meaning and expressive power,

identical with any other composed in the same key. Facts are in direct contradiction to any such supposition.

A disposition to sing, marks a particular condition of the mind, a special exaltation resulting from the disturbance caused by some definite sentiment. For the expression of that sentiment, it chooses those sounds or notes which are most in harmony with it. If, then, the theories of Mr. Herbert Spencer be correct, as we believe them to be; if it be true that every lively emotion makes itself felt by muscular contractions which affect the clearness of the voice and modify its tone and power, influencing also its time and the rapidity of its vibrations: how can we possibly deny that all these modifications may be and are reproduced in music, which is nothing but a systematised idealisation of the language of passion? How can we contend that we are incapable of recognizing in music the identical intonations which we ourselves use whenever impelled by some determinate emotion?

Nevertheless, those who believe that music is an art entirely founded upon mathematics, in which the numerical combination of vibrations plays the ruling part, practically set up such a contention. They must have forgotten the rather important fact that the art existed long before their scientific experiments, and that these have done nothing to show why previous composers gave a preference to certain notes. Physicists and mathematicians weary their intellects, not in trying to divine the moral significance of sounds, which, indeed, they care little about, but in examining their relations from the narrow point of view of their respective sciences. They have been enabled to give us the reasons for a number of very interesting phenomena, which, notwithstanding their great importance, do not by any means constitute the whole art of music. They have put aside everything that belongs to the moral impression as not being part of their especial province; but this is no sufficient reason to deny the existence of such things.

Would they look upon the moral signification of sounds as an illusion, on the ground that it only springs from an association of



ideas? "From the mere fact that the perfume of a particular species of rose may recall, in all its freshness and distinctness, some long forgotten scene of our existence, should we be justified," asks M. Beauquier, "in concluding that different odours possess definite powers of influencing our imaginations? It is the same thing with music: it produces the effect of clouds, in which each man may see whatever he wills." This objection would have considerable force were these associations of ideas purely individual and accidental. But we have only to recal the observations, quoted above, of Mr. Herbert Spencer, to be convinced that the associations of ideas which determine the selection of musical sounds, have universality as their special characteristic; and that the diversities which have been discovered between the musical systems of different races and ages, are founded almost invariably upon differences of numerical relation, rather than upon the signification of the sounds themselves.

The objection has its root in a prejudice of the metaphysicians. They wished sounds to have their significations in themselves and by themselves. And when compelled to abandon this idea, they refused to admit any other explanation. It is ontology again; and we need not repeat our opinion of that species of intellectual infirmity.

§ 5. *Personality in music—Union of poetry and music—Melody and harmony—The special domain of music.*

ONCE more we find ourselves face to face with that conception which, in our opinion, is the foundation of all the arts alike—the intervention of human personality. Music is an art, not because it reposes upon an assembly of more or less precise and scientific facts, but because these facts are of such a nature that they give the artist an opportunity to express his own personal sentiments; to manifest his own mode of feeling and thinking; and to influence by such manifestations the feelings of all who are like him. Whether he address himself to ears or eyes is simply a difference of process, to be explained by individual predominance of either

organ, but possessing no power to change its fundamental artistic character.

No man has all his organs in perfect equilibrium. Physiology has not arrived at sufficient perfection to enable us to understand all the differences; but it is certain that all men, either hereditarily or by education, have received or acquired certain special aptitudes which are explained by the predominance of this or that part of their nervous centres. And more, this predominance ever induces them to exercise the most developed organ; that which constitutes their relative superiority. Their activity naturally takes this direction and, when it manifests itself soon enough, determines the vocation. This observation applies just as much to manual trades as to other employments. He who makes a first-rate statesman would have made but a mediocre philosopher. But it is specially in the arts, that these natural differences become most evident. The painter lives for his eye, the musician for his ear. While the former expresses himself by the help of line and colour; the latter does so by the choice arrangement and composition of sounds—just as the logician proceeds by reasoning, and the mathematician by formulas.

Doubtless these differences of procedure imply corresponding differences in the manner in which common matters affect them. It is certain that the impressions of the musician are less precise and palpable than those of the painter; but they are not the less genuine. His art is not the less on this account a true manifestation of himself with all the emotions through which he passes, and its power depends directly upon the depth and vivacity of his feelings. Music in which every man can see, as in clouds, whatever he tries to see, must necessarily be superficial, betraying mediocrity in its author. We must not conclude from the fact that we may change the whole character of a piece of music by modifying its rhythm or its time, that therefore it has no real expressive power. So much only proves that rhythm and tune are of the highest importance to the art.

The critics who deny all expression to music, or who, to say

the least, allow it but the vaguest and most indefinite significance, are consistent when they declare that they are unable to admit any classification of this art, to them so essentially indeterminate in its character, with the dogged precision of conventional language. They condemn opera as a hybrid refinement of bad taste only worthy of the present age of decadence.

To them we may answer that there is nothing more discordant in the association of words with music, than in the association of painting and sculpture with architecture. As to the accusation of over-refinement, it is to be presumed that they mean it to apply to the very invention of the art. It is not easy to imagine instrumental music as existing before singing, which latter most probably consisted, from the first, in the union of words and music.

Melody, which arranges sounds, has often been compared to drawing; and harmony, which combines them, finds its counterpart in the management of colour. The analogy is striking. From it, however, the false conclusion has been drawn, that melody is everything and harmony nothing. For those who see in melody nothing but drawing, and in drawing nothing but hard and dry outlines, it is natural that harmony should seem to be of small importance—because, in fact, it brings confusion rather than precision into clean-cut melody. It is a very different matter to those who look upon music as a vehicle for expression. In the hands of a genius—such as Gluck, or Weber, or Beethoven—harmony adds untold force to the significant power of melody, giving it a breadth and largeness of accentuation which it could never attain by itself.

Very few composers know how to use harmony in the way that Rubens and Rembrandt used colour. They are, most of them, so to speak, of the school of Ingres; they prefer form, and either fear or despise the complications of harmony. And if they are admirable musicians, just as the great draughtsmen of the French school are admirable artists, the fact does not prevent our belief that genius of a different sort might have succeeded in obtaining

from harmony such results as the Venetians and, still more, some of the artists of Flanders and Holland have obtained from colour.

Neither must we forget that harmony is quite a modern discovery. The ancients knew nothing of it. It is only within the last two hundred years that a really important part has been assigned to it. Purely instrumental music, such as the symphony, is quite a recent invention. How can we foresee what developments the future may have in store for it?

It is true that upon the symphony do those critics chiefly rely, who wish to confine music to the province within which Ingres did his best to enclose painting. "A symphony," says M. Beauquier, "is an architectonic structure made up of sounds, with its parts in movement, and signifies absolutely nothing in a literary sense. . . . In most cases composers would be very much puzzled to say what they meant to express. They arrange musical forms, and combine sounds, without thinking of anything beyond."

Yes, but why do they select one arrangement more than another? Why does one individual composer go to work in one way, and another in another? Why have the compositions of today a different character from those of yesterday? Can it all be a matter of chance? And how comes it that in all these combinations and "architectonic designs" of sound, we are able to recognize the nationality and character of their authors; and often even the moral situation in which they happened to be when they traced their "arabesques"? How are we to explain the asserted fact that by pure chance effects are produced upon crowded audiences which can be predicted beforehand with consummate certainty?

Of course such a thesis is entirely unsustainable. As Mendelssohn said—we must not conclude that, because the significations of notes are not immediately translatable by words, therefore they do not exist. It is true that there is no common measure between words—which represent the results of intellectual analysis—and notes—which are the spontaneous echo from the

concrete and deeply-felt impressions of our sensory life. Must we declare that such impressions have no existence but in our individual fancies, simply because analysis has not yet succeeded in explaining them ; nor language has found words to indicate their natures ? Do we even believe that words themselves, precise as they seem, convey exactly the same meaning to all intellects ; and that all the auditors of the same discourse receive therefrom the same ideas ? We know well that they do not. Yet no one would dream of saying that words are not susceptible of accurately determinate interpretation.

To be quite sure of our ground, we must remember that music, like all the other arts, has its own special domain. It addresses itself to one particular little group of sentiments, which its method of expression is admirably qualified to interpret ; and which, indeed, can not be interpreted in any other way. If we endeavour to explain them by means of words, they vanish like a cloud of impalpable dust ; like water vanishes when we attempt to grasp it in the hand. Yet both dust and water exist.

We all know what disastrous effects purely literary criticism, such as that of which Diderot was the chief exponent, had upon painting. The great idea of that critic was to reduce painting to be the handmaid of literature. Without taking any account of the particular exigencies and capabilities of each form of art—the critic would take away both colour and light from painting, or, at most, would assign to them a very inferior part : reasoning must take the place of imagination ; and every painter renounce the special aptitudes given to him by nature, in order to become the slave of a purely logical and philosophical combination.

It is the same with music. The critic, accustomed to analysis, desires to find in it, the clear and trenchant precision of his own analytical conceptions. He refuses to resign himself to the fact that the reason why art is not science—is exactly because it does not analyse, because ideas are outside its province and that its object ever is, in a greater or less degree, the personality of the artist himself, who thus expresses not only the impression

of the moment, but the very compound of qualities and methods of thought by virtue of which he is a poet, a painter or a musician, rather than a philosopher.

The emotions of the musician penetrate to his soul through his ears, and become outwardly manifest through different combinations of sounds ; just as those of the painter reach him through his eyes, and are interpreted by arrangements of line and colour. To blame either the one or the other for his manner of feeling ; or to pretend to apply to him the rules which we find useful in analysing ideas and logical syllogisms : is about as reasonable as if, in reading an English book, we should be shocked at the violation of French grammatical rules.

A very simple physiological observation explains this fact. You may submit the optic nerve to every disturbance caused by electricity, heat, sound, and the like, but you will never get it to convey any other impression than that of colour. Irritate the auditory nerve in any way you please, and you will obtain no impression but that of sound. This brings us to the conclusion that the musician has for distinctive character a particular irritability of the organs of hearing ; and as a result the acoustic nerve partly usurps the functions of the other organs, and becomes the principal intermediary agent between him and the exterior world. Everything resolves itself into sound and is expressed by notes, the measure of such predominance being an exact indication of his musical aptitude. Precisely the same thing takes place in the case of the painter. We have here the cause of the very common difficulty felt by men who are not so constituted as to form a true idea of artistic conceptions. An analytical intellect, however developed it may be, is not sufficient. Goethe, in spite of all his conversations with Mendelssohn, never could be made to understand music.

As for the musician himself—although he is perfectly conscious of his impressions, he is no more able than anyone else to explain them in a precise manner. He cannot do so, because analytical language does not suit them ; and because, in fact, their only

adequate expression is to be found in the very combinations of sound of which an explanation is demanded. The only way to explain a sonata is to play it. To attempt to do it in any other fashion, would be not only useless, but harmful.

If then we leave the purely technical parts on one side, the æsthetics of music may be reduced into a very small compass. It may be summed up into the following proposition, which M. de la Palisse has not disavowed: To compose good music, the first condition is to be a born musician.

## CHAPTER VII.

POETRY.

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§ 1. *What is poetry?—Qualities ascribed to the poet.*

TAKEN in its widest sense, the word *poetry* means that combination of natural aptitudes which gives birth to artistic creations. It consists in a peculiar excitability of the senses, and in a particular turn of the imagination, predisposing it to that kind of half conscious and half voluntary hallucination, without which genius in art would be incomprehensible. The effect of this hallucination is to add to real and elementary sensations an indefinite train of wonderful imaginings.

It places a poet before certain aspects of life, as if he were looking at them through a magnifying glass: with this ever-present and grand difference, that the magnifying glass would be external to the man, and would magnify equally everything to which it might be applied; while poetical hallucination only transforms those facts which happen to be *en rapport* with the peculiar humour of the poet, and the measure of this transformation is in accord with his varying excitability. This is the cause why, in the comparison of one set of things with another, modifications arise that contrast will render all the more perceptible.

The poetic faculty, as in the case of all special and sharply defined aptitudes, springs from a certain combination of qualities and faults. These of course vary in the different intellects offered for our study. Every man, if he be not an idiot, is a poet,



that is, to some extent, and "on his day." For poetic emotion is but an exaltation of the intellect, more or less durable and frequent, above its ordinary level. Every deeply moved man is a poet so long as his emotion lasts; so long as the images, sensations, and ideas rush into his brain; so long as he feels the super-excitation of his sensory and intellectual life: and his poetic aptitude is great, in proportion as he is capable of deep, lively, and, above all, easily aroused emotion. These things constitute inward and, so to speak, individual poetry; but they are not sufficient to make a poet, in the usual acceptance of the word. It is obvious that whilst this emotion remains buried in the recesses of the soul, or only obtains outward expression in a half intelligible form, it can have no influence over other men. Now, as we are obliged to judge everything by its effect upon ourselves, that poet is no poet in our eyes who, besides the faculty to feel emotion, does not possess the power to communicate it to others.

But this talent is very rare, because it demands a combination of very numerous and complex conditions.

The first is, that emotion must be strong enough in the soul of the poet to make him feel *compelled* to give it outward manifestation; it must also be definite enough to be capable of reproduction in a recognizable form. These two conditions are very seldom found together. The stronger the passion, the less easy is its literary expression. It manifests itself by the language of nature; that is, by gesture, by the movement of the body, by the looks and workings of the countenance, by intermittent and incoherent speech. In its first outbreak, it is too vivacious, too tumultuous, too lost to all external considerations, ever to stop to relate or explain its sensations. Great though may be the faculty for a kind of moral introspection observed in certain people,—a gift enabling them to be more or less calm observers of their own transports—it is certain that the poet as a rule derives his pictures of passion from memories of the past. He reproduces rather an echo of passion than the sensation itself. It is necessary, then, that his memory should preserve sufficiently lively impres-

sions to enable him to reconstitute a true image of his past emotions.

Now nothing is more difficult than to preserve the features of dead passion; to fix them permanently before the eyes with precision sufficient to allow of their communication to others. We can easily imagine a generalised portraiture of a passion which has once been experienced; but so soon as any attempt is made to depict it with accuracy of detail, the whole thing fades away. Imagination, the common possession of every man, is not always or often strong enough to give substance to the vague perceptions of the memory. The same kind of difficulty is experienced when we endeavour to reproduce the details of physical form. To grasp and reproduce by an effort of the memory an exact portrait, even of an intimate friend, requires rare aptitude. When we hear people talk of a beautiful view, or of a fine statue—we all are certain we quite comprehend them, and that we are able to figure completely to ourselves all the beauties of either the one or the other. But suppose we test our powers by experiment. Let us fix our eyes with all the concentration of which we are capable upon the vague and indefinite image which rises in the recesses of our brain; and, when we have thoroughly examined it on all sides, let us attempt to reproduce it externally—either by means of accurate verbal description, or by the pencil. Unless we are poets or artists, we shall either fail altogether, or else produce a simple and accurate copy of some scene which we have formerly beheld. In the latter case memory supersedes imagination. Instead of the passionate, creative kind of memory which constitutes artistic power and originality, we find a cold and barren recollection of some elementary physical impression.

Poetry, then, is possible only when emotion finds external manifestation in terms precise enough to be generally recognizable, and warm enough to be easily communicable.

If this observation be as well founded as we believe it to be, we may from it logically conclude that poetry is purely human—that is, purely personal and subjective. It exists entirely in the

emotion which we experience in the presence of certain spectacles or sounds, or on the perception of certain ideas; and it varies in harmony with the depth of our sensibility, and with the general character of our intellect.

The intrinsic value of a poetic work must then be measured æsthetically by the qualities of sensibility and imagination which, it implies, are the possession of its author; or, to put it more simply, by the power with which he depicts his impressions.

Facts, however, do not always seem to be in accord with this theoretical deduction.

If a poet be endowed with a fantastic or extraordinary imagination; if he be stirred by ideas or facts of a strangeness so novel as to be unintelligible to his contemporaries: it is obvious that, however stupendous may be his genius, he will live unnoticed and die in obscurity.

The only way in which he can exercise his due influence upon his generation, is by reflecting some of the ideas, habits of thought, sentiments and aspirations which animate it. His merit will then lie in giving to these a superior, a more complete and more vibrant impression; and thus that his contemporaries may recognize in his productions their own ideas and emotions elevated by one or many degrees.

### § 2. *Conditions of poetic impression.*

We must not, however, imagine that the influence of a poet over his audience is to be explained only by the transmission or transference of the ideas of the one through, or into, the language of the other. Such an explanation may have been thought sufficient in the days when poetic frenzy was referred to the direct inspiration of the Deity. The poet, passive himself, received his emotion from some power above, and passed it on mechanically to his equally passive auditors. We now know that such an idea is utterly untrue. Both poet and auditors have to look within themselves for their emotions. The emotion of the former is

communicated to the latter because it becomes the basis of internal movement in the soul. Emotion alone can warm him ; if he were quite passive he would also be impassible. It is this necessity for active personal receptivity and assimilation which explains the poetic power that such things as ruins, unfinished works, vanishing lines, falling waters, and inaccessible summits, exercise over us. All these things possess an element of mystery, and, therefore, strike our imaginations on their most vulnerable side—the imperative wish to see and to understand. Absolute blackness is hateful to us, because it is the utter negation of light and life. Full sunlight also, by bringing everything into evidence, acts as a check. But twilight is poetic ; because it gives us the opportunity to fill up and complete at will, objects which are half buried in shade. Our soul at such a moment is able to spread its wings, to float from object to object, divining, creating, and reconstructing the scene according to its own poetic fancy.

Among the etchings of Piranesi, there is one which represents part of a church interior—an immense vault supported by slender columns stretching from top to bottom of the plate. As the lower part of the building is not represented, the vault and columns appear as if suspended in space. High up between two of the shafts, and close to the springing of the roof, a light wooden bridge, a mere plank, is thrown across, and upon this a man stands with drooping head, gazing into the void below. The attitude, the downward gaze upon nothing or upon some object which we cannot follow, compels us to measure the depth of the bottomless abyss. The Alps themselves do not give us a more complete sensation of height.

Poetry, to have power to move us, must have something of the kind. A poet whose meaning is obscure and hard to understand, does not give the necessary shock to our sensibilities. On the other hand, should he say everything, describe with complacent care and completeness every object, every sensation, every sentiment ; should he insist upon all the details, and leave us nothing to find out for ourselves, and while pretending to supply our every

want, fatigue and worry us : we throw down his book. We want a mental stimulus, not a treatise on anatomy. If he wished to dissect the soul, he should have called himself a psychologist and not a poet. If he had done so, we, being properly forewarned, might have followed his descriptions with interest ; we should at least have had no right to complain of deception.

Besides—the calm and careful attention, which is necessary if we wish to omit no detail of our emotions, is quite inconsistent with the existence of emotion in the observer. It is a faculty of the philosopher. It has often been remarked that neither poets nor artists shine, as a rule, when they attempt to play the part of critics. I do not know that, among the great poets, another could be mentioned besides Goethe, who combines these two different and often contrary qualities. We must remember, too, that the poetry of Goethe is founded upon reason rather than inspiration.

From this cause also metaphors and images so often greatly aid poetry. A direct and psychological expression of emotion always seems to circumscribe it, by mixing with it too much of our own distinct personalities—which, under such conditions, become obstacles to our freedom of development. We are too much diverted from the presence of the poet, and consequently from the exteriority of the emotion, whose progress in his soul we are following. But metaphor, by bringing us back every now and again to the elementary, we might almost say impersonal, impression (in the sense that it belongs to us as much as to the poet) restores to our imagination its first vigour and independence ; for it connects this impression with the whole chain of emotions which would be experienced in presence of the spectacle itself. Metaphor abounds in the poetry of the ancients, forming, indeed, one of its chief characteristics.

But we must not allow ourselves to push our theory too far. Although metaphor is useful in poetry from its power to awaken a series of fitting emotions, it only keeps up a proper æsthetic impression by an illusion founded upon a wrong estimate of its effect. In fact, to enable us to receive that impression, a good deal more

is required than the reproduction by the poet of its external form. It is necessary that our own emotion,—fused in his though not destroyed by it, should be accompanied by admiration of the genius or talent of the author who has so greatly excited our sensibility. We have, here, the reason why that too exact imitation of merely elementary impressions, which would go far to make us forget the poet in the effort to get together our own recollections, could never constitute a work of art. It is the great error of unflinching realism. The effect may be very powerful, if the reality chosen for presentation be possessed of a striking character of its own. But it is not art; and, in the great majority of cases, the impression that comes of it is anything but an æsthetic one.

A moment's reflection will be sufficient to convince us of this. Everyone who has ever read the fourth book of the *Æneid* must have a very tender recollection of the description of the death of Dido. When reading of the touching end of the unhappy woman, betrayed by her love—we feel the emotion aroused by the art of the poet; we experience an inward and profound *pleasure*, arising from the union of our admiration of the author with a lively sentiment of compassion for the victim.

But it is absolutely necessary to lay aside, once for all, the realistic notions which form the basis of so many æsthetic theories. Let us suppose the scene in question imitated with a realism so absolutely perfect that we believe ourselves to be in the presence of the reality—in such a case, should we not feel repelled rather than gratified? The sight of a miserable woman slaying herself before our eyes, would overwhelm us with sorrow. Take again the episode of Laocoon—would not the result be the same? Whether the scene be sad or gay, we shall always find the same distinction between real and æsthetic emotion. It is a necessity that if the latter is to be possible, the former must be made to disappear. The auditor or spectator must never forget that, between himself and the fact, an intermediary something is fixed, which gives the latter its poetic power. Yet though the poet should be careful not to weary us with his personality and the intervention of self,

it is not the less on that account necessary that we should preserve a sufficiently lively recollection of him to prevent the fact (or subject of our contemplation) from absorbing the whole of our attention. The neglect of this principle explains the great inferiority of certain works which specially direct themselves to move our physical sensibilities. On the other hand, some of our melodramas have an effect almost equal to that achieved by the brutal spectacles of the Roman Amphitheatre, or of the Spanish bullfight.

These observations bring us back to the principle which we set before us as our goal : that art is the result, less of communicated emotion, than of the participation of human personality in that emotion. A work must display some human individuality if it is to have the power to inspire true æsthetic emotion. This is the quality which, more or less consciously, compels us to admire ; and it is precisely the admiration thus evoked that first makes us alive to artistic beauty—as we have proved in the earlier chapters of this work.

These remarks are equally applicable to every age and every people. The *soi-disant* impersonal art of the ancients does not really, any more than the art of modern times, escape this law. The only difference is, that, in classic poetry, the personality is collective, rather than individual. Such poetry may seem impersonal to us ; but it does so because, instead of conveying the peculiar characteristics of such and such a man, it is stamped rather with the common features of the race. How could it be otherwise at an epoch when man was surrounded by the necessities of a collective life, and was acquainted with no occupation beyond those required by such a mode of existence. The development of individuality found itself restricted by community of interests, of dangers, of customs, of ideas. In our civilised societies, the individual has every chance to develop himself according to his own nature and aptitudes. Provided that he do not violate a certain number of laws and conventional rules, he is free to make what use he pleases of his liberty. The ideal of modern progress is to arrive at absolute freedom for every individual ; upon the one con-

dition—that every individual shall respect the equal right of his fellow-men to such freedom. In primitive systems of civilisation—for reasons too numerous to be stated here—the individual depended upon the whole community, and reflected its characteristics. Everyone had a share in the regulation of manners and ideas, and this power was made use of to enforce uniformity. Usage and tradition provided rules for every occasion, which no man could neglect with impunity.<sup>1</sup>

In truth no one ever thought of doing so, because the spirit of discussion had never been aroused; the desire for intellectual independence was still dormant. As a natural consequence, the ideas, sentiments, passions and habits of every man were almost identical; and, although races differed, and possessed strongly-marked general characteristics, individuals of the same community had few traits that were not in common. The subjects of their poetry were generally confined to a more or less considerable number of traditional legends; which latter formed the foundation of their national literature, being created by the unconscious collaboration of every unit of the race.

Such were the beginnings of the great national poems of India, of Greece, of Germany, of Scandinavia. These indeed have much internal resemblance, because all these nations came from one common stock; and yet great differences in detail and arrangement, because each separate race, in the long series of its migrations, was brought into contact with circumstances widely different, and therefore received very dissimilar impressions.

It is this race-personality, made manifest in the works to which we have referred, which has given us poetry.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. John Stuart Mill, in his treatise *On Liberty*, insists upon this fact at some length. He shows that, though English laws are almost invariably more liberal than those of France, the Englishman is in reality less free than the Frenchman, because he is preëminently a martyr to custom and traditional prejudice.



§ 3. *Human sympathy—Its influence upon æsthetic judgment.*

It is true, so far, at least, as we are concerned, that the poetic value of these poems is rather to be measured by the amount of sympathy between the sentiments which they express, and the thoughts and ideas of our own times, than by any power of personal manifestation which they may display. Theoretically, such a method of estimating them would be as unfair, as if we were to measure the intellectual power of Aristotle or Archimedes by the effort which it would demand, in our days, for anyone to acquire the knowledge that they possessed. But such injustice is a necessary consequence of the fact which we have before stated: that a work of art moves us only by the stimulus that it gives to our personal sensibility, which, when once it has been put in motion, develops itself freely in the direction of its natural preferences. Now, whatever effort we may make to keep our judgment within the true æsthetic limits, it is almost impossible to prevent some interference on the part of our sympathies; for these at once attach themselves to anything that strikes a chord within us.

Whatever may be the purely æsthetic merits of the *Edda*, or of the *Nibelungen Lied*, it must always seem impossible that we should compare them with the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. And why? Because, traversing the diversities of time, race and civilisation, we recognise a more or less vivid reflection of ourselves in the personages of the immortal Greek epics. In them we find a naïve and sincere expression of the moral ideas whose development constitutes our social ideal. Hector, Andromache,<sup>2</sup> Penelope, have an

<sup>2</sup> In the *Iliad*, the vanquished Trojans are clothed with a moral superiority over the Greeks. Evidently this was no part of the intention of the authors of the poem, whoever they may have been. How is it to be explained? By the simple fact that the domestic virtues of the Trojans, which possess so great a charm for us, had no counterpart among the Greeks, to whom power and strength were above everything human or divine. All judgments are affected by similar differences in points of view. The development of this idea may be found in the fourth chapter of the second part of my work, *La supériorité de l'art moderne sur l'art ancien*.

eternal attractiveness for us by the sympathy that exists between their morality and our own; while the ferocious savagery of the personages in the *Edda* and the *Nibelungen Lied* simply repels us. The manners of these truculent warriors have nothing in common with our ideas; their acts and words, instead of touching our hearts, only disconcert and surprise us. They ever remain without the circle of our affections; and this fact is enough to cause it to be very difficult that we should do justice to the very poetic, though real, power contained in these poems.

Such feelings do honour to our morality. They prove that we possess more elevated and more just ideas of the social duties of mankind, than did the heroes and authors of the great epics of Germany and Scandinavia; but they have nothing to do with Æsthetics, properly speaking. Theoretically, the critic must look to the work, and to the work only, for the motives of his appreciation. There is only one true criterion—the sum of poetic ability which the author, by the production of the work, proves that he possesses. Nothing else has any real, scientific value. So soon as we attempt to substitute, in our judgment of art works, the development of our own intellects for the development manifested in such works—we no longer have any sure and common basis for our opinions, and we are reduced to acknowledge the truth of the theory that, on account of the unavoidable changes in individual taste, denies all value to criticism. The whole business will become a matter of chance; the decision will be left to the number of votes on the one side or the other. What right should we then have to abuse the taste of the public, which places the Madonnas of Raphael and the pretty women of Guido and Albani above the breathing and thoughtful figures of Leonardo da Vinci, of Michael Angelo, and, with somewhat better excuse, of Rembrandt Van Rhyn?

Poetry, considered by itself, is, in fact, the result of personal excitement and exaltation, when these occur in a nature gifted with the faculty to observe, arrange, and to preserve or resuscitate such emotion at will. The poet has no right to the

name if, like the generality of human beings, his emotions fail to leave behind that enduring recollection which acts as an echo in prolonging the sensations that animate and inspire his songs. Whatever may be the cause and object of this personal exaltation, it is certain that every work in which it is found—whether it be beautiful and of moral intent, or the reverse—gives evidence of true poetry or art, in exact proportion to the amount of the personal element which it contains.

Here we have the principle, and it is very simple in theory. But practically it is, as we have seen, a very different matter. We have to do much violence to ourselves to put aside all extraneous circumstances, and to replace the poem in the same conditions under which it was originally produced. It is very difficult, not to say impossible, to get away from our accustomed habits of thought and our individual preferences. Sympathy works in us without our knowledge; and inclines us, in spite of ourselves, towards the sentiments which have most in common with our own; or, at least, towards those which we have come, as a matter of habit, to look upon as the most generous and elevated. It is for similar reasons that we can never get the public to become reconciled to see either in poems, novels, or plays, crime triumphant, and virtue oppressed. They demand that art should compensate the stern realities which are unhappily their too frequent experience. Their sympathy with what is good, imperiously demands satisfaction; and the poet who should refuse them such gratification, would surely incur their displeasure.

It is a point in which it is almost hopeless to expect that theory should ever triumph over practice. All that we can reasonably ask from the critic, is that he shall conscientiously do his best to eliminate all foreign elements from his æsthetic judgments. And it is because we fully admit the great difficulty of the effort, that we insist so strongly on the faithful attempt of it.

But we must not conclude that, because Æsthetics and morality are two essentially different things, they cannot, therefore, be brought into harmony with each other. I think it is a great

than the reproduction by the poet of its external form. The necessary truth of our own emotion,—fused in his though not by it, should be accompanied by admiration of the talent of the author who has so greatly excited our

We have, here, the reason why that too exact imitation of elementary impressions, which would go far to make the poem the effort to get together our own recollection never constitute a work of art. It is the great error of realism. The effect may be very powerful, if the scene for presentation be possessed of a striking character

But this is not art; and, in the great majority of cases, the emotion that comes of it is anything but an æsthetic one.

The poet's reaction will be sufficient to convince us of this. The reader who has ever read the fourth book of the *Æneid* must have a tender recollection of the description of the death of the young man rearing of the touching end of the unhappy woman, who by her love—we feel the emotion aroused by the art of the poet—we experience an inward and profound *pleasure*, arising from our admiration of the author with a lively sympathy for the victim.

It is absolutely necessary to lay aside, once for all, the distinctions which form the basis of so many æsthetic theories. Suppose the scene in question imitated with a realism so perfect that we believe ourselves to be in the presence of the reality—in such a case, should we not feel repelled rather than attracted? The sight of a miserable woman slaying herself with her eyes, would overwhelm us with sorrow. Take again the scene of Laocœus—would not the result be the same? Whether we are sad or gay, we shall always find the same distinction between æsthetic and æsthetic emotion. It is a necessity that if the former is to be possible, the former must be made to disappear. The reader or spectator must never forget that, between himself and the scene, an intermediary something is fixed, which gives the poem its æsthetic power. Yet though the poet should be careful to guard us with his personality and the intervention of self,

it is not the less on that account necessary (at we speak of a sufficiently lively recollection of him to prevent the subject of our contemplation) from absorbing the whole of our attention. The neglect of this principle explains the greatness of certain works which specially direct themselves to the physical sensibilities. On the other hand some dramas have an effect almost equal to that achieved by the spectacles of the Roman Amphitheatre, or other Spanish spectacles.

These observations bring us back to the principle before us as our goal : that art is the resultless of the emotion, than of the participation of human personality in the emotion. A work must display some human individuality to have the power to inspire true æsthetic emotion. The quality which, more or less consciously, compels us to admire it is precisely the admiration thus evoked (the first condition) to artistic beauty—as we have proved in the earlier part of this work.

These remarks are equally applicable to every age and people. The *soi-disant* impersonal art of the ancients was really, any more than the art of modern times, essentially personal. The only difference is, that, in classic poetry, the personality is collective, rather than individual. Such poetry is personal to us ; but it does so because, instead of displaying the peculiar characteristics of such and such a man, it rather with the common features of the race. Hence, however otherwise at an epoch when man was surrounded by the conditions of a collective life, and was acquainted with the conditions those required by such a mode of existence. The development of individuality found itself restricted by community of dangers, of customs, of ideas. In our civilized society every individual has every chance to develop himself according to his nature and aptitudes. Provided that he does not violate a number of laws and conventional rules, he is free to use he pleases of his liberty. The ideal of modern times is to arrive at absolute freedom for every individual ; upon

but a combination of symbols for the transmission of thought? Now in everything of the nature of a combination, one of the first things to be done is to eliminate and reject whatever may be found harmful or useless to the desired end. If a piece of machinery have bearings which do not run easily, or an exaggerated number of frictional points, the work done by it will be diminished in exact proportion to such friction; that is, to the amount of force required to overcome it. The same law applies to intellectual labour. If we be called upon to expend three-quarters of our mental energy in disentangling and interpreting the symbols, it is obvious that we shall have but one quarter left for the appreciation of the ideas of the poet; in precisely the same way as we find ourselves ill fitted to enjoy the beauties of a scene, if we be half dead with hunger, thirst, or fatigue.

Without entering into an enumeration of all the practical rules which bear upon this class of ideas, we may say that the essential point is to choose words that, either by their shortness, their volume, or their sound, seem to have most in common with the idea to be expressed. This kind of connection explains the happy results sometimes achieved by imitative harmony. By producing upon our senses a sensation similar to that of the idea itself, it gives it spontaneous birth; or, at least, relieves us of part of the effort which otherwise we should have to put forth, and thus leaves us more free to devote our attention to the idea itself.

It is for an analogous reason that exactly appropriate words communicate a thought with much greater force than general terms. We think of a thing under its particular form; and as a consequence when spoken of under its generic name, a mental translation which uses up part of our energy is necessary.

The arrangement of words is no less important. From the point of view of accuracy and clearness of imagery, the French custom of placing the determinative after the thing to be determined, is most detestable, and to poetic effect absolutely ruinous. When we say *un arbre desséché*, we compel our auditor to go through a double task. The word *arbre* naturally calls up in his

mind a tree like other trees, clothed in verdant foliage; and when we add *desséché*, we force him to retrace his steps, and to obliterate an already formed image in order to replace it with another; unless indeed he has taken the precaution to be on his guard and wait for further information before completing the mental picture. The latter result, if habitual, is no more agreeable than the former; because it must necessarily accustom the intellect to a certain slowness and impassibility, which will end by impairing its susceptibility of poetic excitement. It is true that, in a certain number of cases, custom permits us, under pretext of a figure of speech, to replace words in their natural order. Possibly some day we may come to recognize the necessity of establishing harmony between the structural meaning and the arrangement of phrases. But we must first shake ourselves free from the strange tyranny that certain people calling themselves grammarians are allowed to exercise over us. These gentlemen have persuaded us to look at language entirely by the light of external rules, sacrificing intellectual needs to mere tradition and fantastic routine.

Tropes and metaphors assist thought much in the same way as imitative sounds. They place objects more vividly before us, and in such a way that we look upon them from the right side.

The whole thing may be summed up in one principle: that whilst our endeavour should be to suggest as many ideas as possible to the intellect, we should, at the same time, aim to demand from it a minimum of effort.

Other methods to diminish the strain of continuous effort are the careful management of the intervals of repose; variety, which brings different organs alternately into play; careful gradation, which is, however, nothing but the skilful use of variety; and the employment of contrast or antithesis, the more striking as the opposition is more marked. All these may be easily explained by physiological causes. A black spot upon white paper seems blacker to us than if the paper were grey. This is antithesis. If we had to carry 50 pounds weight for half-an-hour, we

should find it very heavy ; but if we had previously had to carry 100 pounds, we should think the former weight light enough. Again, if, after climbing a steep ascent, we turn to retrace our steps, we feel an immediate relief—the effect of variety. The change seems to annihilate fatigue, because it brings a new set of muscles into play. Rhythm also produces a sensation of repose, by the measured intervals which it places between the repetition of the same sound.

We can not enter into these considerations in detail : we must be content to indicate their general direction. It will be seen that the processes of poetry are essentially similar to those of music. The former borrows from the living reality for the purpose of systematising and idealising its methods of expression and of adding to their intensity, precisely in the same way that music builds up its melodies by the combination and arrangement of sounds which do their work by recalling and reproducing the very emotions that gave them birth. .

These observations justify the importance which the revivers of the romantic school attached to versification, considered as an instrument ; for until their time, it was very deficient in one indispensable quality—suppleness. In spite of the efforts of a true poet, De Rousard, Malherbe had succeeded in impressing upon the language of poetry much of the stiffness and monotony of his peculiar genius. Thanks to the obstinacy of academic pedantry, poetry found itself imprisoned as if in a strait-waistcoat. But the oppressive weight of this tyranny led to its destruction : a new school arose to protest against a ridiculous usurpation, which bid fair to cause art to be looked upon as nothing but a difficulty overcome ; and, as it had the great good fortune to number a poetic genius among its disciples, the public declared for it and the irreconcilable despots of classicism had, in their turn, to submit to the law of the strongest.

But, notwithstanding the great importance of form, it would be going too far to limit poetry to works written in verse. Poetry is less the result of versification, than of the intervention of person-



ality in a state of emotion. Molière's *L'Avare* is not written in verse; but can we refuse to see true poetry in the accumulation of characteristic details, in the abundant invention, in the powerful and energetic pictures which could only spring from an imagination stimulated by meditation, warmed by long and active internal labour, and by the ever increasing interest which he must have felt in his own creation?<sup>1</sup> Who would dare to say that, in order to deserve the name of poetry, the story of Don Juan had to wait for the day when Corneille made it the subject of his verse!

No. Versification does not constitute poetry; and it would not be difficult to name many poems in prose which it would be impossible to improve in verse. Suppose *Paul et Virginie*, *La Mare au Diable*, or *L'Oiseau* had been written in verse: is it a possibility that the change could have improved them?

On the other hand, there are works which it is difficult to imagine in any other form than verse: such are the poems of Victor Hugo, for instance. This feeling is partly caused, no doubt, by the fact that so many of his works are odes, and lyric poems in prose are outside our powers of conception. And independently of this, the matter and form of his works are so intimately connected, that it seems impossible to separate them.

Eloquence from more than one point of view enters into any de-

<sup>1</sup> It would be a strange mistake to suppose that because the imagination of the poet is personal, it is therefore egotistic; or even that it is connected, even indirectly, with his own person. We do not use the word personal in any such sense. The emotion of Molière which led to the creation of *L'Avare*, *Don Juan*, *Le Misanthrope*, and *Tartuffe*, was personal, because even though these characters were suggested to him from without, he remodelled them in his own brain; he re-created them by a purely personal use of his imagination, which was stimulated by the æsthetic excitement produced in him at the sight of his own slowly growing creations. With such emotion, plagiarism, which is ever sterile, has nothing in common. Plagiarism is content to calculate. The poet restores, completes, and finishes, even when he does not invent. The fertility of genius springs from the power which it possesses to interest itself in whatever it takes in hand; to ally itself to its own productions, and to derive intellectual stimulus from them. Like a healthy stomach, it digests and stimulates everything which it takes in. This is what Molière called "*prendre son bien où on le trouve.*"

definition of poetry. Doubtless the art of oratory rests mainly upon reasoning and logic ; its aim is to convince, by discussion of facts and ideas. But when the orator—catching fire from his own contention ; exalted by the energy of his convictions, and by the justice or grandeur of the ideas in behalf of which he puts out his strength—allows himself to be carried away by such passion as penetrates men's souls, by the force of human sympathy which was excited in the first instance by the power of his own logic : what difference is there, then, between his emotion and that of the poet ?

How many passages might we not quote from Demosthenes, from Cicero, from Bossuet, from Mirabeau, that by their power of expression, grandeur of imagery, trenchant language, and depth of emotion, deserve to be placed in the very front rank of poetry !

There is, however, one difference which æsthetic judgment must take into account. Although emotion is of so huge an importance to the poet, there is yet another faculty which he *must* have. If it be a faculty with which the orator may dispense, it is one without which no one can claim to be a poet ; for to a poet nothing can supply its place. I mean that creative imagination which transforms a dream into a reality ; that sane and fertile hallucination of which I have already spoken.

We may say that poetry is to be found even in the exact sciences themselves. What could be more stirring than the discovery and successive mastery of the great scientific facts that are being accumulated and marshalled under general laws, by which their seeming disorder is reduced to the clear regularity of the human intellect ? Astronomy, chemistry, physics, natural history, mechanics—all these admirable instruments invented by humanity for use in its never-ceasing strife against the brute forces of nature, are inexhaustible sources of poetry ; that is, of moral emotion and intellectual excitement. We do not feel called upon to enter into this question here, because, in the exact sciences, poetry is, at most, an accidental result or accessory. The subdivision, which in our art nomenclature we call poetry, does not include the effects produced by accidental emotion in

non-poetic works, but only those which are direct and intended. We consider that this is the only serious criterion.

For a similar reason it seems to us impossible to refuse poetic character to the novel; for this entirely consists in the creation of characters, and the portrayal of passion. It has been the fashion for the last fifty years to abuse novels on every opportunity. Would-be serious criticism looks down upon them as beneath its notice; in the eyes of *littérateurs* of the academy, they are guilty of the grave fault of degrading art, by placing heroic fictions on the same level as descriptions of common manners and of the world as we see it.

To this very fact does modern fiction owe its success with the public. The public, in spite of all the critics may say, has a natural affection for what is true; it demands sincerity, and will never be long satisfied with any kind of artificial literature. The drama has supplanted the tragedy for the same reason that the epic has had to give place to the novel. This double substitution, especially the second, marks a real advance in the intellectual condition of humanity. We shall presently attempt to prove that it is so. But before considering the different kinds of poetry, we must finish what we have to say upon the art as a whole.

The most obvious advantage possessed by poetry over the other forms of art, is the wide extent of its domain. By means of rhythm, versification and accent, it is able to rival music in a certain measure; by means of description it appeals to the eyes, and can convey to them sensations of form and colour almost as vivid as those of the plastic arts themselves; and, in the expression of sentiment, it surpasses every art—music alone excepted. Indeed over the latter it has a certain advantage in the facility to express delicate shades, which music has not, in the same degree. Thanks to the precision of the language which it employs, it can penetrate into details, into refinements of psychologic analysis quite beyond the somewhat indefinite art of the musician.

And this is not all.

Of all the arts, poetry alone has the privilege directly to inter-

pret thought, and to address the intellect without any intermediary. Didactic poetry is founded upon this fact. It is a secondary form of the art, because it lies upon the very limit of poetry and prose, but not the less on this account has it given to the world some remarkable works: the *Works and Days* of Hesiod; the *Creation of the World*, of Lucretius; the *Georgics*, of Virgil, amongst others. Directness of expression, although less dominant, is a chief characteristic of all other kinds of poetry, especially in satire and the drama.

Sculpture and painting, if also able to excite ideas, cannot give them so direct an expression. They require to make use of associations, and as a rule have to go to work in a roundabout way. When they do attempt to act immediately upon the intellect, they run much danger of outstepping their proper limits. Michael Angelo and Nicholas Poussin succeeded in giving a philosophical expression to many of their works, because they had certain individual preoccupations which gradually permeating their imaginations, tinted them with their colours. These preoccupations form an integral part of their artistic personality, and, so to speak, overflow into their works. But this saturation with one idea, this intimate amalgam of the thought and sensation, is extremely rare; it is, in fact, as we have said, one of the most important of the constituents of genius. Outside these exceptional cases, any *direct* effort to express an idea, either by sculpture or painting, is doomed to almost certain failure. Complete fusion between the two elements, either does not take place at all, or is imperfect: the result is like unsuccessful veneering.

Poetry lends itself much more easily to a successful mingling of ideas and sensations. It passes from one to the other without effort, and often obtains admirable effects from the union. When, in addition to the special faculties of the artist, the poet displays loftiness and generosity of thought—he appears doubly great to us, and his works possess twice their natural power.

To give an example: it is difficult to imagine any poetry with a

more human and sincere charm than that of Alfred de Musset. No one can compare with him from this point of view. But if we compare his compositions with those of Victor Hugo, we feel at once that they lack something; and that that something, is elevation of intellect. The grandeur of thought in Victor Hugo's poetry gives it an immense superiority. De Musset may give more pleasure to those who seek in verse for that peculiar delectation which the *dilettanti* choose to consider the chief aim of all the arts. But no one can read Victor Hugo without adding, to their admiration of the work before them, a deep and inward joy at the discovery, in the poet himself, of a thinker devoted to all the problems which interest humanity. Ideas as well as sensations have their poetry, and there is no reason why art should neglect so admirable a source of emotion.

#### § 5. *Character of modern poetry.*

What we have just mentioned is one of the salient characteristics of modern poetry; and it is probable that it will become more marked with the further development of that scientific movement which constitutes the originality of the nineteenth century. In spite of anything which the exclusive admirers of the classic ages may say—the gradual unfolding of the wonderful working of nature, a sure corollary of the researches of contemporary science, cannot well be less capable of warming and exalting the imagination of poets than the childish notions of primitive ages. For in truth the *raison d'être* of primitive mythology was nothing but an attempted explanation of natural phenomena by existing human laws; everything was reduced to a physical and intellectual anthropomorphism.

Must we see in this faculty for giving ideas a concrete appearance, some peculiar gifts of the races of antiquity; some inventive faculty which we have lost—a loss that condemns us to poetic inferiority? People are never tired of saying that it is so. The rich and graceful imaginations of primitive writers are lauded by

every tongue ; and we have even seen a stray spirit here and there attempt to revive, in this nineteenth century, the polytheism of ancient heathendom. All such ideas repose upon very easily explained mistakes, and are the immediate result of a psychological ignorance which is only too common.

It is true enough that the men of primitive times were full of imagination, if we accept that word in its etymological signification—which is the faculty to see, on all hands, nothing but external images in place of internal ideas, and of conceiving everything, tangible or intangible, in the disguise of figures borrowed from visible reality. They possessed this faculty in a supreme degree : it was imposed upon them ; they could not shake themselves free from it ; it is the characteristic that most strongly marks their intellectual inferiority. As for true imaginative power, which consists in facility of invention, of transforming things voluntarily, and with full comprehension of what is being done—they were simply without a particle of it. They invented nothing ; they simply spoke of what they believed they saw : and the fact that their ideas are nothing but descriptions, is to be explained by the psychologic inexperience which compelled them to an endless objectivity. The instinct of progress, however, never ceased to act upon their imperfect intellects ; it continually urged them on to search for explanations of such impressions as they could not understand. Like ourselves, they strove to get to the bottom of all their sensations ; their guesses were absurd because they were so completely ignorant. We have chosen to look upon them as fictions, as poetic flights of the imagination. Their natural philosophy was comprised in the belief that each of their impressions was the result of the direct intervention of some living external being. Their emotions, thoughts, sensations, dreams, all seemed to them to be caused by divine interference, exactly in the same way as the phenomena of the outside world. The sun is a chariot driven by a god ; light itself is another divinity. Storms are the conflicts of Ahsis and the Titans against Indra and Jupiter. The whole universe is a great

clock, in which the wheels are turned by a crowd of mysterious beings with human forms.

That all this is poetical and ingenious, I admit ; but it does not go to prove that science is fatal to poetry. Would it not be very curious if the progress of natural science should have the effect of preventing us from understanding and enjoying the beauties of nature ? or if an acquaintance with the marvels of vegetable life should render us insensible to the beauties of a well-wooded landscape ? Have valleys and mountains lost their poetic power, because geology—by teaching us to trace the convulsions which have agitated the crust of this world, and by placing before us the different stages of its evolution—has extended our knowledge to the earliest ages of the universe and made us live in the days when men were not ? How can we believe that a comprehension of the law which binds the stars and our earth together, and makes them rush in their proper order through the infinities of space, which again are peopled with literally an innumerable multitude of similar worlds and systems, can prevent us from being more deeply stirred by the sight of the midnight sky, than the men who looked up at it and thought they were gazing at a vault sprinkled with golden nails ? Has man become indifferent to man, since the human race has become his chief object of research, and since he has given so much time and effort to the penetration of mysteries of which the ancients had no suspicion ? Upon what, then, is that insatiable curiosity founded, which has the most obscure psychological questions for its aim ; which has made the portrayal of character, sentiment and passion, the chief point of interest in the dramas and novels of our day ? Must it be said that as we have been taught to know men better, we have learnt to love them less ? What shall we say, then, about the sentiments which are the true glories of our age,—charity, toleration, respect for womanhood, for childhood, and for human life ? Pity for animals, is not that, too, a sign of the times ? How comes it that all the sympathetic feelings—such as humanity, compassion, family affection, devotedness—rare enough among the ancients, have become

sacred duties to us, binding upon our conscience ; while the sentiments of self—such as hate, anger, revenge, cupidity, cunning and falsehood—which were looked upon as the virtues of antiquity, are viewed with universal contempt, and punished like crimes? How is it that men are found to devote their lives to the instruction of the ignorant, to the relief of the distressed, to the championship of those who are too poor to defend themselves ; doing all this, too, at the expense of their own comfort, and to the damage of their own interests ?

All this has more effect upon poetry than people think. But, even if it were completely transformed, it would be not the less a living fact. The series of transformations through which it has progressed in the past, and those which are before it in the future, prove that the sentiments with which it is imbued, become ever more and more human and more independent of exterior or egotistical considerations.

§ 6. *Moral and psychological development of poetry.—Novels.*

The two principal forms in which poetry first clothed itself were, in their chronological order, the hymn and the epic. The dramatic form was the product of a later time.

The hymn, which at first was purely religious, expressed nothing except fear or hope. It was addressed to the gods, either to invoke their protection or to avert the consequences of their anger. In it man was entirely pre-occupied with self. The dangers with which he was surrounded, forbade him to withdraw his attention from his own concerns. This instinctive egotism forms the chief characteristic of the Vedic hymns and of the Psalms.

It is also to be found, though in a less marked degree, in the ancient epics. The main difference is the substitution of heroes for divinities. The poet, instead of celebrating the exploits of Indra or of Jehovah against the baleful genii of the night and its storms, sings of the lusty limbed warrior returning from battle after the slaughter of the hostile chiefs. The strength which thinks nothing



of danger, is still the object of his admiration. His homage is paid to the heroes who kill like destroying gods. He must have personages from a sphere above his own. It is always more or less the same thing; the adoration of the strong by the weak. When such adoration no longer receives any direct expression, it still survives in the enthusiasm with which wholesale massacres are described; and, in fact, it cannot be denied that such deeds were looked upon as the best claims which any mortal being could show to everlasting glory. Everything else was a mere accessory; even with the people who were the first to develop some rudiments of a human sympathy.

This latter development is the point of departure for a new state of things.

Little by little, as the progress of observation armed man against danger and ameliorated the conditions of his existence, his primitive egotism became less imperious. The level of his morality was gradually raised with the development of his family affections and the increased solidarity of his national life. Traces of this advance, are to be found in some of the Vedic hymns and Hebrew psalms. Its influence becomes very marked in certain parts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and in many episodes of the great Hindoo poems. It may be followed through all literatures; though it has more or less prolonged intermittent periods, to be explained by the variability of social conditions among nations constantly subject to the chances of war and invasion.

Its progress has become very much accelerated in modern times; thanks in part to increased security resulting in a less rude civilisation, but chiefly to the greatly increased communication between different races. The gentler sympathies which, after momentarily appearing as though on the very eve of triumph at Athens and Rome, were brutally trampled under foot by the barbarian inroads, have obtained a decided influence, and have given rise to a rapid transformation in poetry and in every other kind of literature. *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*, is to-day the universal motto. We care no longer for gods or heroes; we care

only for man. Man inspires both the songs of the poet and the labours of the savant. Psychology invades alike literature, philosophy, and science. In lyric poetry, the religious hymn has given place to the passionate portrayal of human sentiment; a new kind of epic has made its appearance in the modern novel; philosophy has thrown aside metaphysical speculation for the practical study of the facts of humanity: and, side by side with physics, chemistry and natural science, a new science has made its appearance, to which we have given the name of anthropology. All recent discoveries help on the same conclusion, by bringing nations into closer union; railways and telegraphs, industry and commerce, are gradually solidifying all our interests: and, in spite of the dangers with which the criminal ambitions of a few despots are threatening the world, it is easy to see that the new-born sentiments of universal sympathy, seconded as they are by an effective community of moral and material interests, grow in Europe day by day; and that we may, without temerity, predict their final triumph, and this in no distant future.

In dramatic poetry the same progress may be easily traced. Tragedy, which with Æschylus was almost entirely religious, became gradually emancipated under the hands of Sophocles, and with Euripides arrived at the deliberate and skilful portrayal of human passion. This movement was continued through the comedy of Menander and Philemon, down to the borrowed art of Plautus and Terence.

We find it still more marked in the modern theatre. Amid all the diversities which distinguish one nation from another, we may easily discern one common motive—the imperious desire for a complete knowledge of man with all his sentiments and passions. We may say that this desire has been the peculiar feature of European civilisation ever since the close of the fifteenth century; that it is that of the time in which we live.

This desire is so powerful, that it seems as though it were about to triumph over even the most firmly established conventions. One would have thought that one of the essential obligations of art,

was to preserve itself in a region superior to every-day reality, to confine itself to the portrayal of general features instead of descending to the infinite details of individual anatomy. But every one is now so tired of artifice, so much in need of truth, that these feelings bid fair to drown all others. Scott has given us the historical novel, imbued also with a little of the epic feeling. Balzac, in his *Comédie humaine*, has painted the peculiar features of each of the many classes of society: but his aristocratic prejudices made him less capable than other men to seize and understand, in all their complexity, the sentiments and passions of the populace; he saw nothing but the evil side of their natures. We must add, that the dominant faculty of Balzac was imagination; and this, although it made him a first-rate story-teller, often made him disregard the results of direct observation.

George Sand ignores all passion but that of love. The psychological novel, in the complete sense of the word—that is, the sincere and careful study of man in all his good and evil manifestations—is a thing of yesterday. Doubtless, this school must look to Balzac as its chief, but it shows differences on more than one side. We may even say that the two are separated by their fundamental conceptions. Balzac, in spite of his more or less justifiable pretensions to observation, is above all a stage manager. His chief desire is for effect. He only makes use of his powers of observation as a means to supply his imagination with materials which he works up and, as often as not in order to strengthen the final result, transforms.

A new school has now sprung into existence which has already produced a large number of remarkable works, with most various titles: *Mme. Bovary*, *Manette Salomon*, *Germinie Lacerteux*, *René Mauperin*, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, *l'Assommoir*, *Fromont jeune et Risler aîné*, *le Nabab*, and others. The principal members are MM. Flaubert, De Goncourt, Zola, Alphonse Daudet, Hector Malot. This school, which unquestionably takes its origin from Balzac, founds all its art on supreme accuracy of observation. Such naturalism implies a condition of mind always open to impressions

of a realistic nature ; and which follows them through every change of form or of surrounding. Man, the real man, is the object of its study. Not that ideal of which it knows nothing, but man as he is moulded by society, with all his individual manifestations, be they good or evil. We may even say that such a bent of intellect seeks, in poetry, for a realism similar to that of Courbet in painting ; but with the one capital difference, that it does not separate it from life. While Courbet, setting himself up as the apostle of a true idea of which he only understood the half, attempted to reduce the artist to the condition of a mere instrument of precision, and painting to an *ensemble* of lines and colours absolutely governed by physical reality—the realistic writers import living man into their books, with all his virtues and vices, his habits and fashions. They were not satisfied to *tell* us how he acted, how he thought, and how he spoke ; but they made him do all three under the very eyes of the reader. Strange ! that this mad realism, which hesitates at nothing, is to be found here and there cropping out in the works of men who were more than a little tempted to range themselves on the side of its enemies. As Michelet said of history, they wished to make art a resurrection, and their method of painting resembles that of Théodore Rousseau : “ Painting,” said the latter, “ does not lay the picture upon the canvas, it raises in succession the veils with which it is hidden.” So naturalism applies itself to the resuscitation of the people which have come under its observation. It calls them up and makes us acquainted with them, not by a description, but by the introduction of them bodily. We enter into relation with them directly, not through the intermediary of description ; and thus our appreciation of them becomes intimate in the highest degree. In old days, a thousand ceremonies, explanations and introductions, were required. They are all suppressed now : the reader is at once brought *tête-à-tête* with the characters, who continue to go about their usual employments, without troubling themselves about the inspection to which they are being subjected ; and above all, without ever striking those absurd attitudes which are so frequent a cause of our disgust with the heroes

of the old dramas and romances. This downright way of doing things, shocks the delicate feelings of the admirers of academic tradition; but what offends them still more, is the audacity of that modern practice, which opens the pages of the novel or of the drama as freely to the most vulgar individuals as to the most distinguished; which does not hesitate to give an equal prominence to the manners and ideas of a street porter as to those of a marquis. All this is vehemently opposed by the successors of the men who were so righteously indignant at the introduction of such words as *chien*, *bouc*, and such like, into poetry. Buffon, in his treatise upon style, insisted that it is the duty of a writer to avoid particular terms whenever he can; to substitute by preference general expressions. And Delille, faithful to the precepts and genius of his time, did not hesitate to replace the words of ordinary language by so-called definitions in the lofty style; which, if they did give an opportunity for the display of all the subtleties of his intellect and the refinements of his mode of writing, were too often wanting in perspicuity. The good sense of the public has estimated, at something like their real worth, these fantastic distinctions between the language of the nobility and that of the middle or lower classes; but they still exist in ultra-aristocratic and in plebeian minds. We are very willing that the poet should paint for our benefit, the tempests of a more or less tragic passion which are the destruction of the personages authorised by the academy. But we are amazed, forsooth, that he should hope to interest us in a moral analysis of the mental conditions of the outcasts of contemporary society; in the corroding effects of constant discouragement and temptation; in the hereditary transmission of the vices that spring from ignorance, disease, chronic suffering, or ceaseless strife against misery! We do not mind well-bred vice—graceful prostitutes, skilful hypocrites, and fashionable sharpers. But why? Are the malefactors of the great world more interesting than others? Far from it. To anyone who will take the trouble to think for a moment, they must be infinitely more detestable, because, on account of the

greater means given them to resist temptation, their ignominy is the less excusable.

This sentimental kind of prudery has nothing to do with any moral feeling (in such a case we might have some shadow of respect for it). It is nothing but pure aristocratic prejudice, over which the new school of writers will obtain as complete a triumph as did the romantic school over classicism; and will do so by securing the interest of the public by the production of master works. The victory is already more than half won; a little more and it will be complete. Already justice has been rendered to the sincerity and truth of observation that distinguish many recent works. What fault has been found with them? The exaggeration of a few repellent details, not, perhaps, indispensable; and the multiplicity of features which divide and fatigue the attention whilst destroying unity of effect. On these points the objectors are right. However important we may consider absolute truth, we are not obliged to tell everything: first, because it is impossible; secondly, because in all collections of facts, there are some more important than others—and, if we overwhelm the former with the latter, we find ourselves compelled, by our very scruples in favour of truth, to render that truth either totally undiscernible, or, at least, much less conspicuous than it ought to be. There can be no art without selection; and upon such selection the total impression must always depend. Some of the descriptions of M. Zola, remind us of pictures in which the painter, from sheer ignorance of what should be left out, has finished by compromising the truth of everything. Everything is there, but there is no salient point. Such a state of things presents a great danger to art. We may say the same thing of his characters. However intense the life breathed into them by the author, they do not leave in the memory so powerful a recollection as one might, on a first reading, imagine. When we look back upon them afterwards, we may be able to recall details and scenes whose impression is ineffaceable; but the personages themselves have already become somewhat vague and undefined.

It is the inevitable result of the want of condensation of which we have already spoken.<sup>1</sup>

We may safely affirm, however, that these writers are on the right path.

### § 7. *The drama.*

These observations apply with equal force to the drama. Action, dominant so long, has given place to psychology; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that these two elements are gradually becoming more and more intermingled. At first the plot was everything. Personages had no importance, except through their connection with the action, of which they were the instruments or victims. They were indeed necessary to the drama. But, in spite of this necessity, they only occupied a secondary position in the estimation of the poet. This characteristic was universal in epic writing, and in the drama as it was understood by Æschylus and Sophocles.

It is this exclusive, absolute, inexorable domination of action

<sup>1</sup> Is it really necessary to bring together so many unpleasing individuals? I believe this to be a kind of exaggeration from which even the most scrupulous observers do not escape.

Were it not that I might seem to be attaching too much importance to the writing of fiction, I should like to establish a comparison between the novel of observation and the novel of ideas, to which Eugène Sue and George Sand have respectively given so high a position. The latter school is being upheld by a writer possessed of both knowledge and talent, who is far from receiving his proper deserts from the public.

The *Cure du Docteur Pontalais*, and *Mme. Frainex*, by M. Robert Halt, are both works of the highest literary and moral value. The same author has lately published several novels in which moral observation is closely allied with various themes which he sets himself to uphold. They are not mere pieces of patchwork, as is too often the case with works written for a purpose; for they display a most admirable unity of conception. And to this must be added a rare generosity of heart and intellect, a lively but well regulated imagination, great powers of composition, life-like characterization, a remarkable psychological insight, and the most profound love of humanity and of everything which may help on its progress. In M. Halt's last volume, *Le Cœur de M. Valentin*, there is a novel of a hundred pages, called *Alliette*, which is not simply a gem, but a masterpiece.

which constitutes the terrible grandeur of the dramas of the former author. They develop themselves by their own force; nothing arrests their progress, and the marked-out sequence of events is followed without the smallest deviation. We might say that they take their inevitable course over the *dramatis personæ* by a series of leaps, each of which brings the end nearer, until the time comes when the unfortunate people are finally destroyed. A fit comparison would be a locomotive started with full steam down a line of rails, whose unyielding firmness keeps it upon the track until its fatal work is done: everything that comes before it is overturned, overwhelmed, annihilated. The poet, obedient to the legend which forms part of his personal creed, has neither the right nor the wish to change its *dénoûment*; but, in making use of it for his work, he adds to it the expression of a kind of religious horror, which seizes him at the sight of such inflexibility, and doubles its effect upon the spectator. Action is the real *dramatis personæ*, transformed by the imagination of the poet into a kind of invisible and implacable phantom. It is the ruling spirit of the play. The other personages exist for no other purpose than to be destroyed when they come into collision with it.<sup>1</sup>

The imagination of Sophocles was not so overwhelming. But, for the very reason that he had not the transforming power which

<sup>1</sup> It is this idea of action which has led many critics to look upon fatality as the great motive of ancient dramatic writing. The truth is that the Greeks were never fatalists. They never thought that man had nothing to do but to wait with his arms crossed for the accomplishment of eternal decrees. They always believed that work and effort might have great influence over their destinies, and they gave evidence of their belief by their acts. The notion of fatality has been ascribed to them in consequence of their habit of regarding the past rather than the future: what has been, has been; and no mortal power can destroy the reality of an accomplished fact. Now, as their poets took for the subjects of their songs, not inventions of their own fancy, but facts embalmed in religious tradition, it was not possible that they should look upon them as susceptible of modification at any man's will. It was this conception of necessity, joined to the inflexibility of the notions of moral law, which enabled Æschylus to give that appearance of inexorability to action, which renders the effect of his works so striking. For want of patient analysis the critics have included it all under the simple and convenient term—fatalism.



gives so extraordinary an originality to his predecessor, his personages are not nearly so much absorbed in the action of his tragedies. He goes so near to establish an equilibrium between the two elements, that it is sometimes difficult to say which of the two is the more important. Sometimes we even find passages, as in *Philoctetes*, *Ajax* and *Antigone*, in which the portrayal of character holds the first place. We may be permitted to believe, that, among the great number of this author's works which has not come down to us, we should have found many in which psychological study would be conspicuous in the same degree. But in *Edipus Rex*, *Edipus Coloneus*, *Electra* and the *Trachiniæ*, action resumes its sway: it governs the action of the characters, and moulds them to its will.

We find, in the construction of his works, the same principle as that which, as we have shown, governed the development of Greek sculpture. The first idea was taken from some legend; and the work of the sculptor was confined to bringing out and giving due prominence to its particular signification, by emphasizing those special characteristics which distinguished the personage who was to be represented in the national mythology.

Sophocles adhered to the same principle. He always sought for his poetic inspiration in the sacred legends. But, instead of allowing himself, like Æschylus, to be, from the first, entirely absorbed in the thought of the inevitable doom and the desire to give progressive development to all its terror—he applies himself, like the sculptor, to perfect his personages in the moral aspects that bind them to the action. Instead of looking upon them in the light of victims—he regards them, if not as the agents, at least as the instruments of the plot; and, governed by this idea, he unfolds their characters in harmony with it.

Still man remains subordinate to action. Therefore the general conception of Sophocles is nearly identical with that of Æschylus; with one exception—he takes care that such subordination shall not be carried to the point of total absorption. The psychological bent of the poet is not strong enough to make the personality of his

heroes prevail so far as to constitute the cause and explanation of the plot. The result is quite the reverse; it is the plot which explains their characters and rôles. Yet his personages do possess a character, and this fact gives his drama something in common with that of modern times. A lyric genius is the dominant characteristic of Æschylus. His tragedies, altogether epic in their first elements, are composed like an ode, framed, so to speak, in a unique impression which leaves no room for external pre-occupation. Their progression consists exclusively in ever increasing terror, like that which a man chained to a post might feel at the gradual approach of a wild beast. Sophocles is more complex. His unity is already that of harmony. He displays a combination of different elements, and his progression is no longer rigidly direct. The strictly lyric form of drama disappears. Through this diversity of methods and elements, he is the first to step on to the path of modern drama.

But with Euripides a new conception appeared on the scene. Legend, until then all powerful, fell into the second rank—at least in a certain number of his tragedies. It almost came to be nothing more than a pretext for psychological study. We instinctively see that man, almost annihilated by Æschylus, kept subordinate by Sophocles, will soon take his place as the real hero of the drama. First the victim of the plot, next its instrument, he finally becomes its agent. He himself is the author of the course of events which lead to his own death. He himself sets the stone rolling; and, unconsciously, perhaps, but directly, guides it on its way, until, as the consequence of his own action, it finally crushes him. Passion becomes the great motive-power, and the confines of modern tragedy are at last reached.

Corneille and Racine, in spite of the very considerable differences between their respective methods and intellects, are in almost complete accord in their conception of the relations between the personages and the action of their dramas. They may give more sometimes to the one and sometimes to the other, following now Sophocles and now Euripides; but the tendency of man to become

ever more and more preponderant, goes on without interruption.

There are more cases than one in Racine of discord between the historic subject from which the plot is taken, and the picture of passion constituting its real interest.

His elementary conception is that of the tragedy of action. When he first chooses his subject, he thoroughly intends to extract a play from it analogous to that of Sophocles, and in harmony with the rules laid down by Aristotle. But later, when his plot is partly developed, he allows himself to be carried away by the bent of his own intellect and the predilections of his fellow-men; and thus psychology obtains the upper hand. Passion, particularly that of love, becomes not only the active principle, but the very centre and foundation of his tragedy. His characters are not content with helping on the action—they substitute themselves for it, by the great importance and interest which the poet gives to the development of the sentiments which animate them. Sometimes he forgets all else, and his dramatic framework disappears behind his men and women.

This change in the respective rôles is all the more easily felt, because in the plays of Racine the portrayal of passion is sometimes a good deal more academic than dramatic. In them descriptive development, often of a very subtle kind, occupies an amount of space which is not excessive if the special character of the audiences which the poet addressed, be considered. At that time courtiers had a weakness to be thought wits; over-refined discussions were in vogue, and women always took pleasure in listening to discourses on the metaphysics of passion. But, in proportion as the theatre took more account of public matters, it had to submit to a series of transformations imposed upon it by the necessity to conform to the general taste. Action gradually reconquered much of the importance of which it had been deprived, and ended by ousting, to a certain extent, the development of character and passion. Theatrical effects, the *mise en scène*, and sensational incidents absorbed the attention of authors; and the

time came when plays appealed to the nerves and eyes of the public rather than to its intelligence. While some expected nothing from the theatre but gratification for their violent and even brutal emotions ; others, asking from it nothing but amusement, paved the way for the more or less trifling and licentious scenes of the minor opera.

It is obvious that the theatre is, at present, in a transition state. After having held rank at various epochs of history as one of the principal forms of art, it must now be looked upon as an industry. May we look upon this decadence as apparent rather than real—to be explained less by a fall in intellectual culture, than by the temporary necessity to adapt dramatic effort to the general level of intelligence of the crowds which modern facilities for locomotion bring to every great town? Must we suppose that Paris—at one time only visited by a superior class of travellers—has been, for some forty years past, invaded by ever increasing multitudes of people more or less incomplete in their civilisation ; who visit it mainly for the sake of dissipation ; and who, by right of their numbers, impose their taste upon us and shall continue to do so until the day when they themselves become educated to better things ?

Perhaps it may be so. But, in any case, we must acknowledge that the theatre is not just now in a state of progress. It is very difficult to say what the future may have in store for it. We shall not attempt to guess. We shall be content to point out the general direction which most of those who deserve to be called dramatic authors appear to be taking.

The present tendency seems to be to identify action with the development of character, by reducing the former until it is merely the consequence of the latter. All difference between action and persons is thus made to disappear. Active personalities, that is to say, characters and their passions in the conflict of their mutual interests, are the sole constituents of the drama.

We do not mean to say that this system is a new one. It is that of Shakspeare and of Molière. Even Euripides, as we have

explained above, made use of it in some of his tragedies. But he did not carry out his reform to its utmost power—indeed, he did not comprehend its capabilities. He never completely abandoned the framework of Sophocles, continuing to take his plots from the heroic and mythological traditions; but his mode of conception was different, and his system encountered all kinds of difficulties, from which resulted not a few incoherences.

Now-a-days the dramatic poet deals as he pleases with his subject. He is no longer obliged to draw all his plots from a common source, as were the Greek poets and even those of the seventeenth century, upon whom tradition imposed the narrow limits of ancient history and mythology. It will be remembered that Racine considered himself obliged to offer a formal justification for the act of borrowing a plot from modern Turkish history, and to submit that possibly distance of scene might be held to excuse proximity of time.

This necessity to make use of subjects consecrated by mythology or history, and consequently more or less generally known, greatly hampered the freedom of the poet; for under it, he could not introduce the changes that he might think desirable. It is one of the reasons explaining the long subordination of the characters to the dramatic action. They were, in fact, nothing but mechanical puppets. People were convinced that the public would take no interest in anything that did not come either from ancient Greece or from Rome. Thus the poet's sole duty was to adapt characters to the rôles marked out for them in advance, and to fashion them with an eye to the deeds imposed upon them by an unswerving fate.

Comedy was free from this servitude. The poet, free to choose his characters as he pleased, profited by the privilege to give rein to his imagination; and, when psychological interests began to overwhelm all others, he was able, without hindrance, to make such combinations as he deemed most in accord with the new aspect of things. Thus it was that the comedy of character was added to that of action, and soon came to be considered the superior from an artistic point of view.

But even when, thanks to the deadly warfare waged against it by the romantic school, the fetish worship of the antique ceased to be paramount, absolute freedom was not achieved all at once. The field for tragic subjects was at first extended so as to embrace the middle ages; but to this time it was hardly allowable to make use of anything or everything for the purposes of plot or character in the serious drama, although such freedom had long been enjoyed by comedy. There were still limits which could not be overstepped; and these, indeed, it may be said still exist. No mixture of the different kinds of dramatic work was allowed. After the example of Shakespeare, a mixture of what was very serious with what was absolutely grotesque was allowed, the one as a set-off to the other; but never any confusion between the two.

These distinctions will not last. In short, what is the real object? It is to represent men in action, that is to say, characters and passions. These characters and passions, by their gradual development in life, and their friction against others which are either different or contradictory, produce consequences of all kinds, both grave and gay. The whole art consists—first, in the gradual development of the personages represented, so that they shall be placed before an audience with sufficient truth and life to gain their interest; and secondly, in so managing their surroundings, that the natural logical consequences of their moral acts shall constitute a plot having the power incisively to touch men's hearts, whether in one way or the other.

Everything else is of slight importance: whether the characters are well-known heroes, or simple *bourgeois*; whether their names be Charlemagne, or Durand—these things are mere accessories with no influence either upon the merit or the effect of the play. It is absurd to found theories upon considerations of this kind. What is wanted is that those placed upon the stage shall be, not *great men*, but *men*; and to do it in such a way that the principal personage is the centre of both interest and action. In comedy as in tragedy, this is the essential point.

Another point of considerable importance in modern treatment,

is the substitution of individuals for types. With the ancients, the constant search for types represented the subordination of the poet to the legend. In the sixteenth century, everything of the nature of particular portraiture was thought unworthy of the dignity of tragedy. The generic type of passion, as conceived by the *petits-mâîtres* of the court of Louis XIV., was imposed upon all persons, without any reference to the circumstances. Pyrrhus recited madrigals to the mother whilst threatening to kill the son should she refuse his love. He talked like a wit and acted like a savage. Such contradictions shocked nobody. The refinement of passion and etiquette in *Iphigénie en Aulide* went naturally enough with human sacrifices!

In these days, character and passion are both individual—at least to a considerable extent, for it is a condition that they remain in accord with epochs and civilisations. It would evidently be absurd to push particularity to the point of eccentricity. We do not go to the theatre to wonder at phenomena. What we do look for is a certain amount of variety, which in fact is human nature, and which adds an attraction to emotion without in any way disconcerting it. We have made the same remark when speaking of the novel; indeed the novel has a great many points in common with the drama, but these do not require to be specified.

§ 8. *Lyric and satirical poetry—The superiority of poetry over the other arts is to be explained by its mode of expression—Poetry and science.*

Lyric poetry—which may be called exclusively religious in its principles, for its great object was to obtain the assistance of the gods—has succeeded, like the epos and the drama, in singularly enlarging its province under the hands of Pindar, Catullus, Horace, and the poets of England and Germany.

This kind of poetry, so long neglected in France, has conquered an extraordinary amount of favour in our day. The seventeenth century had to be content with *Esther* and *Athalie*; the ode upon the taking of Namur, without being thought a *chef*

*d'œuvre*, obtained plenty of readers, like the epopee of Chapelain. The eighteenth century had but little better fortune. It seems to have been tacitly agreed that lyric poetry did not suit the French genius: it would be difficult to sustain such an assertion in these days.

This branch of poetry owes its resurrection, in France, to that romantic revival which gave the signal for the revolt of spontaneity against tradition, and delivered artistic individuality from the fetters in which it was bound by academic conventions. It was a veritable *sursum corda*. Poetry, petrified by three centuries of pedantry and plagiarism, was warmed with the breath of a new life; and its restored liberty gave it an amount of ardour and *élan* that it had never known before. This sudden exaltation, increased by incessant struggles and a long succession of victories, becomes in its emphasis often exaggerated even to the point of declamation. This is one of the salient characteristics of the romantic school, when considered as a whole. We may safely say that from 1825 to 1840 the literary and artistic classes of France lived really in a state of constant fever, which evoked many works of great ability, but at the same time led to the commission of many absurdities. To their over-excited brains, things appeared in fantastic proportions. But still the period is one of the most curious and interesting in the whole history of the arts. Although by tempting a number of men to form false estimates of their own powers, persuading them by force of incessant discussion that they were born artists, and spurring them into the conflict with no better arms than a contempt for classicism and for tradition—although by so doing it produced many works which are now looked upon as ridiculous; we must yet acknowledge that, at no time, have circumstances been more favourable for the development of talent in those who really possessed its germ. Audacity was permitted, nay, encouraged to excess. Poets were stimulated to put forth their whole force; and their imaginations, intoxicated with such liberty, naturally became filled with wonderful dreams and with language not less extra-



ordinary. It matters little whether odes were written during these fifteen years, or not; the essential point is, that the lasting glory of the century was insured. When we remember the height to which poetic imagination rose upon the breath of that exalted, almost mad, lyricism, we see how difficult it was always to keep splendour of conception in perfect harmony with magnificence of outward form. It would have required men of rare genius to create bodies capable of satisfactorily filling such vestments, or to raise their poetry to the level of contemporary ambition. As a consequence of this disproportion between their contents and their forms, between the ideas and the language, most of the works of that time have perished. Victor Hugo has almost completely succeeded in vanquishing this difficulty, but in this he stands alone. We may say that he is the absolute incarnation of the spirit of that epoch; he is the lyric genius *par excellence*.

There is no need to insist upon the personal and psychological character of lyric poetry. Through it, the poet expresses his sentiments in a form which allows us to feel no doubt upon the point. We may say the same of satire.

Poetry is, then, the most human of all the arts; even more so than music. It is so from a double point of view, both from subject and object. It manifests the personality of the poet, not only indirectly, as do all the arts—by accent, by its choice of motives, and by the character and depth of its emotions—but also directly, through the voluntary and deliberate expression of sentiments and ideas. Its object, too, is quite as closely allied to humanity, for it is the portrayal of man with all his passions and characteristics.

This superiority, as we have seen, must be referred to the nature of its instrument, language, at once the most direct and the most complete of our means of expression. Another fact, not less essential, must be mentioned here. The arts that appeal to the sight can only make use of a single moment of time. Simultaneity is their law; as a consequence, they are obliged to concentrate all their efforts upon that moment, and so to dispose all the parts of a spectacle, as to give, to their simul-

taneous presentation, the utmost possible effect. Thus they find themselves deprived of the passages of preparation and transition which constitute the most powerful resources of music and poetry. Now it is precisely when the portrayal and gradual development of passion and character are in question, that these resources find their proper field of action. It is, therefore, but natural that psychological tendencies should become more rapidly and more completely perfected in poetry than in the arts of the eye. David, indeed, has succeeded, in his *Death of Socrates*, in expressing by a gesture the sublime indifference of the philosopher absorbed in the endeavour to make clear his idea to his disciples; but this is an exceptional case. We may, without exaggeration, affirm it to be a general law, that painting, the most expressive of the arts which appeal to the eyes, could not, without being foolhardy, attempt to compete with poetry in the expression of ideas and characters. Its domain, in this respect, is bounded by the narrower limits of *natural* language; that is, of attitudes, gestures, and the play of the features. In the use of these materials it has some advantages, and consequently may produce certain effects which poetry itself cannot hope to excel. But complications are forbidden to it, and, therefore, the psychological subjects that it can touch are singularly few in number.

Music, although it belongs to the same group as poetry, and is able, like it, to make use of the progression of time, is confined within still narrower limits than those of painting. Like poetry, it arrives at its maximum of effects by gradation and accumulation; but it is able to express only a very small number of passions and sentiments, and these the most general. Everything which possesses any individuality escapes it; the world of ideas is entirely closed to it. No art can rival it in the expression of such sentiments as are within its grasp; but it finds itself reduced to utter impotence, when it attempts to move outside the circle within which it is all powerful.

Poetry, then, is much the most complete of the arts. Inferior to each in special methods of expression, it is superior to all

in that it can, to a certain extent, fill their place by adding to its own resources a part, not only of each of the other arts, but also of prose. Again, its domain is practically almost without limit, as it embraces every emotion of the soul. Nor is this all: for, besides manifestations of sensibility and imagination, it includes those of intelligence; and thus its province becomes ever more and more extended with the advance of science.

We have already noticed this fact, without, however, explaining it.

Science, so long as it was kept down by the prejudices of theologians and metaphysicians, could hardly be a source of poetry; but the reason was simply that it had no real existence, and was incapable of affording any new food for the intellect. Served by fantastic methods which could give it no real help, it did nothing but repeat the lessons of priests and philosophers. It was reduced to a mere examination and classification of the principles imposed, reaching their logical results by a simple process of deduction, without any care to inquire into their validity as premises; and so it arrived at an unvarying reproduction of the principles from which it started. It was the triumph of the syllogistic system. Science worked round and round in an enclosed circle, in which theology and metaphysics exercised absolute authority.

When this empire received the first severe blow, when first experience and then experiment took the place of theology and ontology, real discoveries began. A crowd of new facts presented themselves, and began to play havoc with official explanations. And as these were gradually added to and classified, they ended in forming new generalizations, irreconcilable with those gone before. A new world gradually stood revealed, to account for which the theories so long accepted were quite inadequate. All earlier systems were upset, and transcendent hypotheses found themselves cast down from their places of honour.

Thus have men been brought, little by little, to believe only what is scientifically proved to them; that is, what they can verify

for themselves by direct observation. And this new form of faith is all the more fervent because it dates its rise from the downfall of error. It is faith in science—a new sentiment; but one not the less deep and powerful because free from the intolerance of religious faith.

We now see that the physical and natural branches of science are gradually beginning to exercise influence over the moral group. Through chemistry, physiology, paleontology and anthropology, they react upon and transform philosophy, psychology, and all the studies related thereto. We may safely predict that, in a future approaching more or less rapidly, the habits and processes of human thought will undergo a change analogous to that through which science has passed. The aims of individual activity will be transformed; general civilisation will be drawn into the movement through the progressive substitution of the universal principles of science for the hateful particularism of national or religious selfishness. People will come to understand that the well-being of the individual, far from being a necessary cause of harm to the many, on the contrary directly operates to ameliorate the lot of all. And, when once this conviction has entered every brain, principles of justice and sympathy will become general amongst all civilised races of mankind: there will be a community of aim and effort, instead of the hostility that causes an apparent contrariety of interests.

And then a new poetry, the daughter of science, will arise.

## CONCLUSION.

THERE is, in *Æsthetics*, one thing to be guarded against ; and that is, any confusion of the conditions and characteristics of the critical intellect, with those of real artistic genius. Such confusion is the source of a great many errors to which we are not sufficiently alive. The faculties required by the critic have absolutely nothing in common with those which give to artists their creative power. The work of the former is only rendered possible by his habit of analysis and the predominance of his reasoning powers ; while, to be fertile, the artistic temperament must be essentially synthetic. We see that, while between the critic and the artist there is one point—love of art—in common, this does not prevent the two from being placed, so far as the essential qualities are concerned, almost at the opposite poles of humanity. Their intellectual constitutions are different. That which constitutes the superiority of the one in the special order of conceptions that belongs to him, corresponds to the most frequent defect in the other. Calculation and reason, excellent things in their proper places, only play a subordinate part in the work of inspiration. Artistic genius consists essentially in a faculty to see things in their *ensemble* ; to gather into one harmonious vision the principal features that combine to produce a certain effect. The true artist does not compose his work by the juxtaposition of parts separately and painfully sought after. The peculiar character of his imagination enables him to call up complete and spontaneous images from the depths of his brain ; and from these he selects that which gives most complete expression

to the ruling idea. The action of his brain is like that of the judge in a competition, who gives the prize to the work which to him seems the best.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing can be less like the exercise of this judgment, than the laborious and patient meditation of the philosopher or man of science who proceeds from point to point, from one discovery to another, towards some usually unforeseen conclusion. The faculties made use of by the one and the other, are very dissimilar; and it is in consequence of the omission to take account of this fact, that philosophers, who write upon *Æsthetics*, make mistakes so strange as to the very nature of the intellectual operations which they pretend to regulate.

It was precisely this impersonality in the intellectual labour of artists, which gave rise to the belief, so general in classic times, in the direct intervention of deities specially commissioned to preside over the inception and production of works of art. It was the special business of Apollo, of the Muses, of Dionysus. These inspired all artists and poets; that is, they actually breathed into them the ideas, and dictated the substance of their works.

That which we persist in calling inspiration is, in fact, nothing but a moral condition: it is a cerebral excitement of a peculiar kind, without which an artist, in the complete sense of the word, would be impossible; a kind of conscious hallucination, that, while it communicates an appearance of exterior reality to the dreams of the imagination, remains subject to certain predetermined aims which never lose their directing power.

The effect of this hallucination is to set the brain at work—first, to call up, from the stores of the memory, such recollections as may be useful in the development of the desired impression; next by a process of quasi-spontaneous fusion, to combine these into

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the series of sketches in the museum of Lille, made by Eugène Delacroix in preparation for his picture of *Medea*. The picture is complete in each. There is nothing to remind us of the piece work of logical and analytic labour.

one unique result that becomes both the model and the criterion of the effect expected from the finished work.

When we compare the works of men of spontaneous and rapid genius, with those produced by the system of combination and reasoning, we are chiefly struck with the difference of their structure. In the former, everything is connected with the one idea by invisible but intimate bonds, explained by the unity of the first impression; in the latter, all kinds of solutions of continuity, joinings, and discords are visible. However careful and painstaking the connexions may be, they are never adequate substitutes for fusion. Whence comes the superiority of Shakespeare and Molière, if not from the peculiar power of intuition with which they were endowed, and which enabled them to see each character in its *ensemble*; to conceive it, from the beginning, complete in both essence and development?

It may seem strange to compare the complex characters of Shakespeare and Molière with the simplicity of the Greek statues. Nevertheless the intellectual phenomena from which they are evolved is exactly the same: the only difference is, that the genius of Shakespeare and Molière possessed a comprehensive power very superior to that of the Greek sculptors; and was therefore able to embrace and make use of a much larger number of elements, without in any way compromising the unity of the result.

But there is the same process and the same labour in each, and that for a reason which may be very easily understood. Notwithstanding the numerous and great differences between works of genius, they all spring from one and the same source—namely, from the kind of semi-conscious hallucination which has been already named.

The difference between the points of view at which artists and critics find themselves placed in relation to this matter, is very considerable and of great importance. The duty of simplification, which the critics press so strongly upon the attention of artists, would *appear* to be in perfect accord with such mental labours as

those of which the masterpieces of Greek sculpture are the result : it is, however, only an appearance, or, if it be preferred, a transformation of spontaneity into reasoning. Criticism, which is a science founded upon analysis and calculation, necessarily falsifies all artistic premises by the permanent and forcible substitution of its own language for that of art.

The fact is—the artist simplifies his work because he is almost invariably carried away by a unique idea or impression that takes possession of his mind, and directs all his faculties to one result. He epitomises form ; not in consequence of calculation and reasoning, but because his characteristic faculty, that which constitutes his creative power, is his ability to throw himself, body and soul, into every idea that passes through his brain, to put his whole force into each individual effort. From the moment an idea seizes him, he exists for it alone. Everything that does not relate to it, he casts out from his brain, and consequently from his work, as far as possible—allowing nothing to remain except what is necessary to strengthen, explain, and confirm it by the co-operation of every part in the production of a unique impression.

Let us suppose that a sculptor wishes to symbolize strength, personified in Greek mythology by Hercules ; or agility, of which Mercury was the incarnation. Would he begin by taking account of all the muscles used in prehension or in locomotion ; and then, taking a compass, give them an unusual development, and make this still more marked by the suppression or attenuation of the others ? Evidently not. The minute nature of such calculation and the patient labour required, fit only for a Chinaman, would be in absolute contradiction to the life and warmth and inspiration that give birth to works of art.

It is true, however, that the critic is within his true province when, in analysing a finished work of art, he remarks that such and such muscles are somewhat energetically drawn, while others are either omitted or barely indicated. He is right, should he choose, to note and measure such differences : nor could any one censure him should he fortify his final judgment by simplifying



the whole work through a process either of exaggeration or attenuation. But it is not the less certain, that any artist who should take such a formula for a programme, and should believe that, in it, was to be found the ideal of all art and the complement of æsthetic imagination, would be labouring under a singular delusion. A mere knowledge of how and when to exaggerate, attenuate, or simplify is by no means sufficient. It cannot be denied that anything, in a work of art, that does not help to concentrate the attention and the expressive power upon the essential point, does mischief. On the other hand, when simplification goes so far as to suppress life, the artist is but elaborating a corpse, and wasting both his time and his trouble.

Look at Harpagon and Tartuffe. A superficial critic, guided by the apparently clear principle of simplification by means of attenuation or exaggeration, might discover in them a crowd of characteristics which do not seem to have any direct relation to the value of the idea that they personify. The attempt has been made by a man who had an undeniable faculty of moral observation and, also, a certain amount of sagacity, but who was entirely without any sense of artistic vitality,—La Bruyère. For the complex and many-sided Tartuffe of Molière, he would have substituted a Tartuffe all of one piece, a Tartuffe of bronze, constructed purposely by himself with all the help that he could obtain from the most downright and rigid logic. The *Onuphre* which such methods gave him, was not even a skeleton, but simply a syllogism, an abstraction. This maker of maxims, who set himself up to correct Molière, did not comprehend that, between his mere shadows and the personages of the poet, there is a capital difference; this difference being shown by the fact, that Tartuffe and Harpagon are men as well as being, the one a hypocrite and the other a miser. They were born alive from the imagination of the artist, while *Onuphre* was nothing but the production of logic. In them Molière personified the ideas of a miser and an impostor; and he represented them as acting in the way in which such men would act. He had observed the proceedings of such

people in the ever-changing world of realities ; not in the fictitious and petrified world of the *intelligibles*, the world of metaphysical entities, inhabited by the "types" of the platonic school.

Is it not strange that these profound philosophers, who have so often pretended to give absolute receipts for the production of works of art, should never have been led to ask how it came about that artists—who seldom either know or care anything about metaphysics—are so well able to reproduce the types of ideal life, while they themselves, who are so near to the gods, are unable to create the most insignificant work of art? How can we believe that, being so well instructed in everything necessary for the execution of masterpieces, they are content to use their knowledge only to judge the work of others? This fact alone, as it seems to us, ought to be sufficient to convince them that before any theories and sets of rules can be of any use, something must be added to them : an artist must be endowed with certain natural aptitudes, and must be gifted with an eye and an imagination essentially different from those required by the critic and philosopher.

Were this truth once thoroughly understood, there would be an end to the perpetually recurring confusion between the processes of criticism and those of creation. Critics would cease to require artists to place themselves at their point of view ; they would no longer insist upon mixing up absolutely distinct duties, or upon substituting reason for imagination, and cold methodical calculation for artistic hallucination. There would be an end to their aim to confine art to a bundle of recipes and expedients;<sup>1</sup> of which the least mischief is the encouragement given to hundreds of poor fellows, born for nothing better than to weigh groceries, to think all that is required to make them artists is to learn

<sup>1</sup> See the Encyclopædias under the word "Art." All the definitions given may be thus summarized : a way of doing certain things in a particular way ; although study of methods is not enough, art is only an affair of memory and reason. Emotion and hallucination, which are the really essential conditions, are absolutely suppressed. The definitions given apply well enough to the art of making boots, but not to the fine arts.

by heart a few handbooks. The remarks that we have made on music, may be applied to all the other arts as well. Each of them may be looked upon as the peculiar language of a more or less extensive category of ideas and sentiments, to which it alone is able to give complete and adequate expression. Attempt to translate them by any other kinds of symbols, and you will soon discover that you have undertaken an impossible task. This is why critics and writers upon *Æsthetics* generally, so often find themselves impelled to transform the conceptions of the artist, and to drag them by force on to ground with which they are familiar. The explanations of artistic genius which they give, are simply the modes of critical thought peculiar to their own intellects. For the spontaneity of imagination and sentiment which constitutes the true artist, which has no active cause beyond the physical and intellectual constitution that may happen to be his—they substitute theories which are of no manner of use except to furnish their authors with convenient frameworks for the classification and appreciation of works of art, by bringing them within the range of their own comprehensions.

This error prevails everywhere in official art-teaching in France. It is a veritable bed of Procrustes. Thanks to it, men, who are full of devotion to art and of respect for intellectual independence, find themselves logically compelled to crush without mercy every sign of originality, and to overwhelm young intellects under the weight of theories for which they were never adapted. Young men are driven, like a herd of cattle, towards one single opening, through which they must all pass, however great may be their desire to turn to one side or the other. Another very grave objection to the system is, that it does not even leave time for young people to find out what their aptitudes may be. They find themselves committed to a mechanical routine before they have had any opportunity of self-examination, before they have even thought of such a thing; and they work on with docility without doubting that they are on the right road. No attempt is made to teach them the only thing which can be taught with

advantage, namely, technical skill; but they are at once fixed, as in a vice, in an unquestioning belief in five or six maxims of transcendental criticism, from which they never afterwards escape, and which, therefore, decide all their future destinies. To make assurance doubly sure, their faith is strengthened by continual competitions, in which it is made clear that rebellious spirits who refuse to keep step, can never achieve success. *Magister dixit*: from these words there is no escape—unless indeed all hope be given up of honours either from the school when young, or from the same official juries at the *salon*, when of mature age.

In a pamphlet from the pen of M. Duranty, I find quoted a saying of the painter Constable, the real inventor of the modern landscape; one that cannot be too much impressed upon the imaginations of youthful artists:

“I know that the execution of my paintings is singular, but I love that rule of Sterne’s: ‘Never mind the dogmas of the schools: go straight to the heart, if you have it in you.’

“People may say what they like of my art: I say that it is my own.

“There are two roads which lead to fame: the first is the art of imitation; the second is the art that comes from within—original art. The advantages of the art of imitation are these: it repeats the works of those masters which the public eye has long been taught to admire, and soon attains favourable notice. While that art which condescends to copy no one, which has an intense desire to paint its own impressions in the presence of nature, takes some time to become generally appreciated, for the simple reason that most of those who look at works of art, are unable to form a correct judgment of anything out of the beaten track.

“Thus it is that the ignorance of the public fosters idleness in artists, and drives them to imitation. It more than tolerates *pasticcios* after the great masters; it is afraid of everything which seems to be a new or risky interpretation of nature—truly a closed book to it.

“‘Nothing is more sad,’ says Bacon, ‘than to hear cunning people called wise:’ now mannerists are cunning painters, and mannered works are, unhappily, very often confused with those that are sincere. . . .

“When I sit down, chalk or pencil in hand, before a scene of nature, my first care is to endeavour to forget that I have ever seen a picture.”

This is the idea which we have endeavoured to uphold and develop in this work—sincerity in art, by the spontaneous manifestation of the personality of the artist. This alone is able to restore art, by the renewal of that spirit of originality which only is able to guard it from the over-zealous admirers of Greek sculpture and the works of the Italian Renaissance.

Nothing less than a revolution will do it. Suppose the Institute were to give back to artists their liberty—would that be enough? No; because the change would still have to be made in their modes of thought, in their intellectual proclivities—for these determine their selection of subjects. This point has been put very clearly by M. Thoré, a critic of an unusually enlightened and independent spirit. In a pamphlet under the title *Nouvelles Tendances de l'Art*, published in 1857, he traced the rapid progress of art movements from the time of Phidias to our own days; and proved that, at all epochs, art has been, with but few exceptions, dependent upon symbolism—at first Pagan, and, afterwards, Christian. When, now and then, religious subjects did happen to be put on one side, it busied itself with kings, princes and heroes. It ignored man. The Dutch school of the sixteenth century alone, took any heed of his existence; and only in the following century, a small number of French painters did as much—a matter the more surprising because Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare and Molière had already created men who were neither gods nor princes. It was but natural that poetry should have preceded the other arts in making the change; yet Thoré expresses very reasonable astonishment at the great lapse of time before its creations exercised any visible influence upon the aims of

the plastic arts, even in the countries where the example was given.

To what must we refer the delay? The answer is, to a fanatical regard for the past, and to academic despotism.

“Superficial intellects,” says M. Thoré, “which never penetrate beyond the external aspect of things, and short-sighted ones, which are unable to see into the future, look back upon the perfect realisation of artistic conceptions in the past, and fix the types both of art and beauty, some by the practice of the Greeks, some by that of the artists of the Italian Renaissance, some, even, by the productions of the middle ages—never suspecting that analogous, or even superior perfection may be achieved, in time to come, by pushing on to the consummation of different ideas.”

He goes on to say that “art is unceasingly and indefinitely mutable and perfectible, like all the manifestations either of man or of any other of the world’s inhabitants. Why did not Michael Angelo and Raphael despair when face to face with the works of Phidias and Apelles? And how is it that poetry has been written which is as fine as any thing produced by the ‘inimitable’ Greeks?”

“By avoiding imitation.

“Michael Angelo and Raphael were governed by conceptions totally distinct from those of the classic artists; and these they expressed by the aid of faculties which are evidently not the exclusive privilege of a peculiar race or of a certain system of civilization, but rather which constitute the indestructible and distinguishing genius of humanity.

“And why should not ages to come produce artists the equals of Raphael and Michael Angelo? There is nothing to hinder it, seeing that the Italians have equalled the Greeks, and provided that, by avoidance of imitation of the Renaissance, the way be open to the acceptance of new ideas and the birth of a new civilization.

“Without this nothing could be done.

“The idea only is able to work true revolutions. Change of form is a mere piece of caprice, to which any man can contribute either with his pen or pencil. But to change the essential idea ; this is not to be done at will. It does not depend upon one man, nor upon several. Radically to transform an art, is as difficult as to change the internal constitution of society.

“A transmutation of art can only take place effectively in harmony with a similar revolution in the general intelligence. Has that revolution taken place, or will it take place ?”

Such was the question put by Thoré, twenty years ago. He never attempted to answer it himself : can we do so now ?

Yes ; everything indicates the existence of such a movement as that which he hinted. In fiction the change has already been all but completed ; in the drama it soon will be. In the plastic arts, its necessity is ever becoming more and more acknowledged.

For many years past, the desire for movement in sculpture has been gradually superseding the old exclusive pre-occupation with line ; the sentiment of life is gradually encroaching upon abstract beauty of form. The sculptor is no longer content to reproduce attitudes ; he strives to become dramatic and expressive. One artist, possessed of a boldness almost reaching audacity, Carpeaux, has not hesitated to devote all his powers to such an attempt, in spite of the clamour excited by his innovations. All the worshippers of abstract beauty joined in denouncing him as a corrupter of public taste ; without, however, daring to foretell the influence that he was destined to exercise over contemporary art. We now see that his boldness supplied a want very generally felt, because the public have ranged themselves upon his side. A certain number of artists seem already to have set out, with more or less timidity it is true, upon the road in which he has foregone. We ourselves feel convinced that this movement will grow steadily in importance ; and that, fifty years hence, Carpeaux will be looked upon as the creator of a new art—the art of movement and of life.

We must, however, take care not to lay too much stress upon

this novelty : it is entirely relative. The art of Carpeaux is new merely by the severe contrast which it presents to the traditional theories upon which official æsthetics are based. In reality, it would not be difficult to find similar examples of bold originality in the Italy of the Renaissance, and even in Greece itself. We have already observed, and we repeat the observation, that Greek art is very far from being confined to the narrow limits which academic teaching would impose upon it. There existed at Athens, a religious sculpture, which, simply because its function was the representation of the gods, had no aim but to produce that air of more or less immobile dignity, without which the Greeks could form no conception of divinity ; whilst the decorative and monumental sculpture, by its subordination to architecture, was also condemned to a state of more or less complete immobility.

In both these branches of art, beauty of attitude, line, and form, was the one thing desired. Life and movement were forbidden by the conditions of their production. And to these, and to nothing else, does the Institute look for its models, eliminating everything that does not seem to refer to the pre-determined ideal.

Now, by the side of this magnificent, though somewhat narrow form of art, there existed in Greece another—living, expressive, animated and human—the manifestations of which did not, nor possibly could possess, either in their own days or in modern times, equal opportunities to make themselves known. All the world was acquainted with the great religious and monumental statues, because these came before the public with all the prestige of religious pomp or of the magnificent buildings of which they formed a part. By the preservation of the buildings in or on which they were placed, a sufficient number of such works have been handed down to their modern admirers. While the products of that branch of sculpture which, for want of a better term, I may call secular, as they did not respond to any national sentiment, were not only less famous with their contemporaries, but were more difficult to recover in later times, because their distribution



in private abodes left no trace of their location. Again, as this latter art has only become recently known, it is less familiar, and, therefore, less admired. When modern explorations first brought it to light, the official doctrines upon æsthetics were firmly established, and no room was left for the new-comer, either in the systems or the admiration of the Academies. But this does not prevent it from being worthy of great commendation on account of the very remarkable qualities of truth, life, and movement which it possesses.

I do not in the least wish to prove that Carpeaux drew any part of his inspiration from the Greeks. He probably has never troubled himself to seek for an art pedigree. If he has broken with the dominant traditions of his own day, it is because his individual temperament impelled him to seek for a more life-like art than that which he had been told to admire. But still it may be useful to reassure the timid by reminding them that expressive sculpture is not without its exemplars in the past, and that *precedents* are not *all* on the side of the Academy.

That which has been said of sculpture may be said of painting. The classic theory, debarred from going back to the time of the Greeks whose paintings have perished, has taken the Italian Renaissance for its foundation, and more particularly the religious paintings which that produced. It is, of course, true that among these works, a vast number of *chefs d'œuvre* are to be found, and that the period of their birth must always possess an undeniable glory. But in this case, as in that of the classic works of Greece, we find ourselves in the presence of peculiar circumstances. This art, put before painters as the one ideal, has a purely supernatural domain. Its aim is objective, and that aim divine. It lives in a world very different from ours; in the reproduction of religious scenes, illustrations of the Bible and the Gospels. We confess that we could not offer better models to artists resolved to follow this exact branch; but, as to the others, as to those who are touched by the spirit of our own century, and wish to represent its life—what advantage can they obtain by confining themselves to

a study so little in accord with their aims? Is it not an undeniable truth that, if they must imitate some one; if they must attach themselves to some school of the past: the Dutch are the masters to be studied, because their art is more than any other the art of life and movement?

These questions, so long neglected, are beginning to take the important place that is their legitimate possession. They are discussed in the *ateliers*. Independent intellects are gradually freeing themselves from the embarrassments of the great mythological, religious or historical systems of conventional art, and are turning to the subjects afforded by our modern life, by those internal and external facts which are obvious to all who have eyes to see. Look at our annual exhibitions. Everything that has the good fortune to be rewarded by the official juries, is sure to perish and disappear. The pictures that obtain the approval of true amateurs are always presentments of familiar scenes; of the labours, pleasures, customs and daily spectacles of modern life; portraits, landscapes—everything, in fact, that academic prejudice despises. All is prepared for an artistic Renaissance, in which man, with all his duties, his occupations, his joys and his sorrows, will take the place that belongs to him; in which he will be studied for his own sake, in his condition as man and not as mere decorative material: in which the human figure will no longer be treated as a mere collection of varied lines and surfaces, eminently adapted to give enjoyment to the eye, but as an harmonious group of significant features, all helping to forcibly express a particular physical and moral character. We shall, then, have an art worthy of the name which Thoré has prepared for it: *L'ART POUR L'HOMME*.

It is not possible that the transformation, already complete in the art of poetry, should not extend itself to the art of painting. We are profoundly convinced that so soon as the latter finally casts off the baleful protection that is deceiving, corrupting and smothering it—it will flow with the current of contemporary thought, and will obtain, like poetry, the life and inspiration that it now lacks.

TRUTH AND PERSONALITY : these are the alpha and omega of art formulas ; *truth* as to facts, and the *personality* of the artist. But, if we look more closely, we shall see that these two terms are in reality but one. Truth as to fact, so far as art is concerned, is above all the truth of our own sensations, of our own sentiments. It is truth as we see it, as it appears modified by our own temperaments, preferences, and physical organs. It is, in fact, our personality itself. Reality, as given by the photographer, reality taken from a point of view without connection with us or our impressions, is the very negation of art. When this kind of truth predominates in a work of art, we cry, "There is realism for you !" Now, realism partakes of the nature of art, only because the most downright of realists must, whether he will or not, put something of his own individuality into his work. When, on the other hand, the dominant quality is what we call human or personal truth, then we at once exclaim, "Here is an artist !"

And the latter is the right meaning of the word. Art consists essentially in the predominance of subjectivity over objectivity ; it is the chief distinction between it and science. The man intended for science, is he whose imagination has no modifying influence over the results of his direct observation. The artist, on the other hand, is one whose imagination, impressionability—in a word, whose personality, is so lively and excitable, that it spontaneously transforms everything, dyeing them in its own colours, and unconsciously exaggerating them in accordance with its own preferences.

We think ourselves justified, then, in calling art the direct and spontaneous manifestation of human personality. But we must not omit also to remember the fact that such personality—individual and particular as it is from some points of view—is nevertheless exposed to many successive and temporary modifications caused by the various kinds of civilisation through which it has had to pass. We may say, in general terms, that the object sought has always been truth ; but, as artistic truth is necessarily objective, it has varied indefinitely in the course of centuries—

for these have brought about successive transformations in human personality. All art, worthy of the name, is human and personal in a certain measure ; though this does not prevent the forms of art practised in Egypt, Babylon, China, India, Greece, Rome, and Italy, from being very different the one from the other, as a consequence of the varieties of race, climate, political and social circumstances, distinguishing the inhabitants of the respective countries. For similar reasons, analogous differences are to be found in a nation, and reproduce all the modifications which its ideas, sentiments and aspirations undergo—that is to say, changes in its artistic personality.

France, which, for the last fifty years, has been intoxicated with the fermentation of romanticism and its fantastic dreams ; which has tried to raise its imagination to the level of Shakespeare and Turner ; which, in a word, has been attempting to create an artistic personality apart from facts, by raising itself into a region of poetic phantoms : is now attempting to form a kind of scientific personality, by careful examination of the impressions which spring from direct and careful observation of fact, by elaborate research into detail, and attention to individual temperament. It is still the individuality of the artist that produces art ; the difference is, that this personality, formerly occupied in the search after the gigantic, the superhuman, and the impossible, now contents itself with love of truth and life, such as they appear to the attentive observer.

Can this be called a debasement of art ? We might as well say that Science debased herself when she substituted *why* for *because*, experiment for ontology, demonstration for hypothesis ; when she added the study of the earth to that of the heavens, and the use of the microscope to that of the telescope.

## APPENDIX.

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### THE ÆSTHETICS OF PLATO.

It was the first intention to begin this work with a history of Æsthetics, and in this it was proposed to set forth and discuss the principal theories that have been put forward—those of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Lamennais, Jouffroy, Cousin, Pictet, Ruskin, Lévêque and Taine. But the whole volume would not have sufficed for their proper consideration, so the idea was given up.

We were all the more readily reconciled to its abandonment, as perhaps, with the exception of the first, no one of these theories has exercised any appreciable influence upon artistic production.

The system of Plato is the only one that need be carefully considered; and this because it is the origin, or, at least, the explanation, of most of the prejudices constituting academic or classic doctrines.

Every year, especially while the salon is open, numerous art criticisms appear, in which those who believe in orthodox teaching, resuscitate the name of Plato, in order to attribute to him definitions and theories that they would hardly find in any of his works. However, this awkward fact does not trouble them. A kind of tacit convention exists upon the point, against which no one protests, because no trouble is taken to verify its existence. Most people look upon Plato as the final authority upon any question of the beautiful in art, although that philosopher never wrote upon the subject of Æsthetics.

It is true that he often more or less directly touched upon questions connected with art, and that it is possible to build up, from his works, a sufficiently intelligible system, and one that will show no very obvious discords between its separate parts. But he has never given any consecutive exposition of his ideas; and it is just because they do not exist in any concrete form, that men have been enabled to attribute to him so many high-sounding phrases of which he never heard, and which are so inconsistent one with another. One volume might be

searched to verify a quotation—but ten volumes! that is a more serious matter. And so it came about that men accepted, and, worse still, repeated as authentic, formulas which at last passed into circulation with the force almost of axioms.

When we hear anyone quote from Plato the words: "Beauty is the splendour of truth," do we ever suspect that the philosopher never said anything of the kind? Do we realise that the sentiment in question cannot be brought into complete accord with Greek philosophy even by the most far-fetched analysis? We might, with some difficulty, establish a connection between such a phrase and the doctrine of Aristotle, which made imitation the aim and principle of art; but not with that of Plato, which was entirely founded upon the ideal theory.

It is true that this theory of the ideal has not received such maltreatment as the definition of beauty; and this is all the more surprising in that Plato has repeatedly and very clearly explained his thoughts upon the latter subject.

Every one makes use of the expression, the ideal, without any attempt accurately to define it, as though it sufficiently explained itself. Some direct or indirect allusion places it under the patronage of the "divine" Plato, and this is all. No word is more often found in the writings of official and academic critics. We may even say that it contains and summarizes the whole academic programme. Under the authority of the "Platonic Ideal" they have successively unmathematized all the efforts that have been made to rescue art from routine. It would seem, then, that such a phrase should have, for them at least, some clear and accurate signification.

It is not so, however. The contrary is the case. When by the aid of context and analysis, we have managed to arrive at the sense they attach to the word, we are astonished to discover that its meaning is either quite undetermined, or that it is incompatible with the doctrines on which they rely for the confusion of reformers. Some, professing to follow Plato, confound idealism with generalization; others, thinking themselves to be as faithful disciples as the former, identify it with God himself: and this is done in the face of the numerous pages which Plato has written with no other object than to explain that his conception of the ideal had nothing in common either with generalization or with anything divine. The multitude naturally follows in the footsteps of the academicians, and of the shining lights of the university, and holds forth upon the ideal with an energy worthy of a better cause.

From all this we have a current of opinion that exercises a most disastrous influence over art criticism and over art itself. A little

time may, therefore, be profitably employed in the study of the Platonic theory; and it shall be our endeavour to explain it as clearly and as concisely as the subject will permit.

If we wish to comprehend the doctrines which were imposed upon Greece by the philosophic reaction inaugurated by Socrates and formulated by Plato, we must first of all do our best to realise the general point of view from which they looked on things, and to imbue ourselves with the principles that governed their reasonings. This precaution is all the more necessary because it is only rarely that these principles are clearly enunciated by the philosophers themselves. They may be described as latent axioms, the existence of which, whilst governing their arguments, is not always directly recognised—for occasionally they lead to self-contradiction.

The first of these principles is the most essential. It is, that the human intelligence is in itself inert. It requires to be put in motion by some external force, and its movement is confined to the passive reproduction, in a more or less weakened condition, of the object presented to it. It is, primarily, a kind of mirror meant to give indifferently accurate reflections of the forms of terrestrial appearances, or of the more easily-grasped characteristics of impalpable or metaphysical realities.

The passivity and inertia of the human intellect are the foundation of the theories that are now the chief objects of official admiration. It is on the same foundation that Socrates and Plato have constructed their system of metaphysics.

From the very first they were confronted with one very grave difficulty—the desire for the best, the wish for perfection which has now been acknowledged as the law of history; which was its regulating power long before such acknowledgment was possible. To what present realities do these ideas of happiness, of beauty, of absolute truth, correspond? If we admit that they exist in some other world, how can we explain their repetition in the mirror, man, in this—a world in which they have no place?

These questions may seem embarrassing; but, in truth, nothing can embarrass the metaphysician who is fairly endowed with imaginative power, and who is able to take refuge in the infinite domain of hypothesis. Three hypotheses enabled Plato to outflank all these difficulties.

First hypothesis.—Above the actual world in which we live, another world exists which is peopled by the ideal essences of things. Individual objects, subject to the limits of time and space as we know them, are there replaced by their ideal or perfect types, such as they first

emerged from the divine brain. Each of these types has been utilized in succession as the model for the infinite multitude of objects of the same category. There is the *ideal bed*, the "*lit en soi*," absolutely perfect, after which individual beds are constructed by mortal joiners! There also is the *ideal tree*, whose perfection nature imitates with more or less success in the trees that we see growing around us! There, too, are absolute types of happiness, truth, beauty, which man strives after in his terrestrial life with a greater or less modicum of success.

Second hypothesis.—How is man to penetrate into this world of *intelligibles*, which is impenetrable to the physical eye? This question is answered by a second hypothesis, no less ingenious than the first.

By the side of and in addition to the senses which enable us to see and feel material objects, we have a special faculty, that we call reason, which acts as an intermediary between our tangible world and the other. Reason is the most godlike of the faculties. It is a kind of open window through which human sight is enabled to penetrate into the sphere of pure ideas. But not the less on that account is it a purely passive quality. It, too, is a mirror, superior, indeed, to the other by the nature of the images which it reflects, but able to do no more than reflect. Man, try as he will, can only repeat a lesson which he has learned. All the ideas that he has the power to express have their type and model in the world of *intelligibles*. He is nothing but a plagiarist. The greatest geniuses, in philosophy, in arts or in letters, are those to whom the divine essences of things have been most completely laid open, and who have most accurately reproduced such revelations.

Third hypothesis.—There is but one thing now to be accounted for—and that is, the strange attraction which all that belongs to the ideal world exercises over man. This is a formidable difficulty, because it is obvious that if the human intellect be purely passive, it must also be quite indifferent to the nature of objects and the ideas which they reflect. But every thing combines to prove that such indifference does not exist; that man is naturally drawn to whatever is great, generous, or beautiful.

A third hypothesis is formed, then, to explain this moral phenomenon :

*Man is a fallen god, who retains his recollections of Heaven!*

Before his descent into this vale of tears and misery—man, as Plato tells us, contemplated the essences of things and lived among the Gods. Before being subjected to the yoke of his senses and the dark prison of his body, he was a pure spirit; nothing interposed between the absolute



types and himself; his intelligence was not prevented from entire comprehension of pure truth and supreme beauty. His happiness was complete.

When he fell from heaven upon this earth, he brought with him some vague souvenir of his primitive dignity, sufficient to keep alive in his heart an inextinguishable regret for what he had lost, an incessant desire to enjoy once more the happiness that had then been his. So, too, the sight of the imperfect and gross objects that he perceived on all sides, recalled, from the depths of his memory, the more or less confused and obliterated images of the perfect types which he formerly beheld around him; and excited in him an ever more and more active desire to build up truthful reproductions from these scanty and incomplete materials. This is the theory of recollection founded upon that Indian doctrine of Metempsychosis, which is to be found, in various forms, at the root of most religions.

We have now arrived at Plato's system of Æsthetics.

Matter has existed from all eternity. The Deity charged himself with its organization. Such is the principle of creation according to Plato.

The world, in its *ensemble*, is as fair as any thing can be in which matter holds so important a place. But it neither is, nor can be perfect. Perfection implies a number of attributes that entirely exclude any sentiment of duality. Two perfect beings cannot exist at one and the same time, unless they be quite separate from each other. Perfection denies all limit. The Supreme Being has, then, only communicated to the world a weakened shadow of his own perfection. So it comes about that order, harmony and proportion take the place of divine unity. In accordance with its distance from the Supreme Being, that unity becomes sub-divided, even to infinity; and at last harmony and proportion give place to disorder and confusion.

Things created are subject to the triple law of time, space and movement, by which they are subdued, limited and carried along. They are unable to resist change and destruction; and, as they are limited, corruptible and changeable, they can not be called beautiful in the full acceptation of the word—they present nothing capable of satisfying our love of beauty.

They do, however, sometimes preserve traces of their origin, which awaken in us far off and slumbering memories of our sojourn in the world of pure essences, and once more excite in our souls the love of eternal and divine beauty that we once possessed.

Art is the offspring of this love. In order to preserve from change and

corruption the objects whose perishable beauty arouses our dormant love for the unchanging beauty which it was our privilege to behold in a previous existence—we teach ourselves to imitate them, to reproduce them under such conditions that our pleasure may enjoy a very prolonged, if not perpetual, life.

Artists are they who have been able to preserve the most vivid recollection of, and the warmest love for, eternal beauty ; who, therefore, are quickest to perceive its traces in the visible objects around them ; who are most bountifully endowed with that idea of pure beauty which illumines for them the perishable scenes of this world of realities.

But, for the same reason, we can easily understand that the imitative desire which expends itself upon such realities, does not bind itself down to an exact or servile copy. The object to be imitated is lighted up and warmed by a ray from the divine beauty whose recollection dwells so strongly in the bosom of the artist. He has, then, two models ; or, to be more accurate, the perishable model that he has before his eyes, gradually fades away to give place to the more or less hazy and undefined, but always life-like image of the ideal essence.

This image, far away as it is from typical perfection, is what Plato calls the ideal.

This conception forms the ultimate basis of the whole Platonic theory of Æsthetics. We must dwell upon it with some little care ; because, simple and clear as it appears in the works of the Greek philosopher, it has become curiously vague and undefined in the writings of those modern authors who look upon themselves as his heirs and the expositors of his theories. The reason for the change is not far to seek. From the moment when the hypotheses of reminiscence and of a previous state of existence were put on one side, the very foundation of the doctrine of the ideal was withdrawn, and the whole superstructure left floating in space.

Plato begins by explaining that the ideal, as conceived by him, must not be confounded in any way with the general idea of beauty.

The latter idea is purely abstract and arbitrary, resulting from a conscious operation of our intelligence. Having before us the whole array of objects that constitute creation, we arrange them into such categories as common characteristics may seem to suggest. Thus we obtain ideas, more or less general in proportion as they include a larger or smaller number of analogies. The more diverse the objects comprised under one idea, the fewer will be the common features possessed by these objects. This fact is easily understood, when we remember that a *generic* idea necessarily excludes all differences ; and, on the other

hand, that the number of differences must increase in proportion to that of the objects brought into comparison.

A general idea, so far from bringing objects together, proceeds rather by elimination, and acquires the most complete appearance of generalisation when nothing remains between it and its objects but one common point.

Consequently, the general ideal of beauty is only to be formed by eliminating from each beautiful object such features as constitute its own peculiar beauty, and by retaining only the qualities that are common to all other things to which the same epithet is applicable.

The general result of this is, that the general ideal of beauty, by its own logical constitution, cannot contain so much beauty as the particular objects placed by it in one category; and, also, that it cannot be regarded as representing a *Summum* to be attained.

It is difficult enough to understand how a purely abstract idea, one necessarily and logically excluding all material reality, can become a rule and model for artistic imitation. Art only exists on condition that it *realises* its conceptions. But a general idea can only be realised by ceasing to become general, and putting on individuality. Between the two conceptions there is nothing but absolute and irreconcilable contradiction.

Ideal beauty is, then, a very different thing from a general ideal of beauty. It is not to be found in the individual; because the latter, subject to the triple bondage of time, space and movement, can never reach perfection. Absolute beauty is to be found nowhere except in the one perfect Being, God; and, consequently, does not exist even in His direct and immediate creations, which are the prototypes of visible things.

Absolute beauty must never be confounded with the ideal.

Things absolute, by their very infinity, avoid the grasp of human intelligence, and can never be realised in a visible object. The direct imitation of absolute beauty is an utter absurdity. The ideal is nothing but the shadow of the impressions received by the intellect of man from the types of perfect beauty that he was formerly privileged to behold; it can never be complete. However strong the recollection may be—it can never be anything but an obscure and incomplete image of ideas, that themselves were but an imperfect reproduction of divine beauty.

It does, however, preserve certain traces of its origin. The ideal, considered in itself, is a unique thing; because it is the essence of each class of beings, elevated by reason till it is as perfect as possible here

below. It is immutable, not to be affected by time or change, because it is the constant and universal type of each whole class of objects or beings. It is immaterial, as being the very essence of things. It occupies the middle place between God, who is absolute perfection, and the material and perishable realities of which it is the type.

Another characteristic of the ideal, is that its inability to receive any kind of substance compels it to keep its place in the sphere of pure ideas. Substance can only be looked upon as either finite or infinite. If the ideal were to be clothed in infinite substance, it would become confounded with the Deity, and lose its individual existence. On the other hand, a finite substance would bring it down into the real world; would subject it to the law of time, space and movement: that is, would cause it to lose the characteristics constituting its superiority over mere sublunary matters, a result equivalent to its total suppression.

But as the very nature of the ideal is opposed to any possibility of material realisation, it follows that it can no more be directly represented by art than the absolute itself. The ideal, as understood by the artist, is only a more or less attenuated image of the type; and it is this secondary image that serves as his model in the accomplishment of his works: and this is as much as to say that the most perfect work of art is nothing but a more or less imperfect copy of an imperfect reflection of the ideal type itself. Again, the ideal types of things, which, in the aggregate, form the ideal world, are equal in number and bear the same relations to each other as the general ideals. Each category of real beings and objects is represented, in the language of man, by a word, and in his intellect, by a unique conception, such as table, lion, or tree; and, in the world of ideas, by an equally unique type. We have here, then, a triple series, on parallel lines and governed by the same laws. The artist has to study all these laws as they are in nature and to transfer them to his works; whilst they must not, in so doing, lose any of that ideal character, of that fine proportion and harmonious unity that constitute the beauty of the universe.

So it comes to this—art, springing from the dim *reminiscence* of typical beauty, and re-awakened by the spectacle of actual and real beauty, sets before it, as its aim, the most complete realisation possible of ideal beauty; a realisation that can only come about through efforts of the reason to reconstitute and re-unite the vague and confused glimmerings left in the memory of the artist by the splendid sights that formed part of his former life.

Reason alone, however, would not suffice to produce such a result. The proper field of reason is not art, but science; that is pure science,

the science of God. The beauty that is to be sought in God, is not the beauty with which art has to do ; for that would be absolute beauty, a very different thing from ideal beauty.

But if reason outsteps the true aim of art in the attempt to raise itself up to God, it is not to be denied that, in the course of such ascension, it traverses the ideal world, which is placed, so to speak, half way between heaven and earth. It is the means of revealing the ideal to us ; but, from the point of view of art, its labour would be vain, were it not that our senses put us in communication with exterior objects, by the sight of which we are directed towards celestial things, and have our recollections of our former state of existence stirred up. The Platonic system can do nothing without this latter hypothesis.

We see, then, that reason plays a very important part in art. Were it not for the idea of perfection, instilled into us by reason, we should have neither canons of judgment nor any desire to judge. One thing would seem to us as good as another. Thanks to the idea of perfection, a complete classification has been established. Reason is the force impelling us to the search after that perfection which is neither in ourselves nor in the objects that surround us ; but which allows us to arrange all things in their order in accordance with the proximity to the supreme model.

But perfection only exists in God ; and it is because God exists, that the idea of perfection is to be found among the conceptions of human reason. Consequently, although God can never be the ultimate aim of art—because absolute and perfect beauty is far beyond the reach of the human intellect—it is not the less true that—as the existence of divine beauty alone renders possible for us the conception of that intermediary form of beauty which is called the ideal—without the idea of God no art would be possible. In a word, it is only the conception of the infinite perfection of God that renders us capable of perceiving the finite perfection of worldly things.

This conception of the ideal excludes imagination from art, or, at least, puts a strong curb upon its freedom. Imagination, which, like the senses from which the elements of its creation are derived, is essentially a capricious and ill-regulated faculty, could only result, if left to itself, in an inferior and contemptible kind of art. Its proper function is the combination of the forms that have been preserved by the memory. The materials that it makes use of are borrowed from visible reality, and consequently all their characteristics are well known and jealously guarded. They are, therefore, unworthy of art, as they are complete strangers to the ideal.

Besides, we must not forget that, although the ideal does not appear with equal clearness to every intellect, and that, in consequence, its manifestations may be clothed in ever varying shapes, in itself it is always the same, and art should chiefly aim to reproduce it with all the fidelity that the human intellect is capable of.

We may say, then, that there is but one art, in the true sense of the word—namely, that which offers the most complete representation possible of the unique type to which every object may be referred. As each object obtains its true artistic realisation, that realisation is elevated into the condition of a *canon*, which cannot be changed or interfered with except at the risk of punishment.

This principle was very early applied by the priests, in the countries subject to sacerdotal influences. The Greeks, less easily satisfied because their conception of the ideal was somewhat above the average, left much more liberty to their artists; but not the less for that was the idea of a limit, beyond which no man should go, contained in the Platonic theory. It was a fatal day when tradition obtained the mastery over art, and arrested its progress at the very point where the limit of realisable perfection seemed to be attained.

How was such perfection to be realised? The answer is, by love. The true artist is not only the man whose intelligence is sufficiently elevated to seek for the ideal world and to make itself familiar with ideal beauty as made manifest by the Deity in the primitive types of things, but he also feels a love for these types sufficiently powerful to render his conception prolific. It is creative genius which makes the true artist. The object of art, like that of love, is not beauty alone, it is generation and production in beauty. Hence both one and the other are driven each to perpetuate itself and to acquire immortality—that is to say, to escape from that law of space, time, and movement which is more obnoxious to artists than to other men, because all their faculties lead them towards that ideal sphere, of which the chief characteristic is freedom from the conditions of this changing and perishable world.

Plato's theories, although they are more than two thousand years old, still exercise a considerable influence over modern intellect. They are, in different degrees, the inspiration of all official teaching; the very language of art has received a vivid impression from them. Therefore it is all the more important that we should point out their errors and omissions.

The first thing that strikes us, is the fact that the whole of Plato's system is founded upon an hypothesis, namely *reminiscence*. The philosopher finding it difficult to explain whence comes the force

that impels man to seek for the best of everything, took refuge in the supposition that man had become acquainted with the splendours of the ideal creation in some previous state of existence. After such a conclusion there was nothing to stand in the way of his explanation, that the sight of worldly objects awakened in his memory the more or less faded traces of former pleasures—just as a word will often bring to mind some forgotten dream.

The innate nature of our conception of duty, being thus explained, every thing else came easily and naturally from this hypothesis. Let us examine the truth of it.

The hypothesis of reminiscence brings another in its train—namely, the existence of an ideal and invisible world, inhabited by primitive types, the essences of things, and those pure ideas born from divine thought which may be called secondary divinities themselves, among which men lived before they were precipitated into the gross realities of our inferior state of existence.

We must confess that a system that starts with two propositions such as these, has great need of further demonstration. But demonstration is only conspicuous by its absence. From a scientific standpoint, we should be justified in considering it to be without foundation from this fact alone: were it not that the unreflecting adhesion of pretended philosophers—men who prefer imagination to truth, and judge scientific theories by their own prejudices and fancies—has given it an authority to which it has no internal claim. But to return to our inquiry.

We have said that, if the Platonic theory of æsthetics begins with a series of purely imaginary hypotheses, it finds its consummation in a no less arbitrary supposition. The object of art, says Plato, is the expression of ideal beauty. But any conception of this ideal beauty would be impossible, as also would be the elimination of the partly obliterated traces of the ideal types of things, were not the absolute and infinite beauty of the perfect being an ever present standard of comparison for the human intellect—enabling it to appreciate exactly the quality and quantity of beauty subsisting in things finite.

All this amounts to an assertion that the human intelligence is, in itself, incapable of conceiving and creating an ideal of beauty; and that it must have a visible model upon which to formulate its conceptions. Such a belief was not that of Plato alone, but of all the ancients; and, consequently, it forms a part of all the philosophic doctrines more or less immediately founded upon classic theories. We cannot say too often that official metaphysics is the development of the

same belief. According to it, the intellect of man is nothing but a mirror whose function it is to reflect the images of things as well as it can.<sup>1</sup> Because all the ideas contained in our brains may be referred to some external fact, physical or metaphysical; and because we can neither see with our eyes nor touch with our hands the models for our conceptions: therefore these models only exist in the ideal world!

By a simple deduction, we can prove from the fact that we possess an ideal of perfect beauty, that such an ideal must have actual existence. If we do not see it in this world, it is because its place is in another. Now, perfect beauty is only to be found in the one perfect being, who can be no other than God. Thus, then, the idea of God becomes the formative principle of art and remains its supreme law.

But as, from another point of view, the Platonic system inevitably carries with it the exclusion of matter, we are compelled to ask how it is possible that purely ideal beauty, without lines, contours or any material reality, can have any connection with the plastic arts. For it must be clearly understood that such a god as Plato's, cannot be imagined with any form or shape whatever. He is the infinite; immeasurable; no limit is possible to him.

But with logicians so cunning and powerful, words can easily be made to serve to identify things. Beauty is the object of the arts; and beauty is a state of perfection worthy of the one perfect being. God then *has*, or rather *is*, beauty itself—although it would be absurd to attribute anything to him in the nature of form.

We may say almost the same thing of the ideal types of things that, according to Plato, are the direct models of artistic creations. As they are simple essences, without matter, they too must be destitute of form. They are pure ideas; and how are we to imagine pure ideas in the possession of bodily shapes? Plato allowed himself to be carried away by mere verbal appearances. It is certain that, in our brains the idea of a bed can never be confounded with that of a table; and, also, that the respective *ideas* are perfectly distinct from the realities to which they refer. But how is it that we do not confound them? Simply because they preserve in our memories the shapes and lines which

<sup>1</sup> It is curious enough that modern realism, claiming to be a protest against the spirit of official metaphysics prevailing in the æsthetic teaching of the Academy, itself reflects the essential principle of the system against which it is so bitter—namely, the absolute unproductiveness of the human intellect. I speak, of course, of complete and consistent realism, like that of Courbet, when it is in the humour for reasoning and logic; and not of the naturalism that admits the participation of human activity in the formation of the ideas that both spring from and are expressed by the sight of external things.



distinguished them in their actual tangible existence. Now, these shapes and lines are only possible through the purely physical nature of such objects as are distinguished one from another by their tangibility colour, and such like. The shapes and lines are, then, the results of experimental observation, of sensation—of such material conditions, in fact, as can never be reconciled with platonic *ideas*. These ideas represent nothing from a scientific point of view, but a conception having the double disability of being at once hypothetical and self-contradictory.

In considering this point we must not allow ourselves to be mystified by the somewhat vague and indefinite meaning that ignorance has succeeded in attaching to the word *ideal*. In the system of Plato this expression always bears the very precise signification which we have endeavoured to restore to it; and the conception which it symbolises is one of the principal points in the totality of his art theories. The very existence of these depends upon that of the ideal world, by him suspended half way between God and man. Take away that world and its ideal population, and the whole structure falls to the ground.

Plato, not content with affirming its existence (to which he clung simply because it was necessary to his system; for he would have denied it with equal facility and assurance if he could have discovered any other equally convenient hypothesis) frequently returns to the peculiar characteristics that he assumes it to possess. It is unique, he says; it is eternal, it is immaterial, it is immovable. But at the same time he declares, being forced to do so by the evidence, that this unique ideal presents itself in various forms to different intellects.

But then, we may say to him—By what right do you assert that your conception of the ideal is the correct one? How can you possibly give an accurate account of all the qualities of this invisible thing, which, according to your own confession, bears shapes so various? How can it be at once so vague and so precise, so obscure and uncertain to the rest of the world, and so clear to you alone? Have you received the power and peculiar privilege to enter the abstract world of celestial metaphysics, from which everyone else is excluded?

I truly believe that Plato would have replied without hesitation, yes; because he has more than once expressed his belief in the original diversity of intellects. In fact, he believes in predestination, in the providential selection of intellects; and upon such belief, he has founded political and social opinions of extreme gravity. But it must be said, that if he have no better argument than this to support his notion of an ideal world and its functions, absolutely contrary theories might be founded upon the same reasoning. All the seers, prophets and oracles

of metaphysical discussion may say as much; and yet we are not obliged to receive their affirmations as conclusive proofs. In reality, the doctrine of the ideal in the Platonic system, is nothing but a particular appropriation of the anthropomorphic conceptions that have always held so commanding a position in the creations of popular belief. Man has the double faculty of conceiving the abstract ideas of things, and, at the same time, of elevating those ideas to a degree of perfection that he does not find in the things themselves. Plato, believing that these ideas could only be the intellectual images of real things, was forced to conclude that the real types existed in some other world, where they would be free from the imperfections of matter and time. The determination of the characteristics of the ideal, logically resulted from the notion that gave it birth; from the reasoning that attributed to ideal conceptions a real existence under a special set of conditions. But no kind of proof is afforded us of the existence of the hypothetical world in which they are placed. It is true that, when once the hypothesis is admitted, logic compels us to attribute to it certain characteristics rather than others. It is obvious that if ideal types existed under the limitations of time, space, and change imposed upon real objects, there would have been no necessity to create a new world for their especial benefit; because the aim and sole utility of such a creation was to withdraw them from the tyranny of actual conditions.

But this convenient hypothesis of the ideal, which was of so great service to Plato, did him also an ill turn or two. It is sometimes said that he was a theologian rather than a philosopher. His whole teaching is nothing but a hymn sung in honour of the perfection of divine works.

If there is evil in the world, it is only because a perfect and omnipotent God has been driven, by inexorable logic, to the creation of beings inferior to himself. It would be impossible for several infinite beings to exist at once. God exists, and, therefore, he can only produce finite, and consequently imperfect creatures.

But this same divine perfection imposes upon the Creator the obligation to give all the perfection possible to the things created, so far as may be compatible with himself. So, as God has placed order, harmony, and proportion in the world, reflections of that unity which alone is compatible with divine perfection, the world is as perfect as it can be; and it would be an insult to the Supreme Being to suppose, for an instant, that the universe could be better than it is.

Plato never fails to dwell upon these considerations whenever he has the opportunity. But, by a consequence which escaped his notice, his

theory of the ideal brings us to a logical conclusion entirely opposed to his own. It makes the creations of man superior to those of God!

According to the philosopher himself, the *general*, a purely human conception, contains more of ideal truth than the *individual*; that is, than each of the separate objects created by the divine volition. But art again is superior to the *general* idea, and contains more truth than nature herself.

Art, it is true, is inferior to the pure ideal, because it remains subject to the conditions of matter; but in spite of this limitation, it produces works superior to those of nature—that is, superior to those created by the Deity under precisely similar conditions. It makes better use of its opportunities than the Supreme Being, because it manages to put more beauty in its material creations than He succeeds in embodying in works of the same order.

This is a very grave conclusion, and it is impossible to get away from it. We may be justly astonished that it has not struck those metaphysicians who are the chief supporters of the artistic theory of Plato—a support founded, as we may well believe, upon its conformity with the fundamental characteristics of their own metaphysical creeds, rather than upon any truth in its application to art.

Finally—for we must not prolong this discussion by entering into too much detail—we must affirm that the Platonic doctrine results, in art as in all else, in the negation of movement, of expression, of passion and of life. Plato, in what he says about the fixed and unchanging *canons* that were fatally destined, by their very nature, to invade the whole realm of art and fix it in a state of petrification, confesses so much himself. Another doctrine of the same kind is to be found continually implied in the numerous passages in which he does not shrink from declaring his belief that the most beautiful of all figures are those of geometry.

Even if he did not confess these things, they would follow necessarily from his theory of the ideal. What is the special character of the ideal? Exemption from all laws of time, space or movement. Immutability and immobility constitute the larger part of its perfection. The art that takes the manifestation of the ideal for its aim, should do its utmost to eliminate from its representations whatever it does not find in its model.

The *Æsthetics* of Plato were in complete accord with the moral theories of antiquity, which had, for their principal aim, the suppression of all passion; that is, of the emotions that are the expression and natural manifestation of vitality. The consummation of this doctrine is found: in art, in the serene immobility of the gods of Phidias; in

morals, in the *ataraxy* of the Stoics; in religion, in the asceticism of an Indian Fakir.

We may now leave the subject. An artistic theory that rests entirely upon unproved hypotheses, and that logically results in the negation of all expression, life, and progress; that separates man from his work, and reduces him to the condition of a mere copyist; that, at the same time and by a strange contradiction, would elevate the productions of a being thus degraded over those of God himself—is refuted by its mere recital, and so spares us the examination of the details of less important objections.

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