

THE NEW MISSION  
OF ART

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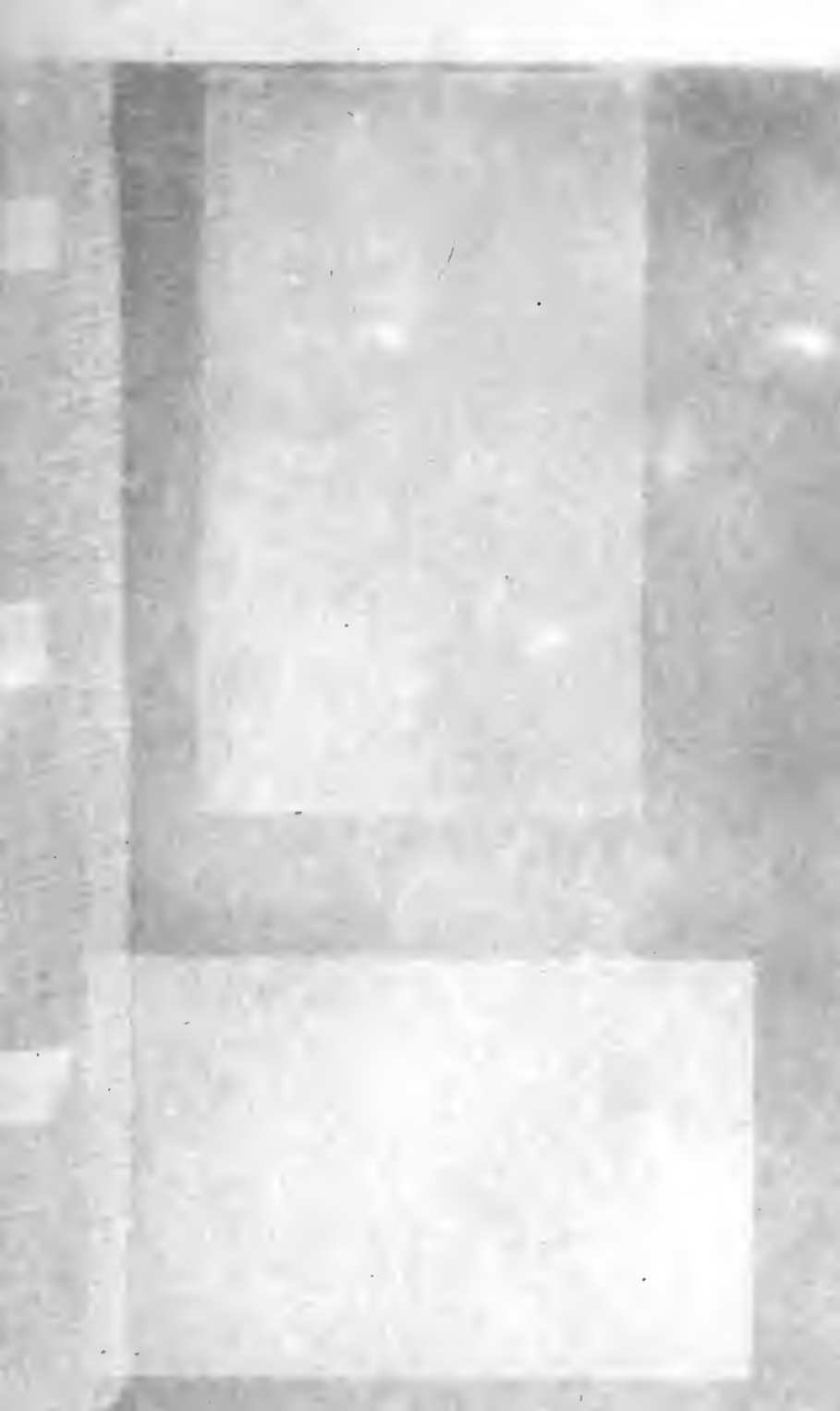
JEAN DELVILLE



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JEAN DELVILLE (PORTRAIT).

*Frontispiece.*

**THE  
NEW MISSION OF ART  
A STUDY OF IDEALISM IN ART**

**By Jean Delville**

"The mission of Art in the world is so mighty that it should be cherished with care and encouraged to the utmost of our power, striving with all our being to keep it pure; it would be a deed as great before God as useful to man to lead Art back to the inexhaustible fount from which it ought never to have wandered."

P.-F.G. LACURIA.

"THE HARMONIES OF EXISTENCE."

**Translated by  
FRANCIS COLMER,**

**with Introductory Notes by  
Clifford Bax and Edward Schuré.**

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**The Members of the**  
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## The Prayer of a Magician

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O God of Light in whom all worlds are one,  
An atom from that fierce and fiery place  
Wherein men stray, behold before Thy Face  
My soul, an eagle mounting to the sun.

The blood-stained idols of an erring race,  
The clouds of evil that men's hearts have done,  
Roll on beneath me to that hour when none  
That brought to birth no beauty shall win grace.

O God, Who gazing on the perfect whole  
Smiles at our loveliness of form or soul  
As gradually the prisoned self escapes,

Beyond all time, division, change, or death,  
Thou art the immortal essence of all shapes  
And earth of Thine eternity—a breath !

JEAN DELVILLE  
(Translated by CLIFFORD BAX)



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## JEAN DELVILLE

**T**HE AUTHOR of the following treatise will be known by name to very few of his English readers, yet the book reveals a personality so distinguished that those hitherto unacquainted with M. Delville's work may care to know something of the writer. The few to whom he is already known will be found among those who, possessing an interest in the arts, have lived a considerable time in Brussels or in Glasgow. In the former, because M. Delville is an artist of renown in his own country : in the latter, because about eight years ago he was appointed to the chief-professorship in the Glasgow School of Art. He worked there for half-a-dozen years and with such personal success that when he returned to Brussels and instituted the "Atelier Delville" a large number of his former pupils went oversea to follow him.

The world of art is hardly less variously peopled than the wider world of politics and affairs. No painter, no writer, can ever please all artists, and M. Delville, especially, by his unflinching adherence to idealism, has encountered for many years much ridicule or abuse from the supporters of other schools. It is unfortunate that so small a number of men is capable of avoiding an extreme. No sooner is a certain style grown over-ripe than the next generation, dismissing the entire school

as misguided, errs yet more markedly in the opposite direction. Here in England at the moment we read articles by men who declare that Burne-Jones knew nothing of his art or that there is nothing of sublimity in the work of Tennyson. In place of those formerly accepted and over-praised, they exalt some trifling fellow who, though deficient in a thousand ways, has yet no trace of the particular weakness which overcame the giant they would depose.

For reaction, useful as a corrective influence, is nearly always excessive, and its devotees quite readily mistake their own backwater for the full main-stream of art. Incapable of improving upon the achievements of a bygone school, they choose out themes and methods which were most likely rejected as unworthy by the painters they despise. The excessive praise of Whistler is now subsiding, but in its place has arisen the cult of those who consider clear colour to be the brand-mark of the commonplace, fair form the delight of an inferior taste. Nor do these bubble-movements lack believers among those who are fearful lest they should be stigmatised as unprogressive, for most men—critics or craftsmen—are carried along by the taste of their time, and few are those who, standing aside from the immediate, work on in the great traditions.

Of such is M. Delville. Faults he has, but not the faults of our time. There is no affectation



in his work : no superficial, catchpenny display of skill. With him, the picture has again become of more importance than the painter. For he is a poet, a thinker, a man who cares greatly for the welfare of the world.

The eminent French poet who penned the introductory note to this book has shown how unavoidably a painter communicates his "*weltanschauung*" to his work, and every phase of M. Delville's mind is thus reflected. In early youth he was a materialist, and the dusty paintings of that period which hang from the walls of his studio would merit praise from some of those who call themselves, euphemistically, "rationalists." Indeed, if anyone should search the great studio he might disinter examples of many contemporary methods. For even in the earliest of his student-days M. Delville possessed a facility so astonishing that before he had been working at the School of Art in Brussels for more than a week, the professor set up his canvas as an object-lesson to the assembled students. In after-years the paintings he produced readily reflected the rapid changes of his mind.

For he did not rest easy in materialism, and, having experimented with spiritism, in spite of the usual chicanery he discovered what he considered overwhelming evidence of disincarnate existence. The pictures which accompany this phase are more terrible than

beautiful—vast, lurid, and awful. During a few years he followed the faint stars of spiritism until they had brought him to the limitless horizon of theosophy, and it is to the inspiration of this world-old wisdom that his latter and important work is due. His adherence to that scheme of thought has cost him much, for in Belgium the Ecclesiastical Party, which is dominant, regards theosophy as a formidable menace, and has opposed him repeatedly. But M. Delville was born a fighter, and never flinches in his loyalty to a philosophy which is strangely abused and misunderstood. A keen student of contemporary science, an eloquent and fiery speaker, one who writes prose with vigour and verse with a rare beauty, he is well able to defend his convictions with a widely-cultured mind and with a range of ability that compels respect.

Unfortunately, he shares with Rossetti a dislike of exhibiting his work, but the annual exhibitions at Brussels have occasional examples. A stately picture, called "*L'École de Platon*" was exhibited some years ago at Milan, where it won the Gold Prize. Most of M. Delville's work is on a very large scale—indeed, his preliminary sketches are usually the size of most large pictures. A vast composition, which is named "*L'Homme-Dieu*," and represents a multitude of men and women surging up, with gestures half exultant, half despairing,

to the enaureoled Christ, occupies an entire wall in his "atelier." Yet he has said that he would like to re-paint it as large again if he could put it in a church.

At present in his private studio, at Forest, a country suburb of Brussels, he is preparing a series of frescoes which are to decorate the walls of the Palais de Justice. Perhaps the designs for this national work are the most powerful and most complete examples of idealistic art which he has yet achieved, and it is safe to predict that the Belgians of the future will not regret the choice of the commissioners.

M. Delville was born in 1867; he never studied his art except in the school at Brussels, although when his student-days were over he spent some two years in Rome—a city which he felt to be strangely familiar, thus offering a theme for speculation to the believer in palinogenesis. His manner of life is simple, as befits a mystic; the vegetarian may number him in the list of the enlightened; and his pleasures are those of the intellect. Often might a friend, having walked through the little garden, come into the house to find him absorbed in a brilliant rendering of some Wagnerian masterpiece, or studying with the firmest concentration some recent work on evolution or biology. In these days, when life is losing continually more and more of its ancient dignity, when occultism,

above all else, has fallen into the hands of commercial, unreligious, and vulgar persons, it is an inspiration to receive the friendship of a man like M. Delville, whose life is worthy of his great religion, who retains not a little of the grandeur which caused the occultists of old time to be so greatly honoured, who realizes the wonder of existence, the sublimity of the universe, and the potential godhead of man. Almost alone he is combatting, year after year, the inane but popular painting of our time, setting forth in daily life and in some of the best of the Belgian reviews that conception of art which he formulates in the present work. It is with deep interest that we who are his allies will watch the reception given to it in England. It is a book which proclaims, not a new and unrelated art, but the necessity of applying some new inspiration to the incomparable traditions of the past: a book which opposes all that is commonly praised in the art of our period; a book which we who are with him can only regard as the work of a great man who writes in a trivial and materialistic age.

C. B.

## Introductory Note to “The New Mission of Art”

BY EDOUARD SCHURÉ

**T**HIS is the book of a true young man ; a book of courage and nobility, a sign of light in times of darkness. The work of a thinker, artist, and one inspired, a testimony to his knowledge, enthusiasm, and faith, it is designed to be a work of initiation and renovation.

It is not the first time that the attempt has been made nowadays to deduce the laws of Beauty from esoteric teaching, that is, from the eternal philosophy in the depths of the soul, in order to cast the horoscope of contemporary art. But it is the first time that a painter has done so, one, moreover, unattached to any party, church, or school, with the delightful ingenuousness of a pure soul, a manly spirit, and an upright conscience.

“The Mission of Art,” by Jean Delville, is an exposition of perfect Idealism according to universal Theosophy. This requires explanation.

The nineteenth century began with that great awakening in literature and art which it has been agreed to term Romanticism. An instinctive reaction against academic conventions, it was at once a return to nature, and a sincere and splendid advance towards the heights of the Ideal. It produced works of genius,

but it was not given to it to influence our civilisation by a work of fruitful education or definite construction, because it was not built on firm foundations. Romanticism was *Idealism without Idea*. By that I do not mean to say that the poets and creative artists of the first half of the century, among whom are to be numbered Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Vigny, Ingres, Delacroix, and Théodore Rousseau, were not inspired in their great works by lofty ideas. I merely affirm that they were not governed and guided, in their general conception of Art, by a clear and broad synthesis. Let me be understood. Neither the poet or artist ought to be professed philosophers, but they need, in order to exercise their functions to their fullest extent, to live in an atmosphere of organic philosophy and a living religion—unless they are strong enough to create a philosophy and religion for themselves, moulding to it through strife and sorrow the children of their thought—as is the case with the few Titans, Lucifers, and Prometheuses of Art. Romanticism had neither this atmosphere nor these giant creators. Hence its uncertainty and weakness. Without a compass, without a rallying point, it was soon disintegrated and driven out of its course. In proportion as the influence of the Kantian and Hegelian philosophy, by which indirectly it was governed, began to wane, in proportion as its place was taken by the Positivism of

Auguste Comte and all his disciples, so Romanticism wavered and fell back in confusion before the triumph of Naturalism and its mongrel followers.

Whether the artist wish it or no, whether he denies it or not, all art, whatever it may be, corresponds to a philosophy. Instinctively or consciously his method is governed by a certain way of looking at nature and considering man. Naturalism is the assertion of appearances, the faith in instinct, in the fecundity of physical life pure and simple, as Zola declares with such honest simplicity. The naturalism in favour at present exactly reflects the materialistic teaching of philosophy. Now, not only has this naturalism deplorably narrowed the horizon of thought, but, as Jean Delville justly observes, "it atrophies the ideal creative powers in the artist's soul by snapping the links that bind it to the spiritual world."—"Nature," says the author of *The Mission of Art* again, "is a mingling of enchantment and terror, of ecstasy and awe. The monstrous intermingles with the divine. It is a wonderful chaos of secret splendours." The poet, as far as he is at all worthy of the name, will ever return to thought, which implies choice, to sentiment, which presupposes a minimum of moral and spiritual life. But what will the artist, sculptor, or painter do, without any other guide than animal instinct or love of appearances? We

have seen the results; we see them still. "They have blown up Parnassus," says the young artist initiate who has written this book, "and from the fragments of the sacred hill they have begun to hew unsightly abortions."

If naturalism in art corresponds to materialistic pantheism in philosophy, impressionism, its bastard offspring, corresponds to absolute scepticism and tosses between extremes like a wreck drifting upon the sea. Impressionism springs from a dim perception of the insufficiency of naturalism as a source of inspiration. It throws itself into *impression* to escape from the tyranny of *appearances*. But, lacking intellectual principles, it escapes it only to fall under the tyranny of sensation and extravagant fancy. Sometimes it delights in a brutal realism turning the painter into a photographer, and causing the stage to become nothing more than a cinematograph of life. Sometimes it gets lost in a vague mysticism without form and without idea. Nay more, for hungering after originality, wishing to shock the eye and twist the nerves, it plunges finally into a perverse pursuit of the Ugly.

Shakespeare, that learned occultist, who understood nature and the human soul so well, beside whom our poor psychologists are but ignorant apprentices, Shakespeare gives to the diabolic powers that hover about mankind to



urge it on to evil a terrible weapon. That weapon is the æsthetic creed of the Ugly.

“ Fair is foul, and foul is fair,  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.” \*

So sing the witches in Macbeth dancing upon the heath, where soon they will weave round the hero a dark spell, which will cause the red spectre of murder to rise in his soul.

“ Fair is Foul! ” This arcanum of witchcraft, which is the black magic of evil, has been used as a proverb by the whole school of amorphism and debased and decadent æstheticism, which makes a wrong and distorted application of it without understanding its baneful effects. Naturalism, realism, impressionism—variations, shades, perversions of the same evil—absence of principles and ideal in the artist. By expelling the ideal from art, the pretended naturalism has misunderstood and profaned nature. Because, considered on its magnificent entirety, nature is an evolution towards Beauty as humanity is an ascent towards the Ideal. Only one ought to divine the inner meaning of nature and humanity, and not servilely copy their appearance and deformity. Yes, Art imitates Nature, but does so in order to complete it. And that is how it happens that Nature, insulted and profaned by short-sighted careless advocates of naturalism, has avenged herself by causing them to mistake Ugliness for Beauty.

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\* Macbeth I. i.

Thanks to this confusion, the better of them have become dangerous madmen, and the others mischievous fools. And as a result contemporary art has lost its strength, and become overwhelmed by the disorder and anarchy which we see.

But in the midst of this witches' Sabbath of grotesque and droll apparitions, there arose, some twenty years ago, an idealist reaction of which few people, even to-day, suspect the influence and import. For, to estimate the force of this undercurrent, it must be known whence it comes. Jean Delville explains it very rightly, and there is not the least exaggeration in the following words as decided as they are carefully weighed: "The idealist truth is about to conquer the modern world with a methodical positive certainty, which nothing can resist, since it is the luminous sign of the true evolution of the spirit, the mediating power which must re-establish the equilibrium between the past, present, and future."

How has that movement been carried on in the domain of the plastic arts? To the honour of art and artists it must be said that it was through the painters that this glorious upward tendency was first set on foot, and that simultaneously in England and France. Everyone is now acquainted, through the remarkable book of M. Robert de la Sizeranne, with the renaissance of *Contemporary English Painting*, of

which the chief representatives are Rossetti, Watts, Holman Hunt, Herkomer, Millais, and Burne-Jones. At the same time two French painters of genius were assembling a young and fearless group around the banner of idealist art. I speak of Puvis de Chavannes and Gustave Moreau. The former effected it by his broad simplicity, persuasive steadfastness, and winning gentleness; the latter with more pride and peculiarity, but with a rare concentration and intensity, appreciated only in one of the elect. In spite of all national and individual differences, there may be observed among all these French and English painters a common effort. A return to the severity of line, a search for distinctive characteristics, of beauty through harmonious composition, a profound aspiration towards poetry, and a worship of the ideal.

Criticism, which is not usually the halting follower of genius, decided, after a hesitation due to its dignity, to tread in the path of the artists. Nevertheless art criticism, and I speak of the better kind, has brought to light the failings of philosophers and thinkers who ought to shed light on the idealist renaissance, and who contribute rather to obscure it.

We will take only two æsthetic writers, two of the most celebrated and most talked of: Ruskin and Tolstoï. In spite of their many numerous merits, neither of them perceives the essential.

With his refined sense of art and its educational mission, it is not a utilitarian and vacillating eclectic like Ruskin who can point out to us the future path of art. In spite of his religion of beauty he cannot do it, because he does not comprehend its sublime origin, its generation through the Ideal and the Mother-Idea. His torch burns neither with sufficient clearness nor at a proper altitude.

Nor, indeed, is it the great and venerable recluse of Iasnaïa Poliana who can guide us in this direction. Tolstoï, in fact, admits no other principle of art but the moral. He does not understand the essential value of Beauty, the harmony of Idea and Form, that is to say, the supreme principle of Art and its true power of expansion. Was it in truth worth the trouble, after writing great novels and powerful works concerned with morality to stoop to deny Sophocles, Beethoven, and Wagner, and to reduce art to a sermon for the use of Russian peasants? And to think that there are Western circles where these Bœotian fancies are received like Holy Scripture! It is but another striking proof of our intellectual abasement, of the futility of our art, and the poverty of our criticism. Inspiration cannot be commanded, and genius is the most beautiful gift of God. It comes when it *wills*, and when it *must*. But it can be prevented from coming by destroying the hearths and temples of humanity, as it

may be attracted by preparing for it a cradle and a refuge.

How, then, is the right way to be discovered? Which is the safe path? Where lead those fertile uplands whose pinnacles are bathed in dazzling light? Salvation will follow from two things—the first of which is concerned with individuals, and the latter with our institutions of public education—in the knowledge of how to discipline the Soul and of a return to Principles. By these words I am far from summing up the noble exposition of Jean Delville, but I shall at least have imprinted a motto on the banner he unfolds and indicated the goal at which he aims.

“The artist needs,” says this young painter, convinced of the power of the Soul and the Idea, “more learning and sensibility—he must receive *initiation*. He owes this to himself in order to develop his intellectual and spiritual being.” And later: “The people are only truly great before God and before Art by reason of the spirituality which emanates from their works. . . . My hope is to see the point of view of artists raised, and of seeing them definitely engaged themselves in the evolution of the human ideal, so that their individual psychology, becoming more luminous, shall glow more brightly in their works.”

So much for discipline; let us come to principles. I said above that Romanticism had

been *Idealism without Idea*, that is, without eternal and universal Principles. The new Art will be *Idealism with Idea*. That is to say, it will proceed from the perfect science which is itself derived from complete knowledge of Oneself, in a word from that Theosophy which is such a transcendent Biology.

In opposition to the conventional and fossilising eclecticism of academies, to an animal-like naturalism, to an ephemeral impressionism, Jean Delville places Idealist Art entire and absolute, which conforms to the two great scientific laws of *selection* and *synthesis*. He condenses it into three principles :—

- (i.) Spiritual Beauty (*La Beauté spirituelle*), which requires lofty conception, Idea ;
- (ii.) Plastic Beauty (*La Beauté plastique*), by which is meant the perfection of forms with a character at once typical and individual ;
- (iii.) Technical Beauty (*La Beauté technique*), which is the realizing of the two former in a perceptible form.

It is not enough to be acquainted with each of these principles in its extent and depth, and wishing to apply all three to a work of art. Its hierarchy and genesis must likewise be known. It must be grasped that the first among them—spiritual beauty—is the essential, central, and generating principle in particular. This it is that engenders the second, as the second

engenders the third. It is from Idea, by way of Sentiment and Sensation, that a work of art arises in the artist's spirit. On the receptive hearer, the intelligent spectator, the contrary effect is produced. He will rise from Sensation to Sentiment, and from that to the Idea, and he will only attain the true æsthetic emotion at their final point, when he embraces Sentiment and Sensation in the primordial and final unity of the Idea. So that it is ever the Idea which remains the generating point of Beauty. It engenders the Form which moulds Matter, as the Spirit creates the Soul, and the Soul fashions the Body. It is because Materialism holds a contrary view that it is radically false, philosophically, artistically, and socially unsound. What makes every real work of art of interest is that it reproduces the mystery of Creation which operates in the Microcosm as in the Macrocosm, in Man as in the Universe. It shows us likewise the Involution of spirit within matter, and the Evolution of matter in the direction of spirit. But the artist has no need of these formulæ. It is enough for him to recognize by intuition and experience the hierarchy of the generating Principles of Beauty. For so the great ones worked and ever will work.

To demonstrate the fecundity of these vital principles would necessitate a long development and all the detail of technical applications to architecture and music, those symbolic and

generalizing arts, to sculpture, painting, and poetry, those living and human arts, and finally to their synthesis—the drama. In fact to create a transcendent system of æsthetics it would be necessary to return again to Number, at once the source of Form and Harmony.

Jean Delville wished only to give in this book the higher principles of the plastic arts, those which the painter and sculptor need to illuminate their consciousness and put life into their work. He has done so as an artist and philosopher. Some idealists, perhaps, will not hold the same view with regard to certain special points. For my part, while sharing his philosophy, I should be less severe than he on landscape-painting, and I should hesitate to banish from art national colour, while wishing that it should be through inspiration as universal as possible. But all without exception will admire with me the Mother-Ideas which flash with such brilliance throughout these pages, and the mighty regenerating breath that emanates from them. There is one admirable passage upon "*the nude*, which brings us face to face with the enigma of life, which incorporates universal ideas, and reveals to us the meaning of nature." Michael Angelo, Leonardo de Vinci, and Raphael, would shake him by both hands. There are others in the vein of Juvenal upon "the adultery of art with materialism," upon "æsthetes without æsthetics,



dandified triflers, wild irresponsibles, incompetent impostors, and sneering eclectics." This book seems written in a single burst, under an impulse so prolonged and impervious that the author never even thought of dividing it into chapters.\* I do not know what is most striking in this work, at once so youthful and so mature, so nervous and so powerful—whether the artist's soul, so enthralled by eternal Beauty which can be felt palpitating in every line, or the spirit of the initiated philosopher, which rises so easily and naturally towards divine principles, or the proud courage of the young warrior of the ideal, who flings himself into the midst of the combat, fearless of blows and wounds, with the flaming sword of speech and the shield of faith. If we were timorous enough to recommend prudence to him, he would reply proudly : "The artist who is not conscious of a divine power making his human power fruitful of Beauty, and who, in the depths of his being, does not feel the God of Love and Harmony vibrate with which worlds and races of men vibrate, the same is unworthy of civilisation."

Artists and poets, youthful believers in Life and the Ideal, read this book. You will discover therein new paths leading to the secret places of Beauty and torches to light your way. It announces the dawn of an era "when Art will be consecrated by Metaphysics and Initiation."

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\* This has been done in the present edition.

On the one hand this breviary of Beauty is a plain synthesis of the whole evolutionary process in æsthetics during the nineteenth century. It represents its closing period. On the other it brings before our eyes something that seems like a white road, between a colonnade of marble, leading from a huge pylon and flanked by propylæa towards the Temple of perfect Art—which, let us hope, will be that of the twentieth century.

EDOUARD SCHURÉ.

## Preface

**T**HIS book does not claim to be a literary essay or a treatise of philosophical analysis.

It does not aim, as so many others have done, at giving a cut-and-dried recipe for a masterpiece by means of the theory of uniformity, but it desires to urge the unfettered personality of the artist towards a higher Comprehension of Art and a purer Conception of Beauty.

In writing it I believe that I have fulfilled my plain and honest duty as an artist.

I think that in an age, and in a country, in which materialism in art is still supreme this book comes in good time, and will awaken the conscience dulled by various pursuits to the true power of Art, that is to say, its mission to humanity.

Materialism is the artist's foe, because it wastes or destroys in him the ideal and creative powers of his being. The genius of art is not to be reconciled to the ignoble attitude of materialism.

The laws of life are not merely physical laws, they do not dwell in the instinct, but in the spirit, whence they cause the being to be evolved.

The experimental proofs of the existence and survival of the soul have been scientifically established.

Modern Æsthetics ought not to neglect the consequences of those proofs. It is indispensable

that the artist should know that ideas, figures, sentiments, emotions, sensations, are by no means simple movements of organic matter or mechanical vibrations. He must understand the ideal part that his soul and his spirit play in the divine mystery of Nature.

There has been much philosophising about art. For the most part, superficial writers on æsthetics have only dealt vaguely with this profound and difficult subject, which requires something beyond taste and learning—*initiation!*

And with respect to this I wish it to be observed that the use in this book of the terms *spirit, soul, idea, instinct, astral, mental, spiritual, divine*, etc., is by no means the result of an artificial or chance terminology. These words signify conditions and faculties of being, of perceptible realities, and I am well acquainted with the part which these unseen powers and conditions play in the mysterious moulding of the æsthetic concept. For more than ten years I have devoted precious hours to the illuminating study of occult psychology, not merely in a speculative, but in an experimental, direction. I am conscious of the value and importance of these words.

This book, then, is not the result of fancy. It is dedicated chiefly to the artists of Belgium, above all to those who are young, since they are nearer the future. And I could say to

them that if there is more art in Nature than in a School, there is also more art in the Ideal than in Nature.

The soul of a nation, capable at times of strength and grandeur, is nevertheless slow in following the great evolutionary tendencies of the human spirit. The national materialism still weighs too heavily upon it. But a people is only truly great before God and before Art in consideration of the spirituality which is exhibited in its works.

The races which produce *great artists* are those where not only physical beauty is met with, but where beauty is found in the heart and in the soul.

Unless I am much deceived, national *soul* is, I believe, superior to the national *character* (tempérament). At bottom of every race there is something very pure, very bright, and very strong. But it still slumbers, as thought stupefied by the fog of materialism which surrounds it.

The age possesses good painters, good sculptors. It has no *great artists*.

Why?

Because its artistic powers, that is to say, its vigorous capacity for painting and sculpture, have not been put at the service of the Ideal, Spirit, and Beauty.

And, in saying that, observe that I am not attempting to extol a *literary* or *philosophical*

art, which would be foolish and wrong. Long ago artists like Chenavard and Wiertz showed the hollowness of their extravagant art, as well as the decayed schools in which Form was no longer a matter of importance.

I dream of seeing the standpoint of artists raised, and of seeing them return once for all to the evolution of the human ideal, so that their individual knowledge of the soul, becoming more luminous, may glow with purer lustre in their works. Has any one seriously reflected on the fresh and luxuriant blossoming of art, which may originate, on the threshold of the twentieth century, from the idealist mode of thought?

That is the aim of my very humble effort: to awaken latent faculties, so as to broaden, by making it more spiritual, the basis of artistic growth.

Perhaps it is well that this ardent desire for regeneration should come from a simple artist.

Perhaps, too—and it is my own opinion—it would have been more effectual if another than I—someone of more authority—had endeavoured to initiate this.

I have waited for that man. He has not come. I have endeavoured humbly to be that man, since no one would raise his voice in the name of pure Beauty.

Who, then, will venture to reproach me with having been impatient in my desire for the Ideal through Nature, and Beauty through Light?

I do not know what welcome will be given to this book that pleads for Spirituality by artists or the general public.

But I venture to say, without pride and conscious of my inferiority, that neither Ruskin, with his inconsistent and refined eclecticism, nor Tolstoi, in spite of his good intentions, rendered futile by such sad lack of æsthetic culture, and not even Péladan,\* so lucid in his metaphysics, but whose idealism is too aristocratic, or occasionally too lenient to antiquated conventions, have presented a clear conception of Art as being evolved agreeably to all the creative energies, both psychic and natural, of the harmonies of existence.

If some narrow-minded critics, governed by paltry prejudice, should declare that it is not well for the artist to take up the pen, common sense must ask them who then has the right to impose limits on the way in which the faculties should be manifested.

If others likewise, confining their interest to some particular locality, and disliking the universal principle of Idealism, protest, in the name of what they call "national art," what does it matter !

The Future will reply to them.

**JEAN DELVILLE.**

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\* Josephin Péladan, a novelist and writer on art. He is an idealist, but broad-minded in his views. His chief works are : " Le Vice Suprême " ; " Comment on devient Mage," " Comment on devient Artiste," and the tragedies " Babylon," " La Prométhéide," and " Œdipe et le Sphinx."













L'ÉCOLE DE PLATON (J. DELVILLE).

[To face page 1.

The  
New Mission of Art



# The New Mission of Art

## I

### The Outlook of Modern Art

Influence of Nature Study on Art—Narrow View of Realism and Impressionism—Lack of Conscious Effort—Genius is not “Unconscious”  
—False notions of Art have obscured its Mission—Absence of Beauty in Modern Art.

**I**N no age of humanity, at no period of the history of Art, have the works of Nature been more loved, studied, felt, and better appreciated, *seemingly*, by our poets, our men of science, and our artists. Certainly they have exercised over modern minds, and over the sensitivity of human beings, on the whole, often a fruitful influence, from certain points of view, but since we are so under the spell of visible things, so confined in our perceptions to objects near at hand, we are forgetful of their concealed, mysterious, and divine meaning.

Accustomed to the emotion of the moment, which in this world seems to be enough, the modern eye can no longer see the *ideal signification* of natural forms.

For the painter—and contemporary criticism strongly encourages him in these narrow ideas—creation is nothing more than a superficial panorama of pleasurable sights. Impressionism, the school of those who are weak and guided by instinct, has proved that, as far as it is

concerned, Realism amounts to a few invariable simple tricks of the palette and that the moments of eternity which it pretends to know how to place on the canvas are confined to an aimless and sorry display of fireworks, which have only resulted in the negation of Form, on which all images of Life must depend !

The eye of the realist painter looks out upon Nature to receive a mechanical impression, like an animal : he looks without seeing ! His gaze wanders over objects casually. Wherever there is every beauty in Nature, he only sees a pretext for optical vibrations. A kind of amorphous pantheism, steeping his intellectual powers in the emotional unconsciousness of instinct and confusing æsthetic emotion with that of the animal, has made the artist a haphazard being ; that is to say, one whose characteristics as an individual have become that of a whole class. His vision is that of one who looks on a thing for the first time ; his feelings are of the same kind : like those of a dog or cat ! But the peculiar nature of the artist, his power of selection, which ought to enable him to see and feel differently to the average man, are warped or destroyed by the debasing pantheism of his intellectual degradation.

To the realistic school Nature has ceased to be a revelation. Even those who, in the name of Isis, frantically wave the red flag of Life and



Realism, are, without suspecting it, profaning Nature, ever so inscrutable and so fertile !

The Naturalism of the present time, so insulting to Nature, has broken the bonds which unite it to the spiritual world. The threefold love of Life, the Ideal, and God, is so narrowed in the soul of the modern artist, the love of Beauty has so completely escaped his understanding, that genius scarcely now illuminates any work.

Criticism—whose mission would be so noble if it were capable of accomplishing it—has become the apologist for the lack of *conscious* effort. "*Genius is unconscious,*" it does not cease to echo in the willing ears of mighty public opinion. Vinci, that mighty mind, Vinci, the most theoretical of artists, and the most artistic of learned men—unconscious ! Æschylus, the Titanic conceiver of that "*Prometheus*" in which he formulates the most conscious of symbols—unconscious ! Newton, discovering the laws of astronomy—unconscious ! The ingenious and bewildering inventor of the astrological clock of Strasburg Cathedral—unconscious ! Raphael, the graceful and sublime composer of "*The School of Athens*"—unconscious ! Bach, the mathematician of harmony, Wagner, expounding his musical theories—unconscious ! \*

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\* Wagner's literary works, including "Oper und Drama," "Ueber das Dirigiren," "Das Judenthum in der Musik," were published at Leipzig in 1871 in nine thick volumes.

Are all these sublime spirits, who could seize a portion of the UNIVERSAL LIGHT, whence streams the life of the whole, shedding its radiance on the multitudes unable to perceive it, unconscious? \*

That is where the lack of idealism, or the lack of knowledge, must lead.

Genius in art, the ideal in art, not being conceived as the penetration of spirit into life, it is natural and inevitable that æsthetic conception and execution should become corrupted.

That mighty faculty, which allows the philosopher to arrange his ideas, and the artist to use precision and a sense of form in the creation of his images, is not, think our modern chroniclers and lovers of cheap art, a necessity to the craftsman.

A painter has but to open his eyes, and the miracle of a work of art will be evolved unconsciously! The WILL, that mighty creative force which is to be observed in all men of genius, and developed in them more than in most human beings, need not be brought into play. Artists, you are only organisms which perform their functions! You must be satisfied with that since the petty critics declare it.

But Vinci has said: "*Painting is the greatest mental labour, since necessity compels the painter's*

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\* "All fine imaginative work is self-conscious and deliberate . . . and self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one." (*Oscar Wilde*, "*Intentions*," p. 100).

*spirit to fuse itself with the very spirit of nature, and become the interpreter between nature and art, studying it to perceive the causes which make objects visible to us and under what laws."*

Is not this clear and admirable exposition of Vinci's attitude towards art a theme for ridicule to the petty critics, who at the present time cumber the daily papers with their ill-digested and foolish opinions?

And how few artists will not shrug their shoulders when they read this definition by the author of "*The Adoration of the Magi*" and the subtle "*Gioconda*"?

Contemporary ideas of art, praised by dilet-tanti, and put into practice by the up-to-date student, have so overwhelmed the soul in its chaos and so stifled the consciousness, that it will take some time before the heart is again opened to the stirring emotions of pure Beauty.

Acting in opposition to the fundamental forces of their nature, yielding to the yoke imposed by the false ideas of the day, artists, for the most part, have lost their native qualities and the moral strength which constitute the essence of their individuality. They will fall very short of their true destiny as artists, because they have allowed themselves to come under the spell of a baneful creed of art.

Thrown into this world "*by a decree of the supreme powers,*" as Baudelaire has said, coming in order to create with their work a

Sign—for a work of art is a *sign*, a perishable sign representing an imperishable idea, an immortal sentiment—they have lost sight of the real reason of their existence, nay more, their mission !

They have indeed lost sight of themselves. They do not know their real worth, not taking into account the mystery of which they are the living incarnations amid society.

They have ended by believing—it has been dinned into them in every tongue!—that the heart which beats in their breast, the brain which throbs in their temples, their hands, the precious hands that create, that their whole being, in fact, are bound by the same condition of life and the same faculties as those of the chimney-sweep or shoemaker.

The artist has to some extent become a creature of society. Sad to say, he is no longer *an individual* in the true psychological sense.

True individualism will be eclectic. To place in one's library the "*Divina Commedia*" by the side of "*L'Assommoir*" \* is to offer proof of a deplorable weakness of character, and to admire equally the vulgar trash of an Ensor † and the graceful forms of a Burne-Jones is to compromise the lofty sentiment of Beauty and Art by a criminal lack of good taste.

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\* Zola's novel, well known in its dramatised version as "Drink."

† J. Ensor, a Belgian painter, exhibitor at the "Cercle des Vingt." He is an eccentric painter, loving strange combinations of colour and inconsequent fancies. He is represented in the Brussels Gallery by "The Lampman."

It is from this preoccupation with feeling or perceiving like the majority, the mob, from that eager interest in the general, that those execrable paradoxes have emanated which have given rise to the phrase "*The Socialising of Art,*" "*The Democratising of Art.*"

Realism, by reason of its low affinities, must accompany this degraded view of art. We have reached that stage. The exhibitions, open to works defying every possible law, are with us to prove that art, when it is not based on the immutable principles of Beauty, can give birth to ugly and senseless things, and bring the Art of our divine Masters very low indeed.

The true ideal view of art, the only one which Art needs to live for and evolve, has been deserted to the advantage of the most foolish abominations of realism. They have made *caricatures* instead of delineating character. Under the pretext of colour and lighting, there has arisen Impressionism, that neurotic malady affecting hand and eye, and in the name of originality they have begun to paint prison cells in order to mingle what is horrible with what is unusual.

Our exhibitions, both those held every three years and others, are flagrant examples of a shameful degradation, if we may venture to confess what is evident. There is, too, the inevitable result which must strike at the very roots of the existence, generally speaking, of

modern art. The absence of idealism in a work is a blemish. Where there is no idealism, there is only something imperfect or meaningless, and that is why pictures of interiors, flowers, still-life, or landscape, will never be the subjects of true art.\*

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\* Brussels is the real centre of Art in Belgium. Excellent triennial exhibitions are held at Ghent, and other towns, as Liège, Tournay, Namur, Mons, and Spa, also have periodical exhibitions. The realism of the Belgian, Baron Henri Leys (1815-1869), and that of the Frenchman, Courbet, had a strong influence on modern Belgian art. Under that influence at Brussels was founded the "Free Society of Fine Arts" and the "Cercle des Vingt," which introduced into its exhibitions works by the greatest foreign artists, however widely differing in aim and method, thus inculcating the principle of "individuality in art."

## II

# The Nature of Idealism : the Threefold Harmony

Idealism Spiritualises Art—Influence on Consciousness of Spiritual Vibrations—Threefold base of Idealism: Beauty of *Idea, Form, and Execution*—Choice of Artist not restricted by Idealism—Close study of Nature necessitated by it—Impressionism the Poetry of the Moment: Its Fallacy—He who has an Ideal not therefore an Idealist—Principle of Selection in Nature—Pure Beauty only found in the realm of the Ideal—Materialism of Modern Art—Limitations of Landscape—Evolution of a Work of Art—Sensation, Emotion, Conception.

**I**DEALISM and ART are the same thing. But the Ideal has been separated from Art, nay, it has been expelled from it! As idealism in philosophy is equilibrium in ideas or the constant search for psychic perfection, so idealism in art is its sublimation, *the introduction of Spirituality into Art.*

The Idea, in the metaphysical or occult sense, is Force, the universal and divine force which moves worlds, and its movement is the supreme rhythm whence springs the harmonious working of Life.

Where there is no thought, there is no life, no creation. The modern western world has become unconscious of this tremendous power of the Ideal, and Art inevitably has thus become degraded. This ignorance of the creative forces of thought has, nevertheless, obscured and diverted towards materialism all modern judgment. Materialism does not know *how* ideas and thoughts vibrate, and how these

vibrations impinge on the consciousness of the individual.

And yet these vibrations, though invisible to the greater part of mankind, are able to exercise an astounding influence over the mentality of human beings, and thus assist in their evolution. Before works of genius the human consciousness receives mental and spiritual vibrations, which are generated by the force of the idea reflected. The more elevated, pure, and sublime a work is, the more the inner being, coming into contact with the ideal vibration emanated from it, will be raised, purified, and made sublime. The artist who is not ideal, that is to say, the artist who does not know that every form must be the result of an idea, and that every idea must have its form, the artist, in short, who does not know that Beauty is the luminous conception of equilibrium in forms, will never have any influence over the soul, because his works will be really without thought, that is, without life.

The Idea is the emotion of the Spirit as Emotion is the reflex of the Soul.

But the emotions should be brought into harmony. The artist, for instance, should not feel that nervous, physical, instinctive, vibration produced by the lower nature. Those emotions do not offer sufficient security to give assurance of the emotional and impulsive higher part.

I have seen silly people moved to tears before



the most trifling things, and remain stolid before masterpieces or impressive sights. I have seen artists fall into an ecstasy before "pierrettes" by Willette,\* or a pig more or less well painted, and jest at the tremendous conceptions of a Michael Angelo!

We see that emotion, in order to be real, must come from above, and ought always to be purely ideal.

It will not be a coarse and unhealthy emotion, like that displayed by the realist, impressionist, and amorphous schools, which will influence the artist in the elaboration of his work. It is against those very schools, which are destroying contemporary art, and whose victims are numberless, that the Idealist view of art is attempting to bring about a reaction. It is against this unintellectual, inharmonious, debased, and revolutionary art, in which the elements of materialism are supreme, and where the essential dignity of Art is roughly thrust aside, that the Idealist is taking his stand and asserting himself.

In opposition to this art, so lacking in the ideal, where eclecticism barely conceals its shameless favouring of commonplace tendencies, as incongruous as they are fruitless, where empty fancy alone replaces the science of art, the idealist tendency upholds the principles of

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\* Willette (b. 1857), a prominent French caricaturist and black and white artist. An ideal delineator of the "risqué" side of contemporary life.

selection and construction, arranged on this basis of artistic perfection :—

Beauty of Idea (*La Beauté spirituelle*).

Beauty of Form (*La Beauté plastique*).

Beauty of Execution (*La Beauté technique*).

And all those who have not been able to penetrate the mystery of art, who do not perceive its divine mission, and who do not understand the sublime origin of Beauty, will argue in vain against this truth.

We defy anyone who should attempt to refute or deny the value of the three terms which constitute, in our eyes, the comprehensive unity of a work of art to demonstrate a theory of art as overwhelming and as thorough in which, as in ours, all theories should be contained or a tendency so predominant and perfect which should summarise, as ours does, all that is best in all others.

We do not hesitate to affirm that anyone who shall understand the exact import of our proposition will be convinced that it formulates what is the very essence of art, and that there is no other by which the personality of the artist can be evolved in a clearer way.

By *Beauty of Idea* (*Beauté Spirituelle*) is to be understood a lofty conception of the subject, this of itself being a means of artistic idealism. Then follows the conception of beautiful, noble, and great things. The choice of a high theme, so that the painter should not be over-careful

in the mere tricks of his brush, which should never be the end, but the *means*. That is Idea in a work.

By *Beauty of Form* (*Beauté plastique*) is meant the striving after perfection of Form! the choice of the most beautiful, the purest, most perfect, and most expressive forms. To reject as far as possible in one's work all that does not aid in the harmony of line, and to accept nothing misshapen or ugly. Ugliness is only permissible in art under synthetic or symbolic forms. It appears as an accident of *nature*, which can only be transferred into a work in its finest aspects, when the *typical* becomes merged in what is *individual*! \*

By *Beauty of Execution* (*Beauté technique*) we mean the refinement of one's craft to such a point that it does not predominate in the work to the harm of the expression. The painter ought to make his brush a wonderful instrument, in order to understand how best to realise his conception; technical skill, being the *means*, ought to be put at the service of the two preceding terms in order to approach Perfection. Every piece of handicraft that does not realise any ideal is an inferior work, a dead work. The process matters little; only the technical and personal quality of its application is of importance.

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\* Watts' pictures of "Mammon" and "The Minotaur" are examples of symbolic ugliness.

Idealists have been reproached heedlessly enough with being "exclusive," and with wishing to impose certain subjects on the artist. And we have protested each time that we conveniently could, declaring that *selection* is legitimate, and conforms to the mysterious laws of nature.

The *idealist theory of art* imposes no subject ; it leaves to the artist every liberty to create, but urges him to work by a system to a loftier result.

The hierarchy of art is based on the hierarchy of being. Every true evolution is a victory over temperament and instinct. The artist who cannot master the fatal forces of his lower self, so as to consciously bend them to his service, will never know the genius of Perfection, the very soul of Art !

The difference which lies between the Idealist tendency and the ordinary schools is that it is based upon a truth drawn from the splendid Mystery of Life, and the well-head of the purest masterpieces, and that it adapts the glorious examples of the Past to the evolutionary impulses of the Future, in order to maintain Art in the high spheres of human idealism, whence it cannot descend without falling into decay. Idealism should represent beauty in science, and science in beauty.

I know that most people absurdly think that idealism in art is but an empty puff of pale



L'ANGE (FERNAND KHNOPEF.)

*(To face page 16.)*



smoke veiling the artist's sight, and causing him to see Nature through the mist of a bookman's dreams in which the images of life are fashioned, and that the idealist artist disdains to go to eternal prolific Nature. We have often said how false this supposition is, and how, on the contrary, idealism demands that Nature should be doubly studied, seeking to penetrate, not only into its mere objective aspect, but also into the mystic essence of its synthetic meaning.

The work of art in which there does not vibrate a harmonious combination of all the elements which constitute life and the ideal will only be an elementary work. What will always cause the inferiority of landscape is that it will only be able to translate impressions. Now the poetry of Nature has other mysteries than those which the realist landscape-painters invariably show us, too limited as they are in their scenes of country life, reduced to the mere problem of natural light, whence has sprung that modern puerile impressionism so justly criticised by Chavannes \* : "*The Impressionists are the poets of the Moment (Poètes de*

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\* Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) was the son of a mining engineer at Lyons. He was bred to his father's profession, but after a visit to Italy he determined to devote himself to art. He attached himself for a short time to Scheffer, Delacroix, and Couture, but he was of the opinion that he gained little from any of them. His early work was loudly decried by the critics, but he found warm defenders in Théophile Gautier and Théodore de Banville. In 1861 he produced a great impression with "Peace" and "War," one of which was purchased for the museum at Amiens. These pictures inaugurated a great series of decorative works which won for him a unique position in French art. Chief among them were two emblematical paintings at Marseilles, the "Ludus Pro Patria" at Amiens, "The Sacred Grove" and "The Vision of the Antique" at Lyons, the series of "The

*l'Ephemère*). Observe that their ideal rests upon a natural contradiction, and can never be absolutely realised ; they pretend to fix the passing moment, the fleeting aspect of things. Now things, in their superficial aspect, are so changing that before an effect has time to take place it has already ceased to exist."

Why are some critics heard strangely reproaching the idealist movement with a pretended "*exclusiveness*," which protests with good reason at the heart-breaking increase of landscapes and their accessories : "*There are as many ideals as there are artists*," they cry, with a logic which M. Prudhomme would assuredly envy.

Evidently every artist has *his* ideal. The ideal of one will lie in painting a pan of roast chestnuts, another in conscientiously painting a litter of pigs, while another will elevate his soul, as a man and an artist, towards an ideal of beauty. Then *every* artist, whether he is a

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Life of St. Geneviève" and "The Old Age of St. Geneviève" in the Pantheon at Paris, and the great hemicycle at the Sorbonne symbolical of Science, Art, and Letters. In some respects his position among French painters is somewhat analagous to that of the Pre-Raphaelites in England, but he was without their romantic sentiment. His compositions were profoundly influenced by his study of the antique, and aimed at simplicity of idea and dignity of design. He was distinguished especially from the classical school which preceded him by the rich landscape setting in which his figures were placed and his decorative treatment of natural objects. The realist school charged him with ignoring Nature ; he contended that it was from Nature that he drew his inspiration. His works were mostly intended to decorate large buildings, and were conceived on a vast scale. They are often spoken of as frescoes ; but Chavannes did not attempt fresco-painting, preferring to paint with oil on canvas which was afterwards applied to the wall, his scheme of colour being subdued in order to harmonize with the architectural environment.



student of nature or realism, is an idealist too ! On this assumption, directly a painter covers a bit of canvas with some tubes of paint, or a sculptor moulds a lump of clay with his fingers, they are justified in calling themselves idealists.

That is an argument which it is no use attempting to controvert. In the eyes of many good people there is no question that François Coppée is as much of a *poet* as Baudelaire !

But few people suspect that nature is itself, in principle, and in fact, very exclusive. In every rank of life, whether vegetable, animal, or human, there is to be found a selective hierarchy. Observe, for instance, how exclusive the bee is in the choice of the flowers from which it gets its spoil. O you of the pantheistic-eclectic school, will you find fault with it for that ? No, because you know that it is seeking a rare and precious substance which every flower does not possess in the same degree. Well, the idealist is something like a bee, who, in obedience to Nature's laws, chooses this and rejects that.

Puvis de Chavannes, who always uses the lofty language of the Great Masters, has not said in vain : “ *Nature contains everything, but in a confused way. It must be formed of all that is the result of chance or accident, of all that is for the moment inexpressive ; that is to say, which does not tend to alter our thoughts. In a word, we may say that Art completes what*

*Nature roughly outlines, and speaks the word which the vastness of Nature is stammering."*

Baudelaire himself perceived this with terrible clearness, when he said: "*Although the universal principle be ONE, Nature never completes anything.*"

That fine thought is a truth. It passes judgment on the impressionist view of nature, and supports artistic idealism.

Pure Beauty, pure Harmony, only dwell in the world of the Ideal.

A truth that modern critics, and even the majority of artists, fail to understand is that Art is the incarnation of the Idea, of the Word, under the forms of Nature. It is because they do not understand this definition that most of them lose their way in the barren discussions of the schools, and that artists—the Belgians, above all!—wallow in their artistic materialism which limits life to the objective world. If Art, speaking from the point of view of society, does not aim at spiritualising the grossness of popular ideas, it is right to ask what is its real utility, or rather the reason for its existence. What intellectual emotion can be aroused by a pile of draperies, or a still-life subject, whether they are "*flambés*" or not? How can the mind feel elevated before *fish* or *oysters*, a bulldog, or a donkey's head, soiled linen, the patches on the trousers of a workman or peasant, and what thoughts are likely to arise

before a landscape more or less well painted? A landscape, an element of decoration, may make us dream for the moment, and dreaming is ever an inferior condition of the soul!

We have always been amused at the *bourgeois* who surrounds himself with landscapes to view the country at his ease because he knows it. They are the favourite ornaments of good dining-rooms. From the sensational point of view what comprises the charm of landscape in Nature is the perpetual and elusive movement of light over objects.

The landscape, especially the landscape of the realist painter, is the art of the uncultured *bourgeoisie*.

In a landscape we do not get beyond the fleeting and personal side of *impression*.\* Every admirer of painted scenery is ever a possible *bourgeois*, who only feels the wish to journey in imagination to some nook of nature. I speak, be it understood, of those invariable commonplace daubs of paint where the artist has merely busied himself in imitating the particular

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\* Perhaps Landscape possesses an inner mystic significance which has not yet been fully comprehended. The Irish poet, A.E., himself a painter of imaginative landscape, says: "A great landscape is the expression of a mood of the human mind as definitely as music or poetry is. The artist is communicating his own emotions. There is some mystic significance in the colour he employs; and then the doorways are opened, and we pass from sense into soul. We are looking into the soul when we look at a Turner, Corot, or a Whistler. . . . No one can say how far, Turner, in his search after light, had not journeyed into the lost Eden, and he himself may have been there most surely at the last when his pictures had become a blaze of incoherent light." ("On Art and Literature," 1907).

imperfections of some piece of scenery. Strictly speaking, I am in favour of an imaginative landscape, when it presents to my eyes the enchantments of fairyland. The works of the Englishman, Turner, are, in this connection, a magnificent revelation. The ineffaceable *impression* of his fantastic landscapes still glows in my soul, but what a pity that this visionary had to confine his faculties to atmospheric glories alone! I can picture to myself with enthusiasm what a wonderful and potent artist he would have been had he known how to combine his visions of magical landscapes with the power of figure composition!

I have said already, and I like to repeat it, that Landscape is only possible and tolerable in art so far as it serves as background to some human action. The scenic illusions of the stage are a proof of what I advance.

Never did landscape receive a higher poetic significance than in the *Elysian Fields* in Glück's "*Orpheus*," because never has it so artistically fulfilled its part as a background. In that case, landscape was what it ought always to be—the pictured space across which the human form moves. A great lesson in art is to be derived from this sublime scene. Glück shows himself there to be not only a great musician, but also a great painter.

*Landscape* means *background*. The painter who paints a landscape under the pretence

of merely practising his palette or by way of a study will be doing right. He will be wrong every time he exhibits this acrobatic feat of his brush.

Landscape, as far as *pictures* are concerned, is one of the illegitimate forms of Art. And, further, it is the product of a decadence. In fact, landscape entered the province of art at the time when the great Italian art was falling into decay. Gradually those less skilled diminished the representation of the human form in their increasing pictures of Nature, and nowadays the incapable have allowed it to completely disappear. It may be said that a work of art strictly *begins by being a Sensation*—a *physical*, inferior, realist state; an *Emotion*—a middle state in which the *soul* is moved, and sentiment awakened; a *Conception*—a loftier, ideal, and *spiritual* state. What is sensation then? For the most part artists and critics do not know what it is. They say very evasively, defining it in general terms, that it is “*the vibration of our whole being,*” without knowing either how or from where this vibration comes.

From a physiological, as well as psychological, point of view, sensation is that sensitive force of which the nerve cells are the conducting threads. It is by Sensation that the sense perceptions of the body are communicated to the Consciousness. But by what are Life and Will communicated to this Consciousness?

By the centre of emotion in a being : the heart. Through the heart indeed we feel sensations of pleasure or grief, because pure sensation is here still belonging to the state of instinct, a pleasure or a grief being unconscious of or outside our will. In the emotional centre, the heart, which draws its fluctuations from these elements of life which are ever shifting and allied to the soul, we reach the state of emotion. By means of it are manifested sentiment, the passions, love, hatred, etc. Finally we reach the mental and spiritual state ; that is, the region of *inspiration*. Through that are gained the perceptions of truth or falsehood, beauty and ugliness, etc. A materialist writer on art, Gabriel Séailles, has formulated a great artistic truth without suspecting the occult reality of what it conveys : “ *An image is the sensation spiritualised.*” It is sensation, which, penetrating the higher kinds of vibrations, is transformed to such a degree that it becomes perception.

It is then that there is accomplished what is termed, with regard to a philosopher, the association of ideas, and with regard to an artist, the formation of images ; it is then that Sensation is transformed into Emotion, and becomes, under the complicated action of the spiritual forces set in motion, thought and will. That is where creation begins, and the point whence the work takes shape. The organ which

serves for the psychic transmission of thought is the brain. Needless to say, these forces perform their functions with the organs more quickly than one can write about them. Without attempting to explain here how the vibrations of thought act on the matter of the brain, it is sufficient to say that the idea is transmitted with the rapidity of lightning.

According to the hierarchy of creative vibrations, the work is evolved in the true artist by Idea, Image, and Form. The idea is the *mental* connexion; the image is the *astral* connexion; the form is the *physical* connexion. The physical corresponds with *sensation*; the astral corresponds with *emotion*; the mental corresponds with *inspiration*.

The man who is an artist is then impelled, impassioned, or inspired according to the centre which acts on his consciousness; that is to say, he is at different times under the low domination of instinct, *the body*; under the intermediate influence of sentimental emotion, passion, *the soul*; and under the higher inspiration of *spirit*, the psychic being, the life of intellect and will. The work, considered for the sake of analogy as a kind of being, will have, as man has, a Body, Soul, and Spirit. It will possess, then, three harmonious influences forming its vital unity, namely, a plastic Form, a pure Emotion or lofty Sentiment, and an Idea. To be complete, proportionately to its

origin, a work of art should show the twofold action of involution through the Idea to the Form, and evolution of the Form towards the Idea.



### III

## The Principle of Beauty

To attain Perfection, Art must express Beauty—Artistic Laws do not interfere with the Artist's Personality—The Artist dependent on Beauty—Beauty an Absolute Principle—Necessity for studying the Laws of Cosmic Ideas—The Art of the Future an Art of lofty Emotion and Reason—The Law of Beauty the Law of Life—Life is Harmony, Harmony is Beauty—The Harmony of Sound and of Form—The Physical and Mental phases of Nature—The Mirror of the Divine—Modern Ugliness : Academic, Realistic, Amorphous.

ON no pretext can it be denied that the essential end of Art is Perfection, which is nothing more than Beauty expressed by means and pure conceptions of everything ugly. This does not mean that Perfection will be found under the limitations of an ideal based upon an immutable formula and process. The first condition of a work is that it shall be *beautiful*. But beautiful how, and in what way? Beautiful in *itself*, the eclectic school will invariably reply ; that is, all those who have only a poor comprehension of art, and who do not know upon what mysterious and sublime foundations the whole theory of art is reared. A work of art, to deserve that rare term, must be *beautiful in a threefold way*, or it will not be so at all. I know that to demand this requires an equilibrium and a harmony in the creative powers of the artist very rarely met with in this age, taking into consideration the material tendency of modern ways of thought, and the weakness of artists in striving towards perfection. One often hears it said by superficial people, and I have often seen

it written too, that it is dangerous for the development of personality to lay down principles for artistic creation. From that, say they, spring conventions (*poncifs*) and schools. There is no absolute Ideal, shouts one side ; there is no absolute Beauty, shouts another. Now the disastrous error of the conventional schools simply rests in wishing that principle should replace the artist's *personality*, which must inevitably result in an absurd generalisation ; that is, a "*poncif*." What constitutes the absurdity and poverty of true conventional art is the principle of uniformity in composition and execution. But to deny the laws of art on account of an error, either of a special or general character, formulated by a school that has gone astray is to fall into the same absurdity ! There exists a Law of Art, as there exists a Universal Law, mother of all other laws. To deny the existence of Laws is nothing more or less than proving oneself to be insane, or unconscious, which comes almost to the same thing. Beauty has its absolute ideal, as mathematics has its absolute number. Just as the mighty harmony of the physical and moral world indicates and reveals to us the evidence of an immutable wisdom, of principles and eternal laws, and of an infinitely active creative intelligence forming the Absolute, so in the same way Art has its absolute principle.

Many eminent writers and philosophers, who are still victims to the great illusion of our modern materialistic individualism, believe that beauty depends on the individual artistic genius alone. To them beauty exists only so far as personality makes it manifest, and outside personality beauty has no existence. They declare consequently that there is no ideal absolute beauty at all. According to this untoward theory, well designed to develop the *vanity* of art and destroy the *love* of the Beautiful, it is not the artist who depends on Beauty, but Beauty which depends on the artist! And that is equivalent to saying that man does not depend on Life, but Life depends on man, or that it is not Law that causes phenomena, but that phenomena is the cause of Law. As a mistaken idea of metaphysics, a mistaken idea of art criticism, we must deplore all its manifold consequences.

It is not difficult to understand that if there exists an absolute principle of universal equilibrium by which the problem of contradiction is solved, there exists also an absolute principle of Beauty, which is beyond all imperfections. Beauty could not be the unconscious consequence of the play of our fancy, whether that of genius or not. The creative intelligence of the artist is not set in motion by the mere accident of the action of the brain, outside the ideal world.

The artist, in order to evolve, will have to extend the study of nature to the great laws of cosmic Ideas. That knowledge will urge him to penetrate the mystery and hidden meaning in the forms of the visible World.

He will have thereafter a clearer conception of Life. In accordance with Truth, by the light of esoteric Science, he will perceive more clearly the splendours of the Divine, the splendours of the Universe, and the splendours of Man ; that is, eternal Harmony and Beauty. The artist in his art, as the sage in his science, must be in agreement with the harmony of the world.

As matter is a *unity*, so Beauty is a *unity*, though manifested by a different kind of vibration. It is the duty of the artist to seek this Beauty through the various degrees in which its appearance undergoes alteration.

The Art of the Future will inevitably be an art of lofty emotion and lofty reason, or it will be nothing at all. "*The artist of the future,*" says Péladan, "*will be he who shall consciously have established an agreement between his psychic personality and universal science, in just harmony with Life and the Ideal.*"

The Law of the Beautiful, which in itself comprises the whole evolution of art, is the same, to use an analogy, as that which governs Life. Pure Beauty reflects the essence of the World. To analyse Beauty ; that is, to seek

for its principles, is to endeavour to learn the causes and laws of universal mystery.

Beauty is the synonym of Truth.

God, or, for greater clearness, the Universal sum of Essence, the eternal principle of that which has, is, and will be, is manifested in Art by the same laws as those by which He exhibits His external aspect in Nature or the physical plane.

The idea of God corresponds to the idea of supreme Harmony, which agrees with the idea of Unity. Life is neither unconscious in its creation, nor spontaneous in its evolution. Life is Harmony ; Harmony is Beauty !

Concerning vision as much as hearing, harmony does not belong exclusively to the domains of music or sound. As sounds are produced by the vibrations of the air, colours are produced by the vibrations of ether. It is impossible to put harmony and rhythm in an exclusive category. Rhythm, or harmony, exists as much in the world of *forms* as in that of *sound*. In music we *hear* harmony ; in plastic art we *see* harmony.

Universal Harmony, the divine law of Equilibrium, which is in beings and things, will be perceived in different but analogical methods of idealism, as real, alive, and perceptible, in the works of a Pheidias or De Vinci, as in those of a Beethoven or a Wagner.

For between the sound and form there is a mystic communion that the study of magical

incantations will especially enable one to perceive and understand.

The creative power of the World is expressed by Form. The divine mirage of created life, it reveals to our spiritual gaze the mystery of art, for Nature is not art, but art is concealed in Nature like a supernatural treasure. Genius lies in seeing the glitter of this treasure through the physical density of matter.

The realist or impressionist artist is only in touch with the physical plane of Nature, the lower objective plane.

The idealist artist, generally speaking, and genius, in particular, are in touch with the mental plane, the superior subjective plane.

That is why artists of genius are *seers*, that there are exceptions, and that mere craftsmen are innumerable!

The ideal is in us, and we are in the ideal.

The spirit seeks or guesses at the spirit of Nature, which is the secret beauty of things, the essential image beneath the image of substance, the subjective form under the objective form, the unseen in the seen.

Human thought, reflecting God and Nature, is evolved in a similar way to this. Natural selection, which affects both the vegetable and animal planes, is concerned likewise with humanity or the plane of the ideal.

Occult cosmogony teaches that the physical universe is the materialisation of the fluid

universe. In fact all forms of Nature pre-exist in a fluid state before existing in a state of objective matter. The great cosmic problem, as far as *natural* phenomena (*phénoménisme naturant*) is concerned, can have no other explanation, and as long as positive science refuses to recognise this elementary and experimental truth, it will not unravel the secrets of matter, which, with such childish pride, it thinks that it has defined!

The creative powers which are manifested in Nature are not limited to the laws of physical activity alone, based upon the illusory relation of our five organic senses.

But we may henceforth declare, in spite of the blind protest of narrow minds, that what we call Reality is no more Truth than it is *Beauty*, of which it only contains the mysterious and divine germs.

The origin of the Beautiful is the origin of Creation, and the origin of Creation is God! Beauty is the daughter of the Absolute. It is its most harmonious *plastic* emanation. It is the soul of Form, the reflection of the Essence in the Substance. It is the truth of Essence in the falsity of Matter, since, as a lucid philosopher has put it, external forms *exist*, but *are not*.

He who through the real forms can see the combination of the three powers, the three states, the three mysterious equilibriums, he

alone will understand life and the secret of its æsthetic growth, he alone will understand the power of Art !

Art, like Life, has its origin in God. Like science, Art reveals God. Beauty is the Mirror of God.

Every work that does not cause God to be felt is an abortion, the lees of all that is imperfect, the ashes of empty technique, a labour false and useless. Whether it be expressed through Evil or Good, through sin or prayer, Beauty must be either the sullied mirror or the open stainless sky, o'er which is wafted the terrible and sublime thrills of the Divine.

But how degrading to modern art is the impertinence of inferior artists who abuse form in every possible way in their clumsy abominations, their endeavours to be archaic, and their feeble imitations of early times when art could still only stammer !

It is in Ugliness, which is stamped on all the strange grimaces of elementary expression, all dark forms of animalism, the pitiable imprint of some embryonic mystery, that degenerate imaginations, artists who have gone astray, and degraded minds, take refuge.

For the conventional ugliness of academies they have substituted the ugliness of realism and finally the ugliness of amorphousness.

A barren infatuation, induced by the bad taste, or the errors of a few idle æsthetics or



artists, lacking balance, has brought about a return to the dark days of art by degrading the human form, and thus confusing the expression of moral beauty with its most pitiful elements.

This grotesque retrogressive idealism, which is the negation of art and its evolutionary impulse, results in corrupting the artist's personality or making him return to his childhood.

## IV

### The Importance of Theory

Harmony of the Natural, the Human and the Divine—Animal Perception of Colour—Colour a Medium of Expression, not an End—Objections to Idealist Theory—Need for Theory in order to conceive “The Universal”—Every Genius is a Theorist—What is the Beautiful?—Shortcomings of Academic and Scientific Methods—The Poetry of Things and the Poetry of Ideas—The Salvation of Æsthetics—The Artist must follow the Living Tradition, not the Dead.

**A** WORK of idealism, then, is that in which the three great Words of Life are brought into harmony: the Natural, the Human, the Divine. To reach that degree of artistic merit—which is not attained at the first attempt, I am quite convinced!—there must be found in the work the purest *idea* within the scope of the mind, the most beautiful *form* in the whole range of things that have shape, and the most perfect *technique* in the execution. Without *idea*, the work fails in its intellectual mission; without *form*, it fails in its mission towards nature; without *technique*, it fails to reach perfection. No wise critic, no thoughtful lover of art, no intelligent artist, will gainsay *with any show of reason* this tendency of idealism, which is pre-eminent over every other formula of the schools, because it is that of Art as a whole, of almighty Art; and nothing will prevail against it either now or at any future time. The true character of a work of idealism is to be found in the equilibrium which governs its production; that is, in preventing either the idea, form, or technique from predominating to the detriment of one or other of the three

essential terms ; but that they should always be balanced as far as possible agreeably in proportion to their respective value. I think it may be of use to cite examples with regard to this. Wiertz,\* a man of impulsive imagination (*imaginatif—impulsif*), that is, almost insane according to pathology, has confusedly expressed his often commonplace ideas in chaotic forms, and with a deplorable technique. With Wiertz the imagination in its degree of instinct held sway to the point of vertigo, and for *form* allowed him only the ugliness of his fantastic and extravagant Homeric battles.

As an example of a different kind, I will mention De Braeckeleeer,† a man of small

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\* Antoine Wiertz (1806–1865) occupies a unique place in the history of Belgian art. Owing to his dislike for parting with his paintings, he long remained little known outside his own country, and, though possessed of strong individuality, left behind him no followers. He early came under the spell of Rubens, and the great aim of his life was to rival the works of that master. His genius was of such an eccentric nature that his work was curiously uneven. Always fantastic and extravagant, he was often dominated by a great and noble impulse, as in his huge canvases, "The Greeks and Trojans contending for the body of Patroclus," "The Triumph of Christ," "The Revolt of Hell," and "The Last Cannon," but at other times he descended to what was meretricious and sensational. Some of his work, as "Hunger, Madness, and Crime," "Buried Alive," "The Thoughts of a Severed Head," are the productions of a morbid and neurotic fancy. Not content with oil as a medium for painting large canvases he set to work to discover a medium for himself. He eventually painted most of his works in a lustreless medium, which he termed "*peinture mate*," very coarse in quality, and looking at a distance like a rude tapestry. He endured considerable poverty, but, with the exception of portraits, refused to paint for money. "Keep your gold," on one occasion he said, "it is the murderer of art." His works are all gathered, as in his lifetime, under one roof in the "Musée Wiertz" at Brussels.

† H. de Braeckeleeer, a Belgian painter, a pupil of Leys, the leader of the Realist School. His subjects are mostly interiors painted in warm golden tones. He is represented in the Brussels gallery by "A Grapher," "The Interior of a Farm," and "A Shop."

intellect bordering on degeneracy, who only knew how to *look* at things with the eye of an animal; that is, according to the receptive power of the optic nerves rendered more or less active by the work of digestion. If a cow, in its ruminating state, could paint, it would be the finest of *colourists*, its retina then possessing an extraordinary visual sensibility. This peculiarity explains why the *realist* painters who excel in *colour* are generally great eaters and drinkers; and of limited intelligence. And with respect to this I invite my brother painters to make a little experiment, which will not fail to edify them: While fasting, or nearly so, paint some object, solely from an objective point of view, and then repaint the same object during the process of digestion, after a heavy meal. Compare the two studies with regard to their colour, and tell me if that done under the influence of *digestion* will not be richer and more glowing than the other!

It must be understood that what results from this particular condition will be in proportion to the optic power of the retina. The painter who is not a colourist will not any the more possess the gift of colour, but his eye, influenced more or less by organic action, by that portion of vital force which circulates in the organ, conveyed by the blood globules and induced by the process of digestion, will be better enabled to seize the appearance of colour.

I allow myself to make this observation, based upon a theory, which, although of a physiological nature, proves clearly that *colour*—as far at least as it is understood by the realists, spottists, and dottists—is not by any means a faculty depending on the artist's genius. This disconcerting theory proves likewise that colour must never be the painter's end, but his means of expression, and it is this that Delacroix,\* a great, but intellectual, colourist, has so forcibly demonstrated in his works and expatiated upon in his writings. Ever new theories, those will thoughtlessly cry who seem not to have observed that man cannot open his mouth or take up his pen without theorising! In science, theory is often derived from natural phenomena, but it may be said that in art phenomena emanates from theory. The unknown sublime creator of the Venus of Milo, to reach that degree of beauty, had to theorise as much, I presume, as the ingenious mechanician Edison had to do in order to produce his phonograph.

Laws and principles exist everywhere in Nature. The law or the principle is not by any

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\* Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) was one of the leaders of the French historical and romantic school. He refused on principle to go to Italy lest the old masters, either in spirit or manner, should impair his originality and self-dependence. He appears to have been one of the first modern painters to concern himself scientifically with the reactions of complementary colours, for he is said to have made observations on them as early as 1825, anticipating the complete exposition of Chevreul. He had quantities of little wafers of each colour, with which he tried colour effects. He was thus the forerunner of "pointillisme."

means synonymous with the formula. Life is the expression of law. Without law there is no life. The genius is not he who discovers the formula but the law. Whilst the formula limits and narrows the field of artistic creation, the law enlarges, broadens, throws light upon it. The formula is the barrier which closes ; the law is the infinite which opens. And the infinite is not disorder or chaos, but the geometry of ideas wherein the mental compass of genius measures the relations of God with the world.

A theory is good or bad according to the source whence it originates. If, for example, it emanates from antiquated artists, frozen beneath the icy breath of an academic clique, then, and only then, it is dead before it is born. Thence assuredly nothing ideal or living can come ! But if the theory is formed in the name of an evolutionary intellectual impulse, in the full sunlight of a clear and powerful vision, why be suspicious of it and treat it with contempt ? The stock phrases habitually used as objections to the idealist theory in particular are : “ *Does the nightingale theorise ?* ” “ *Has a bird a theory with regard to the construction of its nest ?* ” “ *Do bees theorise ?* ” And in this way puerilities are piled up, without it being seen that to establish a comparison between the mechanical function of the animal and the creative faculty of man is utter folly. What should we say of a musician who warbled for ever two or three

identical notes, although it were under the brightest of moons in springtime? We will not press it. But in what way may it be answered? Has the "*Treatise on Painting*," by De Vinci, who laid down theories even with regard to technical rules, prevented the works of that glorious master from shedding their lustre through the ages? Has theory aged him? No. It makes him grow ever younger, and future generations will only bow lower to him!

A fruitful and expansive theory does not pretend to do more than to instil into art an evolutionary process, and to offer to the artist's comprehension an orientation favourable to the development of his latent powers. Theory which pretended to give talent or genius to those who had it not would be merely foolish. Now, idealism, as much as theory, is an *orientation*—an ascending orientation!

Plato, whom many read, but few understand, has said clearly that the duty of the soul is to conceive "*The Universal*." Now, to conceive the universal, it is necessary to understand the law, the principle. But the simpleness of common philosophy, and the lack of familiarity in the modern mind with the terminology of metaphysics, has caused many critics and artists, confusing the *law* with the formula or the *principle* with the system, to fall into an absurd passion at an imaginary obstacle.

The mark of genius is the knowledge of how to find laws and how to apply them to its inspirations and whatever it produces. Pythagoras must seem terribly dull to those who never will understand his theory of Numbers, a theory on which *mathematics* and *geometry* have been built. Was not Wagner, that tremendous innovator, a passionate theorist? And so were Goethe and Baudelaire. Was there a more learned theorist than Leonardo de Vinci? Does not the anarchist, so particularly vehement in his denial of everything, the ardent foe of every principle, of every law, enunciate theories in order to compass the means of destruction? Whether speaking or writing, affirmatively or negatively, theories must still be advanced; to deny eclecticism, or to defend it, is to continue to theorise.

In fact, inferior minds are ever scared by theory, and this aversion to everything theoretical is one of the sad symptoms of our time. It is through this that modern times have, unfortunately, become so painfully certain that man is powerless to discover the Truth or the Absolute, a certainty which produces that vague intellectual stupidity, noticed by Wronski,\* the colossal esoteric mathematician, the unrecognised and little known author of

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\* Hoene de Wronski in 1811 announced a general method of solving all equations, giving formulæ without demonstration. In 1817 the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon offered a prize for the demonstration of Wronski's formulæ. It was given for the refutation of them.



“*The Reformation of Human Knowledge.*” In the province of contemporary fine art for the most part this intellectual stupidity is undeniable. It is owing to it that they have come to consider as superfluous Style, Proportion, Idea, and all that aids in the search of ideal beauty. When we think of the Greek artists passing through a real *initiation*, before realising works of such imperishable beauty, we are right in believing that theory can bring about the purification of æsthetics. Compare the artists of old with their theories with those of the present day who have none! “*Admire the beautiful*” is a formula of eclecticism which is far too vague. The tradesman will fall into an ecstasy before the most ridiculous productions under the pretence that he admires everything beautiful! The essential thing is to know how to discern what is beautiful from what is not, in Nature as in the Work. These are the very rudiments of æsthetics. They cannot be avoided, unless one would remain in a condition of mediocrity in which the understanding is warped.

Between the retina and the spirit there is the same difference as there is between *looking* and *seeing*. Painters like Seurat and Signac,\*

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\* Both Seurat (d. 1890) and Signac are prominent Impressionists and exponents of the “*pointilliste*” method. The former is said to have been the first to carry into practice the systematic decomposition of colour by this method, which consists in the intimate juxtaposition of dots of colour. With regard to their theory see an article by Signac, “*D’Eugène Delacroix au Néo-Impressionisme.*” (Revue Blanche, 1898).

in spite of their analytical qualities, will remain ineffective. The impressionist creed has proved so far that when the painter's eye is disconnected from his soul, his spirit, and the Ideal, he will only be, however rational his process, a barren craftsman and not an artist. The scientific painters have forsaken Beauty as much as those who paint academically. Both are the slaves of *method*, and remain without inspiration, without ideal.

The characteristic of modern schools which borrow their theories from pantheistic materialism, is that they only seek the poetry of *Things*, life only being apparent to them through the senses or its external aspect, whilst idealism tends to perfection by the search and assertion of the poetry of *Ideas*. The idealists affirm the power of *Life*, but, having a fuller consciousness, they have a deeper, more perfect, holier, purer, and more divine conception of Life.

To be impatient at the spiritualising of art is to be wanting in clearness of thought. For the lover of art, the artist and the philosopher, who can see a little further than their noses, the elevation of the Notion can rescue Art from the degenerating influence of materialism.

It is the duty of every initiate, of every real lover of art, of every undoubted artist, to work for the Salvation of Æsthetics. "*As a first condition of this Salvation,*" says Péladan,

*“those who excel in technique must recognise the rule of æsthetics, and the idealists must be infallible in technique; otherwise they will not fulfil their great mission as the saviours of light.”*

The duty of present artists will be for the time not to give themselves up to false traditions, nor too much to the Realism that surrounds them, in order that they may reach a point of equilibrium with regard to technique, form, and idea.

If masterpieces seem to have an air of relationship about them it is because the masters knew how to subordinate their *Personality* to the unifying light of the true Tradition; that is, the whole of the great laws of æsthetics. The artist who is at the same time possessed of high sensibility and high discernment, and goes to Italy, is better enabled to understand the influence of tradition, which keeps the artist's conception in the higher spheres without allowing him to descend to the commonplace or to individual mediocrity, without his personality suffering by its free expansion. There is a dead and a living tradition. The dead is that which, annihilating in the work the creative personal force, substitutes for it the uninspired smooth application of school formulæ; the living is that which is in eternal accord with the evolution of art in general and with the evolution of personality in particular. Æschylus, Sophocles, Pheidias, Michael Angelo, Raphael, De Vinci, in the same

way as Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau,\* Burne-Jones, Watts,† and Wagner are of the living tradition; while Bandinelli, Lebrun, Canova, Chenavard, Navez, Bouguereau, Gallait,‡ and so many others, are of the dead. The first are the great classics, the second are governed by conventions. The great classics are those who are greatly inspired; the conventional are those whom inspiration has forsaken. Among human beings, endowed with

\* Gustave Moreau (1826–1898) (French), endeavoured in every way to foster Idealism in Art. He regarded his duties as a professor in the “*École des Beaux Arts*” as a real apostleship. He endeavoured, by assimilating the traditions of the past, to create for himself a new tongue in which to give utterance to the deepest emotions of the soul. He revived old myths and rejuvenated old symbols to represent under their imagery the moral struggles of humanity. He bequeathed his house, containing about 8,000 of his works, to the State.

† “He believes in a great priesthood of arts. . . . If anyone suggested that before a man ventured to paint pictures or to daub with plaster he should be initiated with some awful rites in some vast and crowded national temple, should swear to work worthily before some tremendous altar or over some symbolic flame, Millais would have laughed heartily at the idea, and Leighton also. But it would not seem either absurd or unreasonable to Watts.”—G. K. CHESTERTON ON “*Watts*.”

‡ *Bandinelli* (1487–1595), Florentine School; historical subjects—*Charles Le Brun* (1619–1690), French School; historical and religious subjects. *Mme. Lebrun* (1755–1842), French School; portraits, landscape, and history. *Anotonio Canova* (1757–1882), sculptor. *A. W. Bouguereau* (b. 1825), French School; subjects taken from the antique and invested with a certain modern sentimentality. *Gallait* (1810–1887), Belgian; mainly historical subjects of a sentimental character. He was for a long time the leader of public taste in Brussels. Théophile Gautier wrote of him: “M. Gallait has all the gifts that may be acquired by taste, judgment, and determination. His art is that of a man of tact, of a skilled painter happy in his dramatic treatment, but superficial.” *P. J. Chenavard*, French School (b. 1808), a pupil of Ingres. A typical painter of the conventional school of the early part of the nineteenth century. His art was not without elevation of thought, but very weak in the rendering of it. He had ideas, but his method of expressing them was frigid and uninspired. *F. J. Navez* (b. 1787), Belgian, pupil of David, and painted absurd compositions in the style of his master. He was, however, an excellent portrait painter, there being a strong analogy between his work and that of Raeburn.

intelligence and will set in motion by their ideal forces, there is a fatality which calculates, weighs, and measures their thoughts, words, and acts. Genius is the individuality in which are most perfectly harmonised the *Ego* and the *Universal*, *personality*, and *tradition*.

The creative intelligence of the artist cannot be separated from the ideal world.

## V

### The Mystery of Form

Art Evolved from Line the Essence of Form—Form the Mystery of the Physical World—Cult of Form indicative of High State of Civilisation—Aid of Music in Comprehension of Form—Intervention of the Spirit necessary for the Comprehension of Beauty—Style should be neither Academic nor Anarchical, but in Harmony with the Artist's Soul—"The Beautiful is the Ugly": Misconception with regard to the Phrase—Greek Ideals—Need for Initiation—Productions of Genius not Spontaneous—Moral Significance of Nudity—It Reveals the true *sense* of Nature—Is the Alpha and Omega of Æsthetics—Art can be regenerated by a study of the Nude—It evokes Humanity and the whole Beauty of Life.

**A**RT began with Design, with Line, and Line is the very essence of Form. It is important, I think, often to remember this at a time like ours when works most lacking in form pass as archetypes of schools called "*Free.*" † The decadence of Art can be seen in the carelessness or incapability of artists ignorant of design, and if nowadays the Ugly has taken the place of the Beautiful in the arts, it is, we may be certain, because the abstract and vital sense of Form has been lost. Is not Line the basis of all Architecture, of all Sculpture? In the works of Nature Line is the signature of God. Line, let us never forget, is the symbolical expression of the mysterious relations which exist between Spirit and Matter. Line or Form is the mystery of the physical world, the mystery of Art, the mystery of Beauty. It is only when civilisations reach the maturity of their intellectual power that

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† The "Société Libre" was founded in 1868, the "Libre Esthétique," a continuation of the Twenty Club, in 1894.





L'HOMME DIEU (J. DELVILLE).

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the cult of Form is developed and spread, because the comprehension of Form always necessitates in a people, if not a complete education, a high state of mental development.

A great and sublime mystery links the Idea with the Form.

It may be said that if music, considered as social magnetism, helps towards solidarity of life in rising civilisations, as well as in their intellectual refinement, it is still nothing more than a marvellous means of preparing the race, the people, for an æsthetic comprehension of Form. Music is the method of expression which best corresponds to the unconscious sensibility of the crowd, but Form, less vague and further separated from the inferior condition where the impression is received through the nerves, will ever remain in a select sphere corresponding best with the clear perceptions of the few.\* The great Goethe has said: "*The soul conveys into a design a portion of its essential being, and the most profound secrets of creation are precisely those which, with regard to its basis, rest upon design and form.*" And has not Goethe also said that design is "*the most moral of things requiring skill?*" If I recall the fine phrase of that sublime spirit it is in order that the capital importance which men of the greatest

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\* With regard to the subject of Music, see Pater's Essay on Giorgione written on the text that "all art constantly aspires to the condition of music." Design may be compared with music when form and colour are combined in arbitrary decoration.

genius attach to the plastic arts may be understood, and it proves that if the plastic arts do not instantaneously act upon the crowd, it is because the crowd, devoid of consciousness and culture, is psychologically incapable of raising itself sufficiently to comprehend what is difficult. It is obvious that *Architecture*, *Sculpture*, and *Painting*, the three arts which express Form in its different æsthetic aspects, and from which emanate such a wealth of idealism that they always necessitate the immediate intervention of the *spirit* in order to be understood, ought to cause the soul of the artist to be elated. The grandeur of their calling ought especially also to make them appreciate how necessary it is that they should have a lofty conception of their mission, what strength they should put into their studies, extending them even to Science and Philosophy, so as not to stoop to the compromises which mark the decadence by which modern art is being overwhelmed.

The great error of the academic schools, whence came such painters as Chenavard, David,\* and Lebrun, was in imposing a *style* which was invariable and fitted to every condition of plastic art to the detriment of individual

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\* Jacques Louis David (French, 1748–1825) was the leader of the French Classical School. He used to say: "I wish that my works may have so completely an antique character that if it were possible for an Athenian to return to life they might appear to him to be the production of a Greek painter." It has been said of his works that they are "coloured statuary."

genius. Certainly a work without *style* is yet a work on the border of realisation, but when it is *in a certain style* (*stylée*), it should be so in accordance with the personal condition of the soul and spirit, and with the peculiar character of the conception itself. Style is then elevated to something that *idealises*—the most difficult mode of æsthetic expression to realise, but the most noble. Many dabblers in Art have been influenced to such an extent by conventional faulty ideas, and have become such advocates of amorphism and lack of form, as to declare *style* a thing to be despised and old-fashioned, crying in every tone that Art should be *anarchical*, without science, principles, or rules, and that, after all, the first attempts that were made, whether in painting or sculpture however formless or ugly, were as much art as *La Samothrace*,\* *the Ilissus*, or *the Saint Anne*! Realism and impressionism shouted victory, because the leaders of these baneful schools threw wide the doors of the *Sanctuary* to give admittance to the barbarians of the brush and chisel. It became the home of the incapable and inferior, of vagabonds and mountebanks, and such as, profiting by the opportunity, adapted to it their pushing and avaricious natures.

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\* The well-known Niké, or statue of Victory, from Samothrace in the Louvre. A wonderful study of a figure in rapid motion. The head and arms and part of the wings are now wanting. It was set up by Demetrius Poliorketes, B.C. 306.

*The Beautiful is the Ugly!* This foolishness has triumphed over Art. It has led to a false view of æsthetics, the misdirection of talents, and the corruption of the understanding. Since it has come into fashion we have seen the modern studios producing all the most disheartening and repulsive work that the errors of a decaying art give birth to. The artist, in order to conform to the instinct of his age, has had to seek the *accidents* of Nature, in order to free himself from "old formulæ" and seem original in the eyes of the multitude, which is as foolish as it is full of admiration, and to this moment as convinced as the artist that *the beautiful is the ugly!* Taine, a clear and keen-sighted critic, has cried in vain: "*True, the ugly is beautiful, but the beautiful is much more beautiful!*" He was too clear and too simple. One of the ancients could not have expressed himself better, with more justice and irony. Parnassus rather has been blown up, and from the débris of the sacred mountain they have set themselves to hew grotesque abortions.

O Athens, if thou couldst see in what depths the artists of the present age have caused the Sacred Form to wallow, of which thou wert the sublime parent, and ye, mountains of marble, who wait till ye are quarried to serve some time or other as material for works revolting in their baseness and ugliness, ye

would tremble with shame and anger under the Hellenic glory of your bright azure skies !

O Greece, radiant with thine ideals, who couldst combine perfection of body with calm understanding, render divine the joyous and harmonious beauty of youth, and perceive through the splendour of form the mystery of rhythm and abstruse meaning of gesture, who didst know how to regulate Life and the Ideal, weigh Spirit and Matter, make repose god-like and movement sublime, who couldst balance in such proportions all parts of the human form, from head to toe, and made man "strong as a soldier of Pericles, and fair as a disciple of Plato"; thou, O Greece, towards whom genius in ecstasy turns its gaze, if thou couldst behold the terrible phantasmagoria of our unbridled exponents of art, thou wouldst believe that we had returned to a state of primitive barbarism and consider that Art in this world had come to an end !

In an age characterised by a harmony between the occult sciences and the arts, ancient Greece formed the æsthetic conception of the *ideal man*. A divine perfection of the human form was attained. That genius for beauty was the result of the teaching revealed by the esoteric doctrine of the temples, when the Magi initiated artists into the Mysteries. The Magi knew that the influence on society of Beauty, which is a real element of happiness

and virtue, consists in elevating the soul of the multitude by awaking in it an eternal sense of harmony. The happiest peoples have the most beautiful art. Goethe was right to say of the Greeks that they had made of life a most beautiful dream. It was through their power of *vision* that the veil before the Unseen fell aside before the young artists, philosophers, and poets. And then they could *see* in the fluid and transparent splendour of the *Universal Soul* the archetypal forms of the pure Idea evolving and the living perfect images of the Spirit. The world of spirit and intelligence, where the beings of Love and Light lead an existence truly divine, was revealed to them.

And from that supreme contemplation of the invisible and immortal life the artist seers returned dazzled and illuminated for ever. In their serene and ineffaceable ecstasy they had received the great secret of Beauty.

Pheidias possessed that secret ; he, too, had *seen* into the Light of Form, that pure and subtle element of the essence of Life, that inexhaustible Well of *ideas* and *forms*. And with this reflection of the Divine in the angelic intelligence of the Eternal Masculine and Eternal Feminine he infused beauty into his sublime marvels, as Pericles by its means shed splendour on the State and Sophocles on the Theatre.

It was thus, through the *vision* of the initiate into the living realms of Immortality, the bright

regions of glorified spirits where the *real being* becomes apparent, freed from the many impurities of the physical body, that material image of moral ugliness and psychic imperfection, thus, I say, that Plato discovered the wonderful formula of the æsthetic creed : “ *Beauty is the splendour of Truth.*”

It is thus that everyone who has been *inspired*, every genius, and all those who have received initiation, have proved that Nature is not *truly* such as it appears at the first glance ; that it is so only in its most objective, most imperfect, aspect, and that when considered from a material point of view it is *debased*, in the sense that it is the negative pole of the universal Spirit. For physical Nature is the most obscure term of the involution of Spirit, and the harmonies of matter, on which are founded the physical laws, are only confusing illusions compared with the more perfect harmonies of the Spirit.

We must not look upon the Venus of Milo as a spontaneous creation, the result of fancy, any more than the lyre of Orpheus, which is the musical adaptation of the *sacred Septenary* taught by the Egyptian priests. The ages of strength and beauty are at the same time those of Intelligence and Wisdom.

The divine perfection of Form in ancient Greece ought to make us observe more clearly that in the works nowadays which are based on

nature all that is of importance is the problem of primordial forms and the divine genesis of infinite perfection.

They knew, those old sages, that Beauty is eternal, imperishable, and that it is the agency by which the light of the ideal is transmitted to human beings, and which, by the ugliness of vice or evil, they continually obscure. And that is why they suffered the sublime reflection of the divine principle to glow through the human form. Through their secret learning they knew that the law of beauty and form is the soul which, by a rational process, and in proportion to its stage of evolution, creates the bodily form which manifests it.

The creative forces of nature, like the creative forces of the spirit, tend directly to Beauty. The imperfections of the individual alone contrive continually to lead astray and corrupt the normal evolution of these creative forces in their universal striving towards Beauty.

The *nude* alone brings us face to face with the enigma of life. Real nudity in a work of art inculcates also a teaching of high morality. What does it matter if, as its adversaries prudishly declare, it does not conform to the social conventions of modern daily life! The nude will not the less remain one of the purest mediums of Beauty, and great artists will not the less perceive its ideal and positive value.



It is childish to think that trousers, aprons, blouses, shoes, and dresses are fit subjects for art and capable of elevating the soul. Clothes generally, and modern clothes in particular, merely show the ceaseless insane caprices of fashion, changing from day to day, incongruous, grotesque, ridiculous, since clothes have become the enemy of the natural shape of the human body, instead of being a covering which should preserve its harmony and rhythm.

It is by the *nude* alone that the artist can express the essential character of life, the impersonal ideas, universal beliefs, and general sentiments of humanity. The *nude*, I must repeat, reveals the true *sense* of nature. And nature has never been so revered and studied as in the art of Greece. It appears there in its double manifestation of the real and ideal, in the *reality* of its *ideal* character. In it we ever observe the clearly defined tendency of harmony, style, and proportion to meet, through the constant study and æsthetic observation of nature, in an IDEAL TYPE, which does not mean a settled *type* (type convenu), as is too often wrongly supposed. Artists in those days studied the natural and spiritual laws of Beauty as now we study the laws of the so-called exact sciences.

To them art was not a conventional and systematic rule, but the reason of æsthetics consisted, in their eyes, in the positive and

abstract study of Beauty, that force at once natural and ideal, and which, whatever sceptics think, is one of the great problems of spirit.

The human body is the noblest ornament. The *nude* is the *alpha* and *omega* of æsthetics. All the science possessed by the artist is summarized in it. It is fitted to express the most subtle and most profound emotions of the soul.

It is furthermore by the study of the *nude* that the fine arts when falling into decay are regenerated. The great revivals of art, in fact, are due to the study of the *nude*. Without the least wishing to depreciate the value of the Byzantine and Gothic periods, whose symbols of expression were based upon the religious theme of good and evil, and whose sombre splendour was well calculated to arouse emotion, it may be said that they had lost the sense of the harmony of Beauty, because they rejected the *nude*. Certainly Cimabue, Giotto, Orcagna, and, above all, the gentle visionary Fra Angelico, remain great in their Christian mysticism, but they did not comprehend—they could not do so, dominated as they were by the Spirit of the time—that bodily beauty is not incompatible with that of the soul. It is only with Botticelli, Leonardo de Vinci, and Michael Angelo, that is, with the renewed study of form, that the *nude* reappeared in its great plastic and spiritual significance, and the Renaissance was developed in the full glory of its idealism.

The *nude* has the high quality of being synthetic, universal. Its representation evokes the *unity* of beings ; that is to say, all earthly souls are united and form a LIVING BEING. The nude can, therefore, drive from the heart the crowd of ideas of social and psychic harmony, destroying thus the instinct for separation and differentiation which divides men. By evoking *Man* it evokes *Humanity*, and the whole beauty of *Life*, not life as we moderns understand it, so neurotic, feverish, and filled with unhealthy excitement, but the great universal life, which makes fruitful the spirit and the earth, makes both the stars and the soul glow with light, causes space to vibrate, which palpitates in the substance as in the essence, which rules and moves the universe, beings, and things, mortals or immortals, in the infinite rhythm and mystery of Eternity, the divine macrocosm and human microcosm, from which the universal Beauty is ever shed and reflected, woven of Love, Wisdom, and Light.

And when the artist has become conscious of this Beauty, when it has appeared to him in its unfading and divine splendour, he will understand its mission. He will learn, in fact, that this beauty which he seeks in the body, in forms, is the same as that which is manifested in sentiments and ideas, and that his duty as an artist will be to make it glow in its purest form, as the spark is struck from an unseen

pebble, through the degradation and grossness in which it has been imprisoned. And then upon a mass of imperfections, realisms, and short-lived ugliness, he will build a purer art. He will save art from the frenzy of anarchy and the petrification of academies. He will be of those who return to the point—the point of equilibrium!—in the name of indestructible and radiant Beauty, which the foolish and incapable have grievously profaned, in the name, goodness knows, of what wretched instinct or antiquated convention. For the artist who is not conscious of a divine force making his human powers fruitful with Beauty, and who, in the depth of his being, does not perceive the God of Love and Harmony move in the breath which sways worlds and men, is unworthy to belong to civilisation. His works will be abortions. His talent, if he has any, will be wasted.

## VI

### The Spiritualising of Art

Signs of a New Age—The Science of the Ideal—The Spiritualising of Science and Art—Disregard of Form in Modern Art—Realism based on a Philosophic Error—Distinction between the Dreamer and the Idealist—Music in Beauty of Form—Need for Spirituality in the Artist—Art cannot result from *sensation* alone—Comprehension “the Reflex of Creation”—The Beautiful in Art superior to the Beautiful in Nature—The Individual Ideal leads up to THE IDEAL—The Artist an Alchemist when inspired by the Spirit—The Beautiful is not one Form, but a harmony of Forms—It is Truth made manifest in the Form by the Idea—The duty of the Artist to reveal Beauty to Mankind—Art a Divine Force.

**L**ET the modern artist not forget that a new age is beginning, that the Idea is returning to the earth, and that a purer, fairer, race is about to inhabit the world!

Day by day the end of materialism is being achieved. Science is forcibly being evolved and transformed before the revelations of the other world. The psychic sciences are arrayed against the physical sciences, and set the occult proof against that of materialism. The occult sciences, the lofty teaching of theosophy, and experimental spiritualism, are setting out to conquer the future and, on the threshold of a new age, are about to establish the Science of the Ideal; that is, the synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy.

Above the overthrow of materialism, so fatally crushing to the soul and spirit, already soars, in the redeeming light, the mysterious transformation of thought. If truth, scientifically, is the harmony of facts, then spiritual

facts, proving the Immortality of the Soul, fall into harmony spontaneously to form truth, which already rises to confront negation.

With this spiritualising of Science, there goes on, side by side with it, the spiritualising of Art. Just as materialism is a monstrous abortion of modern philosophy, so realism, its poisonous outcome, is in æsthetics an actual anomaly, a case of flagrant degeneration in the fine arts. We may seek in vain for an extenuating circumstance which would excuse the schools of realism or naturalism by considering them as an inevitable and healthy reaction against the slavishness of the conventional school, the old-fashioned dealer in recipes and "poncifs." There can never be any excuse for ugliness, whatever be the school that praises or produces it. Ugliness cannot be the object of the fine arts.

Nowhere in the history of the epochs of art, that is, in those of civilisation, can one find such a sheer fall into the shallows of the *trivial and commonplace* as that brought about by the contemporary school of realism.

If the better work of a few great spirits had not been able to resist the many evils of its corrupted state, it might be said, without fearing to exaggerate too much, that Art to-day seemed to have quitted the sphere of Form.

They have replaced creative genius by sculptors without ability to conceive, soulless,

without the power of abstraction, often even without intelligence, who make sculpture riot in marble and bronze in every species of debased Form, either *taking a cast from nature*, or feebly and foolishly making a rough suggestion of it—a kind of wild nightmare in plaster.

One will stupidly endeavour to reproduce the superficial imperfections of the skin, while another tries to give his sculpture the shapeless appearance of kneaded mud.

With respect to those painters, without idealism, and without idea, whose whole art is contained in a tube of colour, and whose complete lack of sense is barely concealed by the clever trickery of *touch*, who only look in a work of art for the reproduction of *object* for *object*, and *thing* for *thing*, their eyes only observe the phenomena of atmosphere. They are tubes of colour which are emptied mechanically on the canvas.

These colourists, lacking the conception of form and the perception of the ideal image, have brought about a reaction in art. Their painting rests upon their digestion, and their consideration of colour only rests upon the part played by the eye, indifferent as they are to everything appertaining to the spirit. The nude, when, with sensual brush, they profane it, becomes fleshly. Beneath their eyes and fingers, animalism is transfused into everything. These are the traders in "bits." Neither

kind seek for Beauty, but only for things *material*, whether they be misshapen, commonplace, or vulgar. Taking it as a whole, the realist and impressionist period will be held as that which pauperised and prostituted the fine arts.

Since Proudhon,\* a celebrated sociologist, but as commonplace in his views on art as he is mistaken in his philosophy, and who formulates a gross error in a piece of stupid sophistry: "*Since all things are equal, there is nothing ugly!*" artists and critics have considered the back of a nude female to be equal in beauty to De Vinci's "Head of Saint Anne."

Realism, the very negation of art, springs from a philosophic mistake confusing *Life* with *Substance*. It perishes when that error is swept away. But new artists have arisen, to renovate philosophy and art by means of idealism. These men know that the spirit descends into form, form into matter, and that without form matter expresses nothingness; that is, something which has no reality. They know, in accordance with truth, that matter is the extreme limit to which the spirit of Beauty can be reflected, and that it is in physical substance that it appears to our eyes under its most shadowy and elusive aspect.

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\* Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), French writer on Socialism and leader of opinion in the Revolution of 1848. Author of the famous paradox, "La Propriété, c'est le vol."





LES SOEURS D' ILLUSION.



This idealist conception of art, in order to avoid confusion, can be made still more precise. Art, contrary to the simple notion of some people, does not waver between the real and "the dream," but between the real and the *ideal*. The difference which lies between "the dream" and the *ideal* may perhaps be expressed thus: "The dream is the unconscious and instinctive feeling of confused aspirations; the ideal is the ordered aspiration of the harmonious will."

Art, then, is neither the slave of the real or "the dream." Art is that balancing force which brings the rational into harmony with the spiritual, emotion with reason, and the natural with the supernatural. Nature is a medley of enchantment and terror, of ecstasy and awe. The monstrous is mingled with the divine. It is an astounding chaos of hidden glories.

Man is the Genius, the conscious and receptive intelligence of *mental*, spiritual vibrations, who from material elements will extract the pure essence, the typical form, the initial idea. In the same way as the musician of genius translates the harmonies of invisible space into natural sounds, the painter, the sculptor, can translate the harmony of typical forms which are in the invisible plastic light, living prisms of divine beauties, in which are refracted the splendours of the universal soul.

Do we know, indeed, whether the Harmony of Form does not correspond to, or is not actually, musical vibration rendered objective? \* Music is to be found in beauty of form as mathematics in clearness of thought.

But before the sublime faculty of inner sight is attained, before the power of making the material spiritual is gained, the artist must become spiritual himself. Then will *inspiration* alone consist in making *the idea* enter into the form, and *realisation* in giving *form* to the idea.

One does not become an idealist by the study or imitation of the art of bygone masters, but by idealising, spiritualising, one's psychic being.

Before understanding or attaining to the purification of form, the artist ought to endeavour to purify his soul. The beauty of a work does not depend merely on objective talent or technical gift, but also on the psychic beauty which emanates from its creator. An impure soul, a base and evil heart, a perverted intellect, a narrow mind, cannot belong to such as Pheidias, Angelico, De Vinci, Michael Angelo, Beethoven, Bach, or Wagner, since Beauty is the divine aspect of the human Soul, and the human Soul is *God* within God.

Art is the memory of the divinity within Man. The work rises to perfection when the will, that divine energy of thought, gains the

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\* Science has proved that waves of sound affect material objects, so as to give rise to infinite variety of form.

victory over the lower nature which is guided by instinct. The artist's calling, so degraded now by the selfish and eager desire to satisfy personal vanity, could be raised even to the rank of apostleship if artists were fully conscious of the grandeur of Art.

Let us never forget, if we wish to avoid a common mistake, that Sensation of itself can never conceive a work of true art. Sensation is not creative thought. The poetry of images, the sense of forms and colours, the life of things, in short, are found in Spirit, but not in what is properly called Sensation. The vital vibration of Sensation acts evidently on intellectual or psychic centres, but the result of that sensation will ever be in proportion to the capacity and power of our ideality. Two persons of equal nervous sensibility, but differing in their spiritual nature, if brought before the same impressive sight, will not express their sensations with the same degree of power.

Without spirit nature does not exist for man. As looking does not mean seeing, so feeling does not mean comprehension.

Now, comprehension, as someone has loftily expressed it, "*is the reflex of creation.*"

It is the sum of our ideal conceptions which enables nature to be felt or expressed with more or less power.

If in the creation of a work it were Sensation that alone could perceive and judge as well

as the sight (which is false, on another ground, since it is not the organ that approves or passes judgment), what should we think of Beethoven, who lost the sense of hearing, the very organ of musical *sensation*, and to whom the world of sound was henceforth closed? But we know that, starting from the moment of his deafness, the musical genius of Beethoven grew and developed with an extraordinary intensity. He composed the *ninth symphony*, his most complex work both with regard to its orchestration and conception!

Let the physiologist who believes in *automatic* action reply! He cannot.

But those who understand the mysteries of psychic man know that what constituted the potential ideal of the musician, in short his real inner being, did not need the physical sensation of music for the purpose of expression or creation in the conditions in which it was placed.

We are not, it will be observed, endeavouring to prove the uselessness of Sensation, but to show that Sensation, instead of being the beginning and end of a work of art, is only a means towards it.

The Beautiful in Art, compared with the beautiful in nature, is superior to it. Art and Imitation are as wide apart as the poles. One of the fundamental characteristics of Art is that it is the manifestation of mental emotion.

The language of Imitation is the language of servitude. Art belongs essentially to the power of expression, and not to that of imitation or impression. By this we do not mean to say that the artist should withhold himself from the contemplation and study of Nature, which affords art the profusion of its *materials*!

The artist seeks and finds throughout nature the universal potentialities of the creative essence. Every true artist should have his own personal ideal, but he must never be unmindful, unless he would stultify himself, that above his ideal is enthroned THE IDEAL, more perfect and more absolute than his own, towards which he ever moves, as he adapts the creative effort of his own personality to its laws. The great artists are those who have a logical *intuition* of these laws. They do not despise theories when they are logical; they make use of them. But the inferior artist is the slave of theory.

A work ought naturally to be the fruit of many sensations, many impressions, many thoughts, but all these elements are to be co-ordinated, regulated by a superior force, by a law or theory derived from that law, otherwise the work will be artificial, confused, and perishable. Yes, all things serve as material for great work, provided that the Spirit is there which governs and co-ordinates all things. The artist is a kind of alchemist. Art is a

species of occult chemistry. Lead can be turned into gold, but the *laws* which bring about this wonderful transmutation must be understood. Just as the magician by the radiation of his will brings under his sway the wanderings and formless forces of *astral space*, so the artist, guided by his genius, brings into order the imperfect images of life by infusing into them the system of his thought.

The Beautiful, a Platonic mystic has said, *is not one special form, but the harmony of forms.*

Between the creative wisdom of nature and the form created by nature there is a vast difference.

The Beautiful, considered in its ideal sense, is not an *illusion*. Beauty is Truth made manifest in the Form by the Idea. When the artist draws beauty from ugliness, purity from impurity, perfection from imperfection, order from disorder, he reveals Truth, the Divine, to humanity. The Beautiful, the True, the Good agree one with the other.

The glory of Art is to know how to make the eyes of profane humanity *perceive* these three sublime harmonies. The ordinary man, we must repeat, by himself only observes what is immediately perceptible through his senses. He, therefore, sees Nature under her ugliest aspect. It is the mission of Art to make him perceive the Beauty that lies behind things. And this Beauty is not a fiction; it exists,



it is real. It is not an *illusion*, but an essential and invisible *reality* which escapes the superficial glance of the crowd.

Let the artist and poet, whom a regrettable misunderstanding keeps aloof from the *soul* of mankind, which happily is intuitive and devoid of prejudice, communicate to it the ideal, the divine sense, of this Beauty, in order that it should likewise turn from the Universal Ugliness, of which it is the unconscious and pardonable abettor! And for that communion to take place there is no need to specially produce a "*social art*," than it is necessary to create a "*select art*" (art d'élite). Art must not be the slave of doctrinal speculation, or descend to the level and inclinations of a particular class. Art must have a *universal* meaning. The artist is he who, through the thousand forms of universal life, seeks out the supreme expression of Beauty for those who, whether poor or wealthy, know how to perceive and understand it in his work.

In the heart of every individual slumbers an artist, a poet, which we must know how to awaken. A spring of beauty and wisdom is ever ready to rise up from the depths of his being. Man is never *absolutely* incomplete. If his dormant faculties often prevent him from opening the eyes of his soul to the artistic raptures of the world and art, it is the kindly duty of the artist, the chosen person in whose

soul beauty is ever alive, to open them and pass before them pure ideas under harmonious images.

The simple man is nearer to beauty than he thinks. But if light, sound, colour, form, and idea are not understood by him in their harmonious sense, and natural and ideal relation, the sentiment of *unity*, the life of all beauty, escapes him.

Now, it is by means of Art that the æsthetic perceptions are developed. And human beings are not made artistic by the conventional Academic school, which only sees in the work the object of an artificial arrangement of the figure, its subjects being *posturers*, nor by the Realist-Impressionist school, which considers that work should be devoted to the imitation of nature. One shows us body without soul, the other things without idea.

The *art of the idealist* creates things of beauty which are *possible*, and whose inner life radiates from their action, form, and colour.

The *idealist conception* alone, emanating from the artist free to create a world of beauty moulded to his ideal, thought, and emotion, can communicate to mankind, by making it capable of perceiving it, that divine power which binds together things, souls, and spirits of the visible and invisible world, and enables it to perceive the *creative Wisdom*, which is the Ideal.

Art is by no means a vain whim of man, due to the accident of selfish pride. Art is one of the great forces that God has implanted in the creature. It is our imperfections, our instincts, our want of light, which too often, alas, degrade Art to our own level, our own ugliness, errors, and darkness.

Without any wish to be identified with Tolstoi's creed of art, so poor and uncouth in too many ways, I am bound to admire and approve of this noble phrase of the venerable apostle of Russia: "*Art is not an enjoyment, a pleasure, an amusement: art is a mighty thing. It is a vital organ of humanity which conveys the conceptions of reason into the domain of sentiment.*"

## VII

### The Art of the Future

Struggle between Spiritualism and Materialism—Future of Art dependent on that of Science, Religion, and Philosophy—Art will cease to be “National”—Influence of Idealism on Modern Thought—Art consecrated by Metaphysics—Reconciliation between Science and Religion—The Mission of Art to cause what is Comprehensible to be Perceived—Influence of Art on Society—Art apparently doomed by Modern Positivism—The Course of Art parallel to that of Science—The Artist should show that his Work results from a High Ideal—The Art of the Future will be based on the Triple Formula of Idealism—Impressionism lacking in real Æsthetic Emotion—Need of a clearly defined view of Æsthetics—The Art of the Future will be that of Universal Love and Brotherhood—Art is intended to purify Mankind.

**W**HAT an enthralling problem, how conducive to thought and able to stimulate the artistic intellect, is the endeavour to learn what Art will be to-morrow, what its ruling influence will be, and from what unknown springs it will draw the magic life of future visions! Many critics, such as think, philosophers, and lovers of art, uneasy about the future, and not perceiving any regular solution, have been, and still are, haunted by the disquieting wish to know the destiny of Art, or at least to conceive a logical view of its process of evolution.

Owing to its spiritual essence Art is seen to be so closely joined to the psychic condition of mankind that it is necessary to begin with studying and understanding throughout its evolutionary growth the mysterious motive power of ideas, and to determine the degrees in which ideas are projected into the intellectual realms of our times. Now the age in which we

live, which will shortly upon the dial of the revolving centuries mark the hour of a universal redemption in the province of thought, is hampered by two mighty currents of hostile mode of thought, Materialism and Spiritualism, both of which impetuously roll their waves towards the future ocean of the Human Spirit, in which each assumes that it will be the positive element of truth.

Which of these forces will overcome the other in its triumphant struggle?

Before we can know what the Art of to-morrow will be, we must ascertain what Science, Religion, and Philosophy will be in the future. The revival of civilisations is in reality a problem the solution of which is to be found in the occult or supernatural depths of existence. The present troubled period which precedes the advent of the Spirit in this world, whose reign will transform the human soul by directing its vital and intellectual forces towards clearer perceptions, is characteristic.

Just as nations will sweep away their natural boundaries, and all moral and intellectual barriers, so art will break free from nationality. Art must not flourish merely as an ornamental adjunct to one centre. If certain schools show that they depend on natural surroundings and a science of nature restricted and peculiar to themselves, is there any reason to think that the artist cannot and ought not to see and feel

otherwise than through the eyes and senses of his fellow-countrymen as a body? The painters who lack *vision* must inevitably depend on *one* sky, *one* earth, *one* climate, *one* atmosphere, *one* type. They represent, indeed, what is called "national" art. And for the evolution of personal talent I know nothing worse than this narrow feeling of nationality. For the theory of environment (*théorie du milieu*) advocated by official art patronage has become a political principle, which requires the national stamp, as in matters of buying and selling. Its advocates and such as desire "nationalism" in art fear too much a loss of originality, as though real originality did not essentially dwell in the creative personality of the artist, in the ideal individual quality!

Great artists and all great men, for the most part, instead of being bound by the prejudices and limitations of the environment in which they may be placed, prove superior to it, separating themselves from it, and passing beyond it in the full display of their emancipated personality, give free scope to the aspirations of an ideal more in harmony with the dreams of all mankind.

In the act of creation, the man, the artist, the thinker, ought to vibrate in sympathy with and on behalf of humanity, and not according to the mode of thought of the place in which he happens to be.

What is termed “ *national genius* ” or “ *generic genius* ” (génie de l'espèce) is too often only the lamentable affection that a race exhibits towards its instincts. The underlying spirit of the race has sufficient power in itself, without needing to magnify drawbacks and build principles upon them. What is the relative worth of native environment compared with infinity of soul? Did Holland give Rembrandt his magic vision? Did Germany create Wagner's “Parsifal”? And if the sky, the soil, the climate, gave birth to the art of Pheidias, Michael Angelo and De Vinci, how is it that Greece and Italy, whose sky and soil, atmosphere and climate, have not changed, do not produce works of equal value? Art belongs rather to the realm of ideas than to physical divisions of the Earth.

Those who are accustomed to watch with spiritual eyes the events of the world see that a Spiritual Force of a providential kind now soars above the plane of human intellect, and that its occult beams pierce the troubled depths of men's hearts, penetrating them with a faint but salutary light.

Yes, we bear within us, in the dark depths of our conscience, the supernatural germs of a new humanity which will have grasped the mystery of life or its immediate relations to the Other World.

For the truths of idealism, there is no reason to disguise it, have begun to conquer the world

of modern thought with a methodical and positive sureness, which nothing can resist, since it is the bright sign of the true evolution through the Spirit, the mediating power which must readjust the balance between the *past*, *present*, and *future*.

Art, which has hitherto been hampered by the contrary methods in which materialism gives it encouragement, kept in the lower sphere of a degraded spiritual state and within national boundaries, Art will assume proportions of which few have little suspicion !

Art has received the consecration of Metaphysics. It already bears within it the new life : the renaissance of the Ideal. This will be its fruit.

It is necessary to state precisely the particular redeeming character of the present movement of idealism in art and of Idealism generally. It is necessary to clearly and concisely explain the civilising mission of Art, the destiny of light which guides the artist and summarises, by the very nature of its glow, the ideal world which humanity bears in its heart. It is likewise necessary to remark on the moral effect which a work of art produces upon people, upon the crowd, the moral influence of Art, more conducive of health and peace than that of Politics.

Reason and Understanding will reign in every sphere. Passions and sentiments will be *synthetically* balanced. Rationalism, shorn of its



strength, will be definitely overthrown by the triumph of Science, conscious of mysteries revealed, but as yet unintelligible and unfamiliar.

Science and Religion ought to be reconciled, to be the complements of one another and remain indissoluble. This reconciliation must necessarily take place. It will be the supreme action of the rule of the Spirit. The absurd and harmful antagonism between Science and Religion has already begun to grow weaker.

Man does not know anything of himself. The powers or forces which constitute his individuality have not been created by him ; but he can, by the purifying influence of his will or subservience to his passions, either strengthen or destroy these forces.

The man of genius, he who is essentially creative, is inspired. A higher power, an occult force, act in and through him.

Now the same law takes effect in the universal as in the individual. We have tried to indicate this law in order that the sceptical reader may, by means of his logical intuition, understand the possibility of mystery or the action of the universal Spirit in mankind in the present and in the future.

We said just now that, before knowing what the Art of to-morrow will be, we must find out what Science and Philosophy will be, because Art is the element which, most immediately and in a way that has most social influence, reflects their essential character. The Mission

of Art is to cause what is comprehensible to be perceived. In that lies the whole of æsthetics. Art is not a fantasy of the human imagination, nor the caprice of a few idlers ; it is an extraordinary effort of the divine faculties of man. Art is a sublime necessity which is brought about and developed in accordance with the progress of civilisation. It is neither above or below other manifestations of the spirit : it results from them and completes them.

Through the infinite veil, behind which the unseen work of the Great Unknown is carried on, Beauty sheds its light, quivering with the divine radiance, the wondrous effect of the mystic harmony of essence and substance, of which works of art are the objective suggestions, in proportion to the mental capacity of the artist, inspired to receive them. It is sufficient to reflect for a moment upon the strange phenomenon of the artistic *vocation* to become assured that Art has a definite reason for its being, and that it consequently plays an important part in idealising society.

Certain short-sighted thinkers, ever advancing hypotheses, and whose pessimism is only the sad result of their ignorance of everything which concerns the secrets of life, have assumed the doom of Art to be at hand, bewildered as they are in the midst of the present confusion of so many schools of such opposite teaching. To their purblind gaze, this confusion, evident

but momentary, is a sure sign that the positivist spirit of the age cannot be reconciled to the æsthetic imagination ! They have never dreamt of asking themselves if the age—the coming age—would really be *positivist* or *spiritualist*, and if the Science of the future would be the same as that of to-day !

That is where, there alone, and nowhere else, the very roots of the problem are to be found, and whence conclusions may be drawn. Art—we use the word in its widest sense—pursues a parallel and like direction to that of Science. Often, indeed, they clasp hands.

Art has been sufficiently degraded by Theory, being said to be idle, and æsthetics to be merely instinctive and fortuitous ! The petty theorists about “*temperament*” praise the art of idle daubers who load their palettes with the matter derived from their impure instincts and the disorder due to their natural imperfections. Critics and artists have gone arm in arm by the path strewn with the debaucheries of their “*temperament*,” confident that they were marching along the highway of Art !

Although we do not wish to insist that each painter and sculptor, before setting about a masterpiece, should write his little treatise on æsthetics, it is at least necessary that he should show that his work is the result neither of mere calculation nor of chance, but the ideal, emotional, conscious outpouring of his soul,

his thought, raised to the level of a subject, inspired by some noble thought. Betwixt the artist's life and death his Work alone remains below. And this work, to be worthy of its name, must not be the outcome of his instinct and fancy, but the supreme effort of his soul, through his will and love, towards Beauty. It is not necessary that the artist's instinct or method should be observable in his work, but his whole *consciousness* alone; that is to say, his aspiration concentrated on an ideal of perfection. Is it not more noble for the artist to exhibit in his work, not merely his selfish and vain "*personality*," but his honest love for the Beautiful? For through this Love alone the divine ray of genius is made manifest.

Yes, the artist, if he would gaze into the divine brightness of Absolute Beauty, must *crystallize* the immortal principle of his being. At once intuitive and sensitive, through the mysterious faculties which are the very condition of his creative life, he can then attain perfection, for which otherwise there exists but a vague and painful longing, and from which the external life, that depending on the senses alone, is far away.

But the time has come when the Fine Arts, regenerated through Synthesis and penetrating into the boundless regions of the Other World, will at last become "the incorporation of the Idea, the *Word*, in Forms of Nature."

The triple formula—*Beauty of Idea, Beauty of Form, and Beauty of Execution*—which forms the fundamental principle of idealist art, and over which vague criticism will never prevail, will not have been uttered in vain. It will be the basis of the Art of the future.

Idealism, in art, in philosophy, and even in politics, is the mighty and everlasting movement towards the Better. We venture to prophesy that the artistic creed of the future, far from deteriorating, carefully preserved from all that is romantic or academic, from naturalism and impressionism, will no longer be the product of the spontaneous instinct of superficial temperaments. It will become the harmonious concentration of the individual artistic faculties and creative powers towards a complete art, a harmony of form and intellect, worthy of human beings that have undergone a moral and spiritual evolution.

A higher conception of Beauty and Life ought to form in the artist's soul side by side with a healthier and clearer manifestation of Emotion and Idea.

Impressionism, which is only a neurotic realism or naturalism, has not been able to inspire art with the real æsthetic emotion. Fact, instinct, sentiment, the spontaneous, the fleeting, the immediate, the instantaneous, the all-but, the relative, those are the only themes of art which it has introduced into its

process. It is the school of Objectivity and Illusion. Separating the Ideal from Nature, and Thought from Life, this school has become barren. A false conception of Nature, a false conception of Life, a false conception of Art—such is the sum of the realist, naturalist, and impressionist views of art.

Believing mental emotion, ideal emotion, to be of no use, the majority of modern painters instead of getting into communion with Nature, have distorted it (*dénaturée*).

Much talent has been frittered away and lost for want of a clearly defined view of æsthetics and a mental inspiration. Many, finding themselves possessed of real technical powers, have only been able to utilise them in the representation of trivial and inferior things. The fact has been too often ignored that just as the universal and cosmic laws are the primordial conditions of the whole natural, moral, and psychic evolution of mankind, so in art the law of the Beautiful is the condition of all perfection, of all idealism. Artists at present, diverted from their natural powers, unconscious of their natural strength, contemptuous or afraid of pure idealism, do not know how to adjust *nervous sensitivity*, the psychological condition of the modern race, to a lofty artistic expression.

Let us henceforward strive to facilitate the natural evolution of Art by proclaiming the power of the Ideal.

Without wishing to encroach on the province of sociology, we may affirm, with our gaze fixed on the progress towards the Best (*le Meilleur-Devenir*), that the society of the future, whose clear shadow can already be seen on the broad luminous horizon of the new age, will possess an art where universal Love and human Brotherhood, the relations of Nature to the Absolute, of the Invisible to the Visible, of Matter to Spirit, will be the subjects that will occupy the new-born ingenuity of the Artist.

Artistic creation will proceed wholly upon a higher level, whence everything distorted or debased will be logically banished, since the form will then be adequate to the thought.

The immediate Mission of Art is to purify man. Deprive art of this mission, and there remains to it only a barren imagery, able only to interest the puerile soul of some idle virtuoso or the commercial instinct of dealers, who find in the wares of art something which may satisfy their sordid lust for gold.

## VIII

### The Relations of Church and State to Art

(i)

No *utility* in Uninspired Art—"Christian Art" the product of Religious Materialism—Modern Religion prohibits Initiation into Sacred Things—Transmission of the Universal Wisdom—Its ability to achieve the Unity of Religions—The Fundamental Spirit of Christianity—Wisdom of East and West derived from a Common Source—Key to the Secret Doctrine withheld by, and Beauty discountenanced by, the Church—Indissolubility of Art and Religion—"Christian Art" debased as long as its Source of Inspiration is corrupt.

"ART, like Science, can enlighten the human consciousness." It must never be made a pretext for diversion or an easy method of securing pleasure, and when it appeals to the senses, that is to say, when it limits sensation to the empty objects of grosser life, without raising the spirit to the vision of the higher life, when, in short, art does not remind the human soul of the inner and divine aspirations of Love, Charity, and Light, then it is better to stamp it out, since it is then the cause of a great and deplorable loss of energy both to the individual and the community. Art which has no thought, which does not purify, and which, in a word, does not raise the soul above the vain shows of earth is an art which has no *utility*.

It may satisfy the limited understanding of the inferior, it may satisfy the sordid personal vanity of artists without ideal, whose name



is legion, but such an art will never lead towards the true goal of Art.

It dwells outside the artistic consciousness ; and among the different kinds of perverted or decayed art there is one we must remark upon. It concerns that religious materialism which even now we still venture to call " Christian Art."

We know that the part played by the contemporary Church has been pitiable, not to say culpable. Modern Religion, whose orthodox and realistic mysticism has caused a material conception of the Gospel Mystery, is seen to be contradictory to the pure Christian ideal, since it has cast out of its bosom esoteric initiation into sacred things—its very basis. It is the Initiation of the *Universal Wisdom*, which is, nevertheless, ever alive and never can be destroyed, for though rejected by the creeds of fanaticism and hide-bound orthodoxy, in order to assure the maintenance of the prerogatives of the Church, it finds a noble asylum in the enlightened communion of rare spirits, whose Christianity is that of Christ, the divine initiator of immortal theosophies. This it is which is destined to bring about profound changes in the social and religious order of the world. This, too, is the same *mystic* and *scientific* doctrine, in which Diotimé\* (that

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\* Diotimé, a Greek priestess of Mantinea, is mentioned by Plato in the " Banquet." She is said to have influenced Socrates in his theories with regard to Love and Beauty.

extraordinary woman of the ancient world, in the history of mystic philosophy coming earlier than the pure victim of S. Cyril, the beautiful Hypatia), secretly initiated Socrates, a doctrine which is found, as though transmitted by initiation, in the poet of the Divine Comedy, Dante, seventeen centuries after the great Egyptian initiates revealed it to the philosophers of Greece.

In the history of philosophic teaching, the Universal Wisdom is that which shines with the purest radiance. Successive generations of eastern and western initiators have transmitted it through alternating periods of light and darkness to modern times, and it is to-day to be found in two powerful bodies of doctrine, "*Martinism*" and the *Theosophical Society*, the first representing the western tradition, the second coming from India, through the august and immemorial initiation of Brahminism, but both perfectly united in their teaching.

Whatever the orthodox may think, it is through this that the great principle of the *Unity* of Religion will be established in the world, because it is precisely in the realisation of that principle that the divine elements of the universal brotherhood are found, which holds humanity as an actual *Living Being*; that is, that individuals, peoples, and races, are members of one body: Humanity. And this esoteric Wisdom is nothing else than

philosophic Gnosticism, revealed according to the need of the age for the spirits of truth and love, which, in the heart of the unseen, watch over the destiny of the human race. Our gratitude is also due to the intelligence of light incarnated on earth, and whose mission is to shed their light upon human science, religion, literature, and art, each time they slip back and fall into materialism.

Rama, Krishna, Moses, Hermes, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, Manu, and our Master Jesus Christ, the early fathers of the Church, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Irenaeus, St. John and the Apostles, were the most brilliant and powerful teachers of the Science of the divine mysteries. The pure mystic Christology of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Hindoos, Persians, and Greeks, who were cognizant before the coming of Christ of the Symbol of the Cross, proves, indeed, that this Universal Wisdom or *Ancient Wisdom*, as it is usually called, is a revealed science, whose unity is clearly to be seen beneath the apparent divergences, due to adaptations to place and period, of great religions based on an esoteric teaching.

We must not then sever, as obscure and subtle theologians have done, the Christian teaching from this Science of the Soul, the science of sciences, the true Science of the Ideal, nor consider it from a sectarian point of view in the light of a heresy, at the risk

of displacing the axis of civilisation or causing the spiritual evolution of beings to go astray.

*Gnosticism* or *Universal Wisdom* is really, indeed, the pure and fundamental spirit of Christianity. All Christian theories, Catholic or Protestant, have sprung from it, corrupted or partly mutilated.

St. Pantaenus,\* Athenagoras, Origen, knowing it to have come from the temples of Thebes, Memphis, and Saïs, inculcated its lofty teaching. The works of Abbot Trithemius,† Saint Denys the Areopagite, St. Thomas Aquinas, the admirable Ruysbroeck,‡ St. Angela of Foligno, and St. Francis of Assisi, are impregnated with it. St. Augustine, one of the classic Christian writers, has said: "*What is now termed the Christian religion existed in ancient times, nor has it ceased to exist from the beginning*

\* Pantaenus was head of the catechetical school at Alexandria (180–202 A.D.), and the teacher of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. He is said to have originally been a Stoic, and was sent as a missionary to "India" or Yemen. His commentaries on various books of Scripture are lost.

† John Trithemius, Abbot of Spanheim, taught chemistry to Paracelsus. He is the author of tracts on the "elixir vitæ," the "*Poligraphia*," the first important work on cryptography (1500), and the "*Chronicon*" of Spanheim (1506).

‡ John Ruysbroeck (1293–1381), the father of mysticism in the Netherlands. His doctrines were rather practical than speculative. He is chiefly occupied with the means whereby the "*unio mystica*" is to be attained, whereas Eckhardt, who greatly influenced him, dwells on the union as an ever-present fact. He lived in seclusion with his little community at Vauvert, and died as first prior of the Convent at Grœnendael. He has been confused with William of Rubruk, a Franciscan Friar, who wrote a narrative of Asiatic travel in the thirteenth century.

*of the human race to the days when Christ came upon earth."* \*

In short, primitive mysticism, that is to say, such as existed before modern orthodox theology, is this universal philosophy, which contains the Christian truths, and which is furthermore the primordial spiritual substance of the cults of East and West.

Between the "*Imitation of Jesus Christ*" and the "*Bhagavad-Gitá*" there only exist differences of terminology. The form and imagery change; the essentials are the same. It is the same Word of spiritual life. The Christian and Hindoo adepts, through their profound enlightenment, found in it the one source. The Brahmin of India and the Christian of Europe, in spite of time and space, vibrate as one soul with the harmony of the universal Truth. By what right does the pride of the Catholic Church wish to shatter the spiritual harmony of two worlds? By whose authority? In the name of whom? In the name of what?

In the name of Christ? Christ is not called the Pope. Christ is called Love and Light. The Spirit of God, the universal Word, sheds its light on all humanity. In this lies the disagreement between the *secret doctrine* and

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\* St. Augustine wrote a treatise on the Beautiful—now lost—in which he appears to have reproduced Platonic ideas under a Christian guise. He taught that Unity is the form of all Beauty ("omnis porro pulchritudinis forma unitas est"). Infinite goodness, truth, and beauty are the attributes of the Deity, and communicated by Him to all things.

Catholic dogma, for Buddha is the *Christ* of the East as Christ is the *Buddha* of the West.

The present Church, veiling it in obscurity, refuses to admit this truth, which, when the day comes for purity to be preferred to power, it must end by embracing. It has driven again into the darkness the light of divine knowledge. The light will consume it in its unquenchable flame.

This light, vibrating with Love and knowledge, is already growing larger, not in order to destroy dogmas, but to vivify them, to illuminate them, to render them more translucent, and, out of the black petrified mass which they have become, to make a glorious diamond of dazzling psychic light, able to bring about a new rebirth of the human race.

Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, who is but a new revelation of the divine Wisdom, of the Science of Mysteries, said of the disputants of the Pharisaical priesthood: "*Woe unto ye who have grasped the key of knowledge and, not having penetrated into its sanctuary yourselves, have yet closed it unto others.*"\*

The narrowness and poverty of ignorant devotion, the inability to understand the meaning of the ritual of the Roman Church, the continual Popish transformations in the performance of the Mass, falsifyings, errors of all

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\*S. Luke xi. 52.

kinds, have made religion, both in practice and understanding, not the realisation of the great ideal of universality through Love and Science, but the political organisation of a materialised faith.

In the darkness of Roman orthodoxy divine Christianity has long gasped for breath, and the policy of the Papacy has been to take away the *keys* in order to keep the much needed truth closely locked up.

Now this same religion, which has banished the sacred knowledge, has ended by reprobating Beauty.

Since its munificent and productive patronage of art during the Renaissance, the Church has forsworn any interest in it. Since then religious art has day by day deteriorated. The imagery of contemporary Christianity is as trivial as it is possible to conceive. It is a perfect expression of nothingness in art. The artists of "Christian art" have debased religious inspiration with the grossest and most puerile elements of bigotry. It is the reign of absolute commonplace insipidity.

The spirit of the Church no longer comprehends the Ideal, and Christian art has become one of its shames. It borders on sacrilege. Its degradation is complete.

The religious spirit is now incapable of conceiving Beauty. It lies in the bondage of obsolete conventions and realism of an inferior kind.

The scandalised hypocrisy which the Church cast upon the *nude* is the very origin of its artistic decay. It was bound to come to this impoverished state. The veiling of spiritual truth was bound to lead to the veiling of the most sacred of forms: the human form! The cramping of the psychic faculties naturally brought about the annihilation of religious *inspiration*. Distortion of religion gave birth to ugliness in art. Religions have the art they deserve.

Art and Religion are indissoluble. The Princes of the modern Church should never forget it. Instead of allowing Christian temples to be profaned by the banal monstrosities and hideous eye-sores of the School of St. Luc, that manufactory of sacrilege, the high dignitaries would be better fulfilling their spiritual duty by entrusting the Sacred Images to the genius of inspired artists.

It can be seen that the conception of "religious" or "Christian" art cannot be revived from its ashes, if its source of inspiration is corrupted by the dogmatic and conventional conceptions of the contemporary Church. Religious art will be replaced in the future by the *universal idealist Art*, the sign of a new spirituality.



## The Relations of Church and State to Art

(ii)

State neglect of Art—Modern Rulers lacking in the “æsthetic sense”—Art Patronage in the Nineteenth Century—Changed character of Royalty—The Reign of Mediocrity—Degradation of the Artist—Renaissance Passion for Art—Monarchs and Republics culpable alike—Art neither an Aristocracy nor Democracy.

**B**UT it is not the princes of the Church alone who deliver art over to inferiority and ugliness. Modern Kings likewise in this respect have proved themselves unworthy. If the princes of Religion have deformed the æsthetics of religion, the princes of the State, at the same time, have forsaken the worship of the Beautiful. Seeing no longer that the artist, like the thinker and man of science, is the glory of a nation, they have in a petty and commercial spirit left Art to take care of itself.

Modern kings are not true kings. The disciples of Prudhomme, their dynastic principles seeming to aim at the perpetuation of a reign of intellectual mediocrity, they never raise the eye of the spirit beyond decorous financial speculation, or trivial diplomatic jugglery. When a prince lowers the nobility of his soul to the stagnant level of commercialism, he falls from his giddy height and no longer deserves the prestige due to his race. The genealogical ties of the ruling houses has long lost its sap, and on its dry branches grows only withered fruit. Oligarchs are irremediably tainted with

the first symptoms of decay ; the venerable mottoes on their escutcheons are like the mocking voices of a dead past, when they claimed the right to rule the world. Alas, the bright blue blood of Royalty that once mantled their brow with such pride, fit for the purest jewels of heroic idealism, is terribly discoloured, leaving wrinkles of age upon their sunken temples. For, if the *physical* is the image of the *moral*, these two principles of human vitality are found among our illustrious degenerates in a degree almost approaching zero. It is enough to look for a little upon their effigies, to see very clearly the darkness that enveloped their brainless skulls and soulless bodies. With them thought is no longer what it should be, that is to say, the undying passion for knowledge or meditation ; the soul is no longer that inexhaustible well-head of splendid enthusiasm. Absorbed selfishly in its own powers, participating no longer in the mystic poetry of universal life, the intellect, instead of becoming refined, is dulled, loses that sixth sense, the æsthetic sense, and becomes incapable of feeling that *ideal thrill*, of which the æsthetic, the great lovers of art, are so proud. And then inevitably follows the destruction of that intellectual Paradise where the bright flowers of a pure taste flourish.

The individual races which are debased, kept in subjection, thrown back on themselves





PROMETHEE (J. DELVILLE).

*See face page 97.*

like sickly plants, that can no longer erect themselves in the light which has caused them to spring from the soil, become insensible to high human inspirations, particularly such as arise directly through special impulses, as Art does.

When the French Revolution traced with bloody fingers the prophetic symbol of the emancipation of the people, and in the terrors of its lightning the Mene-Tekel-Phares of the aristocracy blazed out, the ferocious activity of its thousand guillotines seems to have exhausted for ever the blood of the fallen theocracy. All the glory, character, and wit that past generations had bequeathed to them seems to have perished in the revolutionary storm of '93. Indeed from that time no monarch has known how to rise to anything extraordinary either in act or thought. Offspring of Italy, the land of masterpieces, Napoleon preserved in his dark conqueror's soul one of those great lights which enabled him to hold the art work of his time in respect ; a bright constellation of artists arose from the Napoleonic era. But after that, for anything like royal encouragement in matters of art, there was nothing, until France was plunged in the decadence of that curious empire, when Bonaparte, obsessed by the majestic phantom of the old imperial eagle, did not dare to neglect artists altogether, and bestowed on them the

foolish patronage of a sensualist, better able to appreciate obscenity than a real work of art. In fact, after vainly going through the commonplace sovereigns of the nineteenth century, it seems that the only prince who appreciated his artistic mission was Ludwig II. of Bavaria, "*the only true King of that age in which Kings were of such little account,*" as Verlaine justly remarked. Without the lavish aid of that warm-hearted enthusiast, that quick imagination, Wagner, poor, abused, unknown, misunderstood, would never have realised the cycle of his mighty conceptions. Without Ludwig II. the temple of Bayreuth would not have come into being, and the genius of Wagner would never have reached its fulfilment, crushed by the enmity of his contemporaries which is the great disgrace of that time! And that is all. After the glorious "madness" of the Bavarian prince, no royal personage has given new lustre to the gold and diamonds upon his inspired brow. Constitutional kings no longer know how to be heroes. Complete stupefaction seems to have absolutely destroyed in them all sentiments of dignity—or glory. They have not even the excuse of gilded misery, and keep their magnificence for the hideous official ceremonial in which they are pleased to exhibit their growing unpopularity. In this, indeed, they are true to their part of government puppets, for the modern king does not make

laws : he submits, he proposes ; he no longer acts. His duties are automatic, humiliating, abstract, ineffective : it is sovereignty in its most absurd form ! The purple is changed to a frock-coat, the sceptre to a walking-stick, and the crown to a top-hat. In such royal guise M. Prudhomme easily takes flesh, and can at his ease use his civil list profitably in commercial enterprises, without at all needing to interest himself in spiritual matters. It would be a marvel if it were otherwise : it belongs to the category of moral destiny. A king whose government is in the hands of lawyers, manufacturers and the monied classes, whose interests are mainly centred in common political intrigue, must, if he wishes to dwell in peace, become mediocrity to some extent. A *constitutional* king—huge irony of modern greatness—is an ill-rewarded slave seated upon a gilded chair. The chief puppet of some ministers who are recruited by election from the lower depths of the ambitious bourgeoisie, bound to deny himself the slightest initiative, he acts according to the whim of those who pull the wires. His whole interest in art is represented by a Ministry of Fine Arts, whose business it is to acquire at a huge price the wildest freaks of worthless art, and leave true artists with their works and projects to perish of hunger. Indeed it is an understood thing that the artist who cannot leave his high probity and outspoken independence

behind in his studio, to knock like a beggar at the side door of the government office, will never receive any official recognition—unless maybe at the point of death, or, long after that has taken place, on his tombstone.

The part of Maecenas played by modern potentates is lamentable and worthless, and when we see in the terrible jumble of the triennial exhibitions the mark put upon their acquisitions, it is hard to know whether to laugh or weep.

These Boeotians of high rank, the costly ornaments of inglorious kingdom or empire, are—it can be easily proved—beggars who cling to the trappings of state like Harpagon to his gold, and seriously profess an incurable scepticism for everything that bears any resemblance to art. This deplorable poverty of intellect, and degenerate spirit, is the effect of minds contaminated by speculations on the money market. Rothschild has come to dominate their thought, their palaces, and their whole being. They are the strange votaries of the Golden Calf, around which whirls in a demoniac frenzy, in our times of universal pauperism, the Saturnalia of capitalism. Ah! the princes of the Renaissance—we bow low to them—took part in commerce too, and sometimes even descended to make raids on the Bank, but the money, in the hands of these cultured enthusiasts, was made the *means* of



realising their artistic aims. They utilised their diplomacy and trade in aid of their eager passion for the Beautiful, and commerce and manufacture never rendered their great souls incapable of noble deed or thought. A prince's revenue was the true public treasury, from which all those who pursued science or art drew what they needed for their labours.

The Borghese, Urbans, and Medici, Popes and Emperors, Kings, Dukes, and Nobles, were the great admirers of human genius, whose palaces were turned into Temples in which artists officiated. Before the sovereignty of Art, they knew how to put off the sovereignty of rank; this pure-blooded aristocracy, with whom "*action*" was "*the sister of dreaming*," placed the aristocracy of thought above their own.

The princes of those days, full of that magnificent pride from which spring noble passions and great races, dwelt amid the luxury of art, liberal, easy of access, with imperial splendour, like eagles intoxicated with the light, and if they could rise from their splendid sepulchres would not admit the *bourgeois* monarchs of the present day even among their condottieri or train of menials. Can there be found among the awful tribunal of those who sway the sceptre in these latter days one man who, like Julius II., is capable of uttering such a cry as this: "*I would drain my blood and cut short my years*

*to give them to Michael Angelo!*” It was not mere admiration, it was divine love. Genius, in these days of splendid image-worshippers, fired the spirit, heart, and soul, as to-day Money pollutes, and renders them base and servile. On all sides the sacred flame was fanned whence sprung immortal works, and the great ones of the earth suffered the impetuous breath of human thought to sweep intoxicatingly through their palaces. A thrill of æsthetic ecstasy animated monarchs and wondering peoples. It was the Reign of the Beautiful. Now it is the Reign of Mediocrity.

In the palaces of the world the kings shine, and intrigue in secret, with that dangerously growing concourse of social murmurings, their empty bulk alone acting as a threat. And how sad it is, amid this evolutionary progress, these increasing social complications, this growing passion for art, this intellectual impulse, which is slowly and painfully, but very surely, making headway among the people, these new forces which are about to rule the world, to see in complete contrast the supineness of kings, their littleness, their narrow outlook, the spell of their prestige, and their weak rule ending in moral wretchedness, complete and final! He will not here play the demagogue desiring the end of one régime in order that an inept “social art” may prevail. Proudhon and his great paradox have long been overwhelmed

by the later judgments of those who have a purer comprehension of art; that is to say, those who straitly affirm that art is neither an aristocracy nor democracy, but that it is *Art*, that mighty emotion for the Beautiful under its manifold variety of form, *attainable by all those who know how to love it*. And not more than a barren Monarchy could we excuse a Republic that allowed men like D'Aurévilly \* and Villiers-de-l'Isle Adam † to die in destitution, while its mighty commerce showered wealth on political quackery and buffoonery.

But are Art and State ever to remain at opposite poles, the absolute antithesis of one another, and will future assemblies and law-makers, like those of to-day, and like our modern Kings, be invertebrate and empty-headed bourgeois, whose pitiable shades will never move across the stage of history, without exciting the derision of peoples and artists?

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\* Barbey d'Aurévilly was a novelist of great power and originality, all his work being marked by genius of a rare kind. He wrote "Les Diaboliques," "Les Prophetes," "Le Chevalier Des Touches." He died in poverty about 1895. See an article on him by Edmund Gosse in "The Pageant" (1897).

† Count Villiers de L'Isle Adam (1838-1889), French poet and dramatist. Inaugurator of the Symbolist movement. "La Revolte" appeared in 1870; "Contes Cruels," a volume of short stories, in 1880; and his last play, "Axël," was published after his death in 1890. A romantic idealist, he had considerable influence on younger French writers.

## A Revival of Sacred Art—The Beuron School

THE unexpected spectacle, amid the decadence of modern Christian Art, of a religious artistic revival comes as a surprise and pleasure to all those who deplore the way in which Catholic sanctuaries are profaned by imagery of the most puerile kind. For a long time, we know, religious art had become commonplace and absolutely lacking in artistic feeling. And it must be confessed that the contemptuous epithet *bondieuseries* which has been commonly applied to the tasteless and inappropriate decoration of modern churches was well deserved. The unanimous outcry of all those that have preserved the sense of beauty in face of the treason against art committed by such as profane the profession which has been so blindly entrusted with the decoration of our sacred buildings did not seem able, in spite of its vehemence, to bring to life again within the Church anything of the beauty of former days. The artistic instinct of religion seemed indeed to have utterly perished, and so flagrant was its poverty of conception that it might have been thought that religious feeling would never again recover its proper expression.

In this degeneration of sacred art can there not be perceived, as we do not hesitate to affirm,

a proof of the weakening of the mystic sentiment, an impoverishment of spiritual life. The counterblow given to it by the evolution of modern ideas, the growth of naturalism, the manifold theories of the emancipation of the individual in art, the incoherence and uncertainty which prevail in contemporary thought, have they not all contributed to relegate to the shades of a past which has become embarrassing and of no further use the glories and immortal example given to generations by the Primitives? Mystic art, it might well be thought, had lost connection with great tradition, and the ugliness of the present day, like that of a barbarous age, triumphantly displayed its vandalism in the Catholic shrines. There was reason then to regret, in the name of outraged Beauty, the pure and solemn splendour of an artistic past inspired by an almighty faith. Certainly we must take into account the bad taste and iconoclastic tendencies of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries when seeking the causes which brought about the decadence of sacred Art; but, however that may be, there is reason to deplore the influence, direct or indirect, of naturalistic theories. Yet if there is an art which should not be under the influence of wholly imitative principles it is surely sacred art, whose aim is not to reproduce perceptible objects, but rather to inspire

the soul with piety and devotion. Sacred art dwells in a region of its own, beyond the contingencies of the moment, in the mystery and perfection of its symbols, in moral grandeur, and the exaltation of the mystic drama. And this region is so essentially sacred, that a French writer whose name is a synonym for scepticism, M. Anatole France, speaks of it in the preface to his "*Noces corinthiennes*" in these terms: "I deal in this drama with serious and delicate matters—of matters of religion. I have redreamt the dream of the faith of ages; I have given myself up to the illusion of living beliefs. It would have been too wanting in the sense of harmony to treat what is pious with impunity. I have a sincere respect for sacred things. . . ."

No one will deny that the harmonious region of mystic apotheoses ought to have a solemn, hieratic, and ideal art, an art filled with peace and holiness in which form and colour are subordinated to the profound requirements of the liturgy, to the plastic exigencies of dogma.

Now, instead of compositions adequate to the intellectual loftiness of their theme we see the devotional Christianity of the Church compromised by deliberate outrages on Beauty. If the standard of faith is to be judged by the degree of artistic inspiration shown by the Church to-day, mysticism, it must be confessed, has fallen into decay. In setting this result

down to external influences alone, those appear much to be blamed who have submitted to it in so passive and prejudicial a way. Religion, speaking in an æsthetic sense, must not allow itself to be controlled by the ever-changing play of schools and theories.

From a strictly religious and liturgical point of view, there is no artistic evolution possible in the fundamental and essential principles of Christian art, which are *order* and *splendour*. The character of liturgical art has been determined by the Primitives. It was only necessary to continue them by traditional principles. The type of mystic beauty having been formulated by that tradition, I mean the æsthetic and technical principles of religious decorative art, the Church had only to perpetuate them on the great lines laid down by them, since nothing prevented their being adapted to the present day.

It is because the Primitives have been deserted, the purity and splendour of their example despised, the mysterious power that links together Art and Religion misunderstood, that the source of inspiration has become defiled. Cimabue, Giotto, Orcagna, Fra Angelico are the eponyms of Christian Art. They are the immaculate source of Christian æsthetic inspiration, because they reflect, in true proportion, the pure intermingling of the tradition of Græco-Latin art, inherent in the very origin of the

religion of the west—Christianity. Outside that tradition Christian Art cannot but lose its beauty, its grandeur, and its mission, and sink fatally into the most deplorable exhibition of perverted taste.

Sacred Art has no point of contact with the formless and fanciful productions of the profane schools. It is wholly concerned with expressing to the senses what, from a mystic point of view, appears to be absolute and eternal, the bases of the whole spirit of synthesis, the foundations of all æsthetic unity. It demands nothing from the individual because it proceeds from a collective and universal condition of the soul springing from the emotional breath of the sentimental life. Just as Esoterics possesses a visionary Metaphysics whose theories are based on the direct vision of invisible verities, so Religion has its æsthetic creed consisting of principles created by the superior psychic nature of religious experiences. Mystic beauty is necessarily superior to natural beauty because it expresses at the same time the perfection of moral beauty. That is why liturgic splendour is never found in a purely realistic composition. It is a divine and not a human art. Unity is its end. Hierarchy and hieratism are the only possible means of expression because it should express, not merely the manifestations of individual life, but above all the magnificence of the Christian Virtue equally with the



adoration of its followers. Sanctity, the highest degree of inward evolution, the pinnacle of moral beauty, needs a plastic representation arising from a clear and simple harmony, which abhors "*movement which displaces line.*" Order, in what is geometrically ideal and visibly harmonious, constitutes the indispensable decorative element in works of sacred art.

Ruskin said very rightly in "*The Seven Lamps of Architecture*": "Symmetry is not an abstract quality." Indeed symmetry is a natural law whose manifestation is to be found in all forms—visible or invisible—in the universe. The beauty of perceptible forms results from that symmetry. It is the signature of the divine order in nature. Now, since the object of religion is the search for order and the divine, is it surprising that sacred art, in its monumental and decorative expression, should endeavour to draw nearer to the plastic essence of nature by the geometric laws of Beauty?

This, judging by the works they have already achieved, has been perfectly understood by the monastic artists of the *Beuron School*,\* and it is no exaggeration to say that they have restored to the great art of religious decoration

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\* The community of Beuron was founded at Beuron in Germany, by the Arch-Abbé Naure Wolter (died in 1890). The Beuron School was created by the R. P. Desiré Lenz with the object of reviving sacred art by the idealist view of æsthetics. The School has already produced quite remarkable works, notably: The Chapel of St. Maur, near Sigmaringen; the decoration of the Church of the Holy Vigrin, at Stuttgart, in the Abbey of Emmaüs, near Prague; and in the Convent of St. Benoît, on Monte Cassino, near Naples.

its proper form and rediscovered the source of which the Church seemed to have lost all trace. The reproduction of their frescoes and bas-reliefs bears remarkable testimony to the high sense of decorative treatment which guides them equally with the pure comprehension of form which inspires them in their superb impulse of revival. Their aim can be perceived in their works, which is to realise the great principle of religious art by uniting the love of rhythm which characterises Greek æsthetics with the sentimental harmonies of the Christian drama. Pheidias and Fra Angelico should be the chief inspiration of their idealism. Owing to the universality of its principles Idealism is ever to be met with, because Beauty partakes of Unity. Whether Pagan or Christian, great art is always religious. Idealism necessarily produces beauty, because it is the very expression of great art.

In proof of this I mention the Virgin (Vierge hiératique) which adorns the portal of that wonderful chapel of St. Maur, reared by the Beuron School on the rocks of the Danube valley, and which has been well compared—a wholly relative comparison, be it understood, but grounded rightly on the perfect harmony of its architectural proportions and decorative treatment—to a little Christian Parthenon. All the austere artistic effort of the Beuron School seems to be summarised in this wonderful and mysterious image, beautiful

with the irresistible beauty of a perfect thing. It is only a knowledge of the geometry of æsthetics, the knowledge of exact proportion, measurement, and number, of which Plato speaks, which could have realised such perfection in the agreement of the whole and its parts. The example which the monk artists of Beuron give there to contemporary art is great and significant.

From the simple linear ornament to the composition of the fresco, everything in this noble work is eloquent of harmony and beauty. It is the pure splendour of simplicity, the condition of perfect equilibrium between matter and spirit which the artist has reached, due to his respect for a wise tradition and a lofty emotion. That tradition, we repeat, is the only one suited to the decoration of sacred buildings, and, if it does not wish to degenerate still further, modern sacred art must become impregnated with it. By following it, the Benedictine artists who know how to apply it with proper taste and intelligence will return to the primitive cradle of the art displayed in the catacombs, which owed its freshness precisely to the agreement between the tradition of the ancients and the Christian ideal. Out of the spiritualism of those two tendencies there should arise a new form of art in which beauty of form would be conjoined with nobility of sentiment.

The Virgin of the Chapel of St. Maur agrees with the liturgic representation of the Early Church, which holds her at the same time to be seated on the throne of divine Wisdom. Such as the artist has painted her, with so sure a taste, and such proper feeling for mural treatment, would she have appeared in the sacred presentment of the Virgin; that is to say, according to the Scriptures: *The beauty of order is in Me for all eternity.*

This Virgin especially, as well as the head of Christ, represent indeed the æsthetic ideal which governs sacred art, and we know few works that are superior or equal to them. In our eyes they are worthy of being classed with the noblest expressions of Beauty and Perfection which sought to fix the ideal type in which should be manifested the union between the essence of what is human and what is divine. It is only by proportion, purity of design, and beauty of line that these ideal types can express in art their dogmatic grandeur. For Line, as Péladan says, is *the immutable theology of Form*. All sacred art aims immediately at the decorative objectivity of the divine character of Beauty. The Benedictine painter bases himself upon that beauty, and seeks the eternal type in the human form. Ugliness is incompatible with the ideal of perfection which Christianity sets up. Besides, if history is to be believed, the saints, both men and women, were, speaking



THE VIRGIN OF S. MAUR (BEURON SCHOOL).

*To face page 112.*



generally, physically beautiful. Do not nearly all the lives of the Saints remark on the admiration felt by their judges and butchers when they beheld the beauty of the martyrs?

Christianity cannot remain insensible to the beauty of human perfection. This is what the Christian artists of the Beuron School understand, and that is why, we are glad to think, they are endeavouring, by setting a good example, to bring about a reaction against what is commonplace and in bad taste, and, in a word, against the clerical ugliness of sacred images which have become the terrors of the sanctuary. For it must be confessed that it is the clerical conception of religious sentiment that has brought about the profane treatment of modern sacred art. So that it is with a real feeling of friendship and artistic brotherhood that artists welcome the endeavour of the Beuron School to bring about a revival. The place which the religious sense occupies in modern civilisation is still sufficiently prominent, it must be allowed, for it to endeavour to express itself in a form of art worthy at least of the powerful current of spirituality which Christian thought has sent throughout the West. In the hands of the artists of Beuron the decoration of the churches will be raised to the high level of the moral unity of the Christian life, which of necessity must produce in art line and colour, as well as technical unity, which alone allow

the harmonious treatment of the vast decorative schemes requisite for the architectural breadth of edifices consecrated to the religion of a people. If the historical evolution of art is considered, we are met with the undeniable fact that decorative painting, properly speaking, is really an essentially Christian art, in the sense that it is, of all plastic arts, the most fitted for the external display of sentiments and ideas. Is it surprising then that in the very bosom of religion there should be again exhibited an artistic impulse under its most legitimate form? We have grown accustomed nowadays to consider sacred art as definitely dead, and to look upon every attempt to revive it as an anachronism. As defenders of Beauty under whatever form it may be expressed, it is our duty to welcome, on occasion, every endeavour that is made towards Beauty.

That endeavour, none can doubt who have seen their works, has been successfully accomplished by the Beuron School. It corresponds, moreover, to a general tendency of art at the present day. Whilst contemporary art is struggling at this moment to shake off the errors of the schools that rely on instinct and imitation and is endeavouring to rise to the conception of general ideas through the form of that great decorative art, of which Puvis de Chavannes was the forerunner in France, these solitary monks are likewise striving laboriously



in the silence of their monasteries to give a new birth to their religious ideal by means of a nobler form of art and one with a new meaning. Knowing what element of beauty their original resources could supply, and the method of expression allowed to them by Hellenic and Byzantine traditions of sacred art, the Beuron School has managed to evolve a sustained style, full of grace and dignity, suitable to the religious life of our times and worthy of modern inspiration.

In these days when religious beliefs themselves, governed by the law which determines the evolution of the conscience and profiting by the acquisitions of modern learning, have assumed a more philosophic and scientific guise than belonged to those of the Middle Ages, which were too exclusively devotional and ascetic, there is wanted a treatment of sacred subjects which should be better informed, better balanced, free from the crudities of the Gothic period, and in which mystic emotion should be under the control of the laws of knowledge, wisdom and reason. Formerly the works produced in the monastic studios were executed stiffly and mechanically according to the conventions and style peculiar to the different Orders. The artist was completely controlled and fettered by the rigid and narrow application of the principle of the division of work. The manual of the liturgic artist, the monk

Theophilus, was the unchangeable and uniform creed of art, conforming to the expression of the ascetic vision of the age, impregnated with the violent reaction on which the new Christian faith was founded against the physical beauty of paganism. The Beuron School does not consider it necessary to continue to propagate that early error, which in the course of time brought about the debasement of form, and caused sacred art to lose the sense of harmony and proportion. And if it has chosen to return to the purely Greek and Byzantine sources of Christian Art, it is to properly apply the decorative beauty of tradition to the symbolical exigencies of the liturgy, confident that Hellenism, owing to the rationalism of its artistic principles, will preserve their art from becoming commonplace and ugly, by restoring it to grandeur and elevation of style. Moreover, were not the works of Pheidias, Polycleitos, Zeuxis, Apelles, and Lysippus, the prototypes which served as guides to the early Christian artists? And has not the tradition of the technique of decoration been borrowed from the ancient world? The genius of Greece is always being encountered at the basis of religious art.

A magnificent example is presented to us by the frieze of Flandrin\* which so affords so

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\* Jean Hippolyte Flandrin (1809-1864) was, like Chavannes, a native of Lyons, and, like him also, is famous chiefly for his monumental decorative paintings. His early difficulties were removed by his taking, in 1832,

harmonious a decoration to the Church of St. Vincent de Paul at Paris. Does not this masterpiece, one of the most important works of modern art, unfortunately too little known, and which criticism has not appreciated at its proper value, owe the wonderful arrangement of its line and perfect decorative unity precisely to the fusion of its pure Hellenism with the gentle austerity of Christian sentiment?

And since we have naturally come to speak of the masterly work of Flandrin, may we be allowed to take advantage of it to offer here a friendly warning to the Beuron School? In all art, the danger to be avoided is convention; that is to say, the frigid application of formulæ, which results in a "*poncif*." In a word, it is inevitably death to personal inspiration or emotion, owing to the absence of direct contact with forms of nature. To speak frankly, there is an omission which weighs upon modern Christian art with all the weight of the prejudice which gave it birth: it is the absolute proscription of the study of the *nude*, the observation of the human body, God's masterpiece in nature!

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the Grand Prix de Rome, and he soon acquired a reputation by several important works mostly of religious subjects. In 1838 he was commissioned to decorate the Church of St. Séverin at Paris, and from that time onward he was continually engaged in similar work. His chief works are at St. Germain-des-Prés, at Paris, in the Church of St. Paul at Nimes, in that of St. Vincent de Paul at Paris, and in the Church of Amay at Lyons. Regarding painting as the vehicle of the expression of spiritual sentiment, Flandrin perhaps paid too little regard to the technical qualities of his art. His work is austere and cold, and though it is customary to compare him with Fra Angelico, his creations lack the joy and purity of the early master. He died of small-pox at Rome.

It has always been a great mistake to suppose that the representation of ideas in art takes no account of the study of living forms. The two unshakeable bases of æsthetics are Nature and the Ideal. The attempt to follow the laws of ideal beauty, without giving heed also to the laws of natural beauty, results in a "*poncif*" and "*pastiche*." The traditional methods and formulæ requisite for the technical application of a difficult art ought to be put at the service of the creative instinct and individual inspiration. To continually endeavour to conciliate the experience of tradition with the renewal of creative power is not only the duty, but the right, of every true artist devoted to great art. However right and proper the decorative treatment may be to express a general idea, nothing must suffer individual inspiration to be suppressed. If, therefore, the Beuron School, while remaining faithful to the principles of a legitimate tradition, desires to carry out successfully its attempt to give a new life to sacred art, it must not embody its ideal in too rigid a formula. It will then be the better able to work in harmony with the inviolable laws of change, and not remain stationary in a too exclusive imitation of the past, and so adapt its art with due balance and proportion to the changes of the spiritual sentiment of religion. Egyptian art, itself, liturgic and sacerdotal as it was, underwent changes in

the æsthetic expression of ideas. It began to degenerate from the moment that its architects, painters, and sculptors began to servilely copy, without infusing them with the inner life which renews external appearances, the scale and proportions which had been bequeathed by a powerful sacerdotal tradition.

The artists of the Beuron School, while basing the form of the figure on the impersonal nature of the Greek cult of rhythm as well as Byzantine sacerdotalism, significant on their part of a true sense of beauty, should aim more at *individualising* their heads. Thus, the irresistible beauty of symmetry, one of the essential elements of harmony, will be rendered more complete by the irresistible charm of the expression of *type*. That is, too, what all the great masters of sacred art, Giotto, Cimabue, Fra Angelico, etc., were accustomed to do. Without forgetting that the treatment of sacred subjects depends on the formula so clearly enunciated by Denys the Areopagite: "*When we bow down in worship to an Image, we bow down to the prototype represented by that Image,*" the religious painter is right in seeking among the forms of natural life for an ideal prototype. Certainly we are somewhat inclined to take the Benedictine artists of Beuron severely to task for being rather too anxious to emulate the Greek monks of Mount Athos, and regret that the *Guide to Sacred Art* by Giorgos Marcos, a

Byzantine monk, should serve as their text-book. But it is not the less true that remarkable works have issued from the monastic studios of Beuron, and that from this time forward sacred art of a more or less renovated kind is actually existing. The ecclesiastical authorities have been shown *how churches ought to be decorated*, of which they have been strangely ignorant for so long, to the disgrace of the dignity of their worship and the dignity of art.

## IX

### \* The Social Influence of Art

*"Of all social forces which have power to assist in the uplifting of a people, there is none perhaps of greater importance than Art."*

ANNIE BESANT.

Harmony the Secret of the Universe and the State—Art reveals Harmony—Birth of Social Intelligence marked by creation of *an Image*—Perception of Beauty inseparable from Mentality—Evolution of Art corresponds with Social Progress—Superficial view of Æsthetics—Social Energy aims at Perfect Harmony—Social Problems solved by the Cult of Beauty—Æsthetic Sense the great force of true Spiritual Life—Beauty perceived through the Imagination, rather than through the Senses—Inferior Artists afraid of Great Art—Great Art does not imitate, but conquers, Matter—Art must illumine Society, not reflect it—New Era in Belgian Art—Beauty and Utility not incompatible—The Artist represents Public Thought—The Mission of Art is to represent Ideas—Ideas of Past Ages reflected in their Monuments—Æsthetics a Social Benefit.

**A**N illustrious disciple of Plato, and an influential friend moreover of Pheidias, the great law-giver Pericles, on one occasion at Athens allowed this wise and profound saying to fall from his lips, which seems the living echo of the Pythagorean doctrine: "*Touch not the bases of Music; you would touch the very foundations of the State.*"

In these words Pericles formulated the social principle of Art, the essence of which is Harmony, that is, Beauty.

The statesman and the artist in him reminded Greece that what constitutes one of the first elements of the moral and intellectual harmony of a civilisation is the feeling for the Beautiful,

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\* This chapter is from a paper by M. Delville, entitled "*Le Principe Social de l'Art*," contributed to "*La Belgique*," April, 1907.

or, more clearly, the direct action of that wonderful feeling upon the soul in the formation of human societies.

Order and harmony, no one can reasonably deny, are very prominent social virtues. The universe only exists by harmony, and the important formula, "*order from chaos*," is one of the most formidable affirmations of the divinity of Harmony in the primordial genesis of the world. If harmony is the essence of things, if it is the great balancing force which vibrates at the core of worlds and in the core of the smallest atom, if it is, in one word, *the secret of the universe*, it ought, therefore, to be the essence and secret of the State likewise.

Now, it is Art which makes man most directly sensible of the fundamental existence of harmony, that universal harmony before which modern materialism is forced finally to stammer its admiration in despair.

The social principle of art may already be traced from the earliest ages of humanity, in the dark periods when the nascent civilisations scarcely emerge from the night of time. The most undeniable document, the most positive proof of the advent of intelligence in primitive man, and of the æsthetic element which enters into his composition, the very sign of the evidence of the mental light in the human animal,\*

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\* See, for what more especially deals with the *esoteric* teaching of human evolution or human genealogy: "*The Mystery of Evolution*," by Jean Delville, Lamartin, Brussels.



do we not find in this fact, revealed by geology and anthropology, that the appearance of social intelligence among mankind dates from that wonderful moment when he learnt how to carry his feeling for the beautiful into *an image*, derived from the forms of the life around him?

Yes, it was indeed by tracing on the raw material, the outline of a living or inanimate object, the memory of whose beauty he desired to perpetuate and which had made its impression upon his intelligence, that prehistoric man, at the dawn of the human race, revealed the social and intellectual principle of Art.

Now, it has been remarked by the great English biologist, Huxley, that in all the numerous kinds of species no animal has endeavoured to reproduce an image of aught that surrounded him. Art is unknown to animals.

Art, then, is, indeed, the undeniable sign of intelligence and wit in man. As soon as man could think, he was an artist.

Just as primitive man expressed his ideas by means of imagery, so in the world of imagery people become conscious of ideas.

The feeling for the beautiful is inseparable from the mental conscience. One of the characteristics of the psychology of the child, one which marks an important stage in the development of his intelligence, is the growing interest that he takes in the image. There again we have a proof that the æsthetic idea cannot be

separated from the mental evolution of man, and that art plays a vital part in human life.

The evolution of the æsthetic sense always corresponds to increased social consciousness, to refined sensibility. The whole history of art shows us how it works hand in hand with human progress. Wherever in the world the germs of civilisation have been found, those germs have been manifested under one of the forms of art.

The domain of æsthetics constitutes a social factor of a truly harmonious psychic influence.

Imagination is a real power in man. Without imagination man can create nothing and invent nothing.

The artistic faculties are not derived from instinct, but, on the contrary, from spirit. Art is one of the proper activities of the Spirit. That manifestation of human Intelligence which is termed *artistic genius* is not, then, an artificial product, a fantasy, a superfluity which has but a relative and distant connection with the ethical development of society. Artistic genius is inherent in the phenomena of life, as beauty is inherent in the manifestation of the universe.

It is because they forget that Art is a civilising force, the roots of which are deeply buried in the origins of the human soul, that most statesmen to-day, and such as represent the popular power, adopt generally a mean and superficial view of æsthetics.

Likewise, because they have forgotten the essence of æsthetics and the mission of art in the world, the majority of artists to-day put their talents at the service of inferior emotions and ugliness.

Of what use, then, are the schools of Fine Arts, in which the beauty of Form is taught, if social life ceases to be impregnated with this beauty and if artists themselves turn their talents in the direction of the ugly and commonplace?

Of what use are museums, if they are crowded with works in which bad taste predominates, and from which the artist's intelligence is absent?

A great English writer on æsthetics and socialism, John Ruskin, spoke truly when he wrote: "*The ugly must be fought even to the life, and, after being banished from its own dreams, must be expelled from reality.*"

Indeed, æsthetic ideas could always be applied to social ideas. Writers on socialism ought at the same time to be cognisant of art, if they wish to become perfect organisers of human life.

The beautiful is inseparable from social life.

The search for social happiness of necessity causes beauty to flourish.

Wretched and barbarous peoples, we know, have no art. The social harmony is not complete—it is not possible, I may say, without

the manifestation of art, which is the flower and joy of the world.

Why is that? Because the Beautiful is intimately allied with the Good; because the Beautiful is the visible form of universal Love.

The social and moral world are the same thing. Art has its share in both.

Thus an immense responsibility weighs on the statesman, the writer on socialism, and at the same time the artist.

On one side, when the powers of the state do not encourage the most elevated expression of art, they do harm to one of the vital forces of the spirit; on the other side, when artists are satisfied with representing something inferior and trivial, they compromise art, and fail in their ideal and social duty.

This idea of *æsthetic duty* from a social point of view must seem paradoxical.

However, it is easy to understand that this duty is based upon the *social principle of art* itself, and that the *social principle of beauty* assumes a powerful aspect when we know how to disengage it from the depths of the activities in which it is hidden under the accumulation of external appearances.

If in society we take account of the collective effort in the differing manifestation of intellectual energy, we are struck by this:—

The doctor, though a professional man, fulfils his social duty by fighting against Disease.

The statesman fulfils his by fighting against Misery.

The lawyer, or the magistrate, fights against Injustice.

The advocate does his duty by fighting for the Right.

The duty of the Savant is to fight against Ignorance.

Add together these sensible energies, which really constitute, not mere lucrative professions, but *harmonizing activities*, fighting against ignorance, misery, disease, injustice, against all the discordant elements that disturb social harmony, working, that is, towards the realization of a maximum of *Beauty* in the world, and you will see that the end and function of all human effort, all social energy, all professional activity, is to realise the greatest possible sum of harmony, of beauty. Moral Beauty and æsthetic Beauty complete one another.

Beauty is the culminating phenomenon among the phenomena of life, since it contains in itself the immanence and the infinitude of Perfection, the end of the whole cosmic and human Evolution.

Looked at from this point of view, it becomes easy indeed to understand the value of the social principle of Beauty and of Art, which seems at the same time to be a principle of evolution and perfection.

To desire that the world should be beautiful, that life should be beautiful, to wish that the fine arts should shed their calm inspiring lustre on society, is to desire the Good of humanity.

If, then, the splendid and barren fortunes which are the disgrace of certain wealthy persons could be utilised in producing the greatest social Beauty, could advance, that is, the living Art of a people, an immense stride would be made in human progress.

*It was a subtle philosopher and very observant psychologist who said: "Perhaps the cult of beautiful things is the surest guide to the solution of social problems."* And, indeed, from the contemplation of beautiful things spring joy and happiness. They that show admiration are good. Great artists, in spite of their vicissitudes, have had happy lives.

Wherever a man, or a people, have nothing to *admire*, they grow blasé and become boorish.

So, then, we may say that æsthetic admiration is to be included among the catalogue of social remedies.

Every time that a man finds himself face to face with a great work of art, he seems to grow in stature, a kind of inner light renders his consciousness more receptive, he experiences the delightful and disturbing sensation of being enriched with intelligence, goodness, and love. This is because the very nature of æsthetic emotion does not constitute merely a pleasure,

but the elevation of life, morally and spiritually. Unconsciously, the vibration of the feeling of admiration has awakened in him one of the spiritual principles of his inner being, for it is not on the senses alone that the sentiment of beauty depends, but it is the spirit that perceives Beauty, Harmony, and vibrates in agreement with them!

This, I am aware, will seem somewhat romantic to such as have a materialistic and physiological view of art, completely ignoring the *occult* psychology of man, since it is just their incurable ignorance of *occultism* which characterises the “*esthètes du protoplasme.*”

To most people art means sensuality. They only expect from art an agreeable visual sensation, in the physical sense of the word. And when, despite themselves, they feel in their heart all the mystery appertaining to a work in which some artist of genius has known how to render visible the mysterious power of the spirit, they turn a deaf ear to that supreme revelation which art breathes on their blunted consciousness.

So many modern psychologists endeavour unsuccessfully to define the nature of æsthetic emotion because their arguments are based upon purely physical data. The result has been a veritable materialisation of art, and artists, imbued with baneful theories, think that they do well to appeal only to the incoherence of

their lower nature. This phase, fortunately, is drawing to a close. In spite of everything, the conception of art is becoming more elevated and new aspirations are appearing. Psychologists and philosophers are beginning to declare that "*the æsthetic sense is the great force of true spiritual life.*" Truly, art is the working of spirit on matter.

The harmonies of nature correspond to the harmonies of existence.

Art is the expression of mysterious affinities.

If it is true that the plastic arts display to us material beauties by means of the senses, it is truer still that the æsthetic pleasure derived from the contemplation of these beauties affects the soul, the spirit, much more than the senses themselves. The æsthetic sense is an inner faculty of man, a faculty which permits him to feel again in the presence of material beauty psychic and non-material impressions.

The object of art, then, is rather to cause man to perceive the essential reality of things. And the immateriality of things can be only perceived and understood by the immaterial principle of intelligence and spirit.

If, as certain critics of art still imagine, the sense of beauty depended merely on physical sensation, the coarsest and most sensual natures would be the greatest artists and surest critics.



Now, it is not difficult to recognize that the contrary is the case. Are not, moreover, those persons, in whom imagination as a rule has power over the senses—for Imagination is a superior faculty to the senses—those that show themselves most ready, not only in their perception of the manifold and subtle aspects of the beautiful, but likewise in creating it?

Since it is averred that the artist is improved by his art, and that his art has an elevating influence on the human soul, is it not, therefore, indispensable to endeavour unceasingly to raise the level of Art, and should not artists strive to reach a higher level of sensibility?

The artist, instead of seeking an easy success in the mere mechanical production of works almost identical and in which the creative activities of the spirit are no longer to be distinguished, would do better both as an artist and man of intelligence in attempting to bring about the proper evolution of his art.

True artists are not those who paint or produce sculpture to gratify an instinctive pleasure in sculpture or painting. True artists, whether they be painters, sculptors, architects, or musicians, are those who have discovered how to construct for themselves an ideal of Beauty with the spiritual energies of their being and the natural forces of life. Like the mystics, who, by dint of the ideal they looked to, ended by discovering in themselves "that

wonderful power of transformation by which man himself become that which he worships," so true artists reflect in their works the ideal which they have placed before them.

Most artists have a vulgar and flippant view of art. Their psychology exactly reflects the middle-class ideas to which, with a compromising facility, they complaisantly adapt themselves. Those are rare who have the courage to sacrifice their artistic egoism on the altar of art to resume it in the hey-day of success. Mediocre artists, like the vulgar, instinctively avoid great art because they find that *it needs too much unselfishness*. They are afraid of it—as a fool is afraid in the presence of a man of genius.

How many artists are there who understand the social and human import of their vocation, and who say, as Schiller so neatly put it: "*Beauty should be brought forward as a necessary condition of mankind!*"

There are many men who paint pictures, and many who produce sculpture, whose hands are not illumined by the great pure light of Art, whose souls remain unexalted by the love of Beauty.

Is it not rather by employing ideal themes raised above inferior and commonplace contingencies that artists will exert a much wider influence on the moral life of the people?

Michelet said truly: "*The birth of genius is a type of social birth. The soul of a man of genius, that visibly divine soul, since it creates like God, is the inner state on which should be modelled the outer state, in order that it should be divine likewise.*"

Nothing will prevent art from generally playing in society more and more the part of an educational force, conscious of its mission.

The time has come to infuse society with art, the ideal, and the beautiful. Society now-a-days tends to depend too much upon instinct. It is saturated with materialism, sensualism, and commercialism.

Modern art has been used too much as a pretext for all the impure and neurotic ugliness of the times. The prevalence of uninspired realistic and imitative productions—whether impressionist or not—is the disturbing result of what was otherwise a salutary reaction against the old academic formulæ.

Too many mediocre artists take advantage of the confused ideas of the day, and the conception of art, with its splendid plastic and ideologic possibilities, is seriously compromised thereby. "Modernism," instead of being a broadening, a more complete expansion of all the artistic faculties in the domain of universal beauty, has really become a levelling and narrowing influence. Naturalism, that great artistic calamity, does not understand Nature. It

has only imitated ugly and material things. Those who still claim acquaintance with her, and those—a little ashamed of her—who hide under the mask of impressionism, are wanting in clairvoyance. They do not see indeed that pictorial ideology, *the great decorative and monumental idealism*, is beyond any academic servitude, is a wholly modern art, and which even ought to be considered as the synthetic and social art of the future. The symbol of modern times is *thought*, as the sign of future times will be *spirit*. All evolution of human activities contend with the effort being made to free mankind from the inert fatality of matter. The only true glory of this world is the knowledge that, by victory over matter, we draw nearer to wisdom, truth, and beauty. Matter has no real existence beyond the opportunity it affords us of struggling against its attraction and illusion. Every chef d'œuvre is not an imitation of, but a victory over, matter. This is not a paradox. It is the key to the whole of creation, to all evolution. It is, too, the very sense of Art, the vital element of which should be Thought in its manifold and varied plastic expression.

Rodin, the most modern of artists, is the most *thoughtful* (le plus penseur). And as he is the most thoughtful, so he has the greatest plastic power!

Thought, therefore, whatever certain flippant sensualists and unthinking academicians may

say, far from being incompatible with the exigencies of the visual plasticity of art, is, on the contrary, its true vital and creative element.

Has the profound thought of De Vinci paralysed his technical power? Never. On the contrary, plastic perfection is exhibited in the works of the great Florentine with a magic greater as his thought is more subtle and profound. It is not true, therefore, that realism alone brings about Realisation.

How long is it that the artist has been dull-souled and ignorant? Since realism has forbidden him to have a brain and imagination. But times are changed.

In face of an æstheticism lacking health and vigour, without aim, without ideal, which has too long kept its place merely to satisfy the fads of a snobbish "élite" at feud with the bourgeoisie, it is consoling to know that ideas of art are becoming broader. A new generation, scornful at once of "flamingâtisme" and "libre-esthétisme," those two aspects of art so devoid of greatness and beauty, is daily asserting its creative desires turned in the direction of the great symbols of life and human ideas.

To narrowly and selfishly foster one's own "personality" in the hothouses of "esthéticomanie," or wallow brutishly in the sensual sloth of a national antiquated tradition, what can be less likely to produce a Beauty possessed

of power! The true Moderns are not those who, with a shameless perversity, are pleased with contemporary things through degraded notions of art. The true Moderns are those who, understanding in short the plastic value of Ideas, know that art ought to illumine the soul of society instead of being content with reflecting it. True æsthetic culture, really modern art, lies in that. And that is the renaissance of great Art.

Very significant symptoms of artistic intellectuality have triumphantly appeared on all sides—in England, Germany, France, Belgium, and Holland.

With regard to what more particularly concerns our country,\* whose growing intellectual evolution is daily tending to widen the artistic horizon, it may be said that what Chauvinistic criticism still calls “Flemish Painting” is becoming more and more an obvious anachronism. What constitutes the glory of the painting of the past, the traditional splendours of the early Flemings and the period of Rubens, is continued wretchedly enough in the guise of a realism that lacks its grandeur. If the so-called “Flemish Painting” is still carried on in a dull, lifeless way by certain landscape, animal, and genre painters wanting in soul and intelligence, it is no less true that, in spite of old-fashioned prejudices,

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\* Belgium.

the artistic genius of the Belgian race has for some time assumed a new aspect and more elevated expression.

This tendency is in no way accidental or foreign to the temperament of the race. It is, on the contrary, a national phenomenon, which is manifesting itself naturally, because Belgium, freed at last from the grip of historical dominations which drained her personal vigour, is again becoming conscious of her strength, of her true regenerated personality as a race.

*Belgian Art* is about to take flight anew to a loftier sphere. All the immense and rich fund of imagination and idealism so stored with pictorial genius, choked and paralysed, and for so long under the incubus of an easy-going feeble psychology, will when the time comes emerge with an impetus which will cause surprise. Sculpture, which has not had to submit, as has been the case with painting, to the tyranny of the "Flemish" tradition, has already proved that the Belgian view of art can rise to the most sublime and powerful creations. It is the same with literature, which likewise not having to drag with it the paralysing weight of a Flemish tradition, has leapt, with splendid and powerful strokes of the wings, into the world of ideas. Painting, the most characteristic expression of the Belgian soul, its native gift, is about to improve in its turn. And it will be surprising to behold how wealthy are the

resources of pictorial genius, when it is definitely attempting to realise something broader and more ideal.\*

The themes of plastic representation are renewed under the form of great decorative art, and painting, adapting even the ancient myths to its living ideas, again assumes its monumental and social function.

Camille Mauclair, in his remarkable study on "*The Symbolic Painting of the Future*," has likewise eloquently claimed the supreme rights of art with regard to imagination and ideology, showing all the new elements of beauty that social life and modern thought bring to the realization of great art.

And, indeed, new and splendid harmonies of colour and line can be created by the symbolisation of modern ideas and be applied to the necessities of artistic ornamentation.

Art is in accord with the exigencies of all ages and all nations, and all ages and all nations are capable of expressing themselves in their art. Incompatibility only exists in the personal powerlessness of adapting one and the other.

Narrow utilitarians have stupidly rejected the beauty of the useful, as if those two elements of social activity were incompatible likewise. Now they are inseparable ; for what impartially

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\* This, too, is what one of our most learned writers on art, M. Fierens-Gevaert, has been at pains to show, with rare eloquence and enlightened enthusiasm, in his recent course of lectures on "*Art in the Nineteenth Century : its Expression in Belgium*."



contributes to utility must inevitably realise the beautiful.

It is from a more perfect conception even of utility and a purer conception of beauty that more harmonious groupings of mankind will be formed and states become beautified.

Just as art must be re-established in the heart, brain, soul of artists and all men, so also must the social principle of art be recognised likewise. Artists, like poets, are only useful to humanity so far as they cause by their Art the highest thoughts, the highest sentiments, the highest aspirations, to be more easily perceived.

In the hierarchy of the higher national forces, the Artist, like the Savant, represents public Thought (*la Pensée publique*).

The multitude, whatever some may say, is moved by great things, because the emotions of the multitude are pure and healthy. It is enough to display before it things beautiful and sublime, to cause the multitude, without proper comprehension analytically speaking, to be *touched* by them. It is clear that there exists a popular "instinct," but I am much more certain that this anonymous force which is so termed is by no means an absolutely obscure and blind force, and that the soul of the multitude is illumined by the inner light of intuition.

What a mysterious and profound faculty indeed is this immense intuition of a people! How strangely analogous it is to genius!

The multitude understands genius, and genius understands the multitude. Between that collective consciousness and that individual consciousness there exists a mighty affinity.

The link which binds together the soul of genius and the soul of the multitude is the divine perception of the Beautiful. It is Art in its social manifestation.

A truth too easily overlooked is that the mission of all the arts consists in the representation of Ideas.

“Metaphysics!” those who at present represent “*panbéotisme*” will scornfully reply.

No one, however, who is at all conscious of æsthetic phenomena will deny that the representative arts, such as Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, show us the hidden travail of Ideas, imprisoned in the materialist conception of art. Now, there is no better example for a people than that in which is shown objectively the influence of the artistic creation which civilised man has at his disposal. Humanity knows how to derive from this example of beauty clearly springing from matter considerable moral energy, because the dignity of the human being is measured, not only by the quality of his actions, but also by the degree of creative force of which he feels himself capable.

The mystery of art is felt by the multitude in the same degree as creative power emanates from the production of the artist.

It is in face of the realisation of beauty that the profound feeling for *Construction*, an intellectual faculty inherent in the human type, is revealed and confirmed.

Man is essentially a *constructor* and *creator* in the widest, most ideal, and most æsthetic sense, and the arts generally are the external evidences of his innate construction and creative powers. The whole surface of the planet offers us the spectacle of human creation changing in its sense of the beautiful. Even among the ruins of extinct civilisations there still lingers, like an everlasting enchantment, amid the chaos of time-worn stones, the genius of the creative power of beauty, an undying flower of human intelligence.

The Ideas incarnated in beautiful forms do not, then, perish, since we find the essence of them again in the material vestiges of the Past.

Truly, therefore, the mission of all the arts consists in the representation of Ideas.

Popular art, then, is again concerned with one of the most harmonious activities of life, since the construction and beautifying of human states offers men a magnificent opportunity of exhibiting, in visible splendour and harmony, the essential Ideas which govern the construction and divine creation of worlds.

Ancient India, Chaldea, Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, are perpetuated in the memory

of modern peoples, thanks to what they have left us of art, public art, art in its social manifestation.

The beauty and grandeur of those mighty aspects of the soul, which we call ancient civilisations, is still displayed in their remains.

Art, indeed, enters into the very life of a civilisation, into its civil and religious life, with the energy and pantheistic beauty of a natural force. The soul and thought of a people is impressed on its monuments, from the soul of the Ancient East, so full of splendour and metaphysics, as exhibited in her colossal palaces and temples, to the Christian and devotional soul of the West, transfused in the sombre majesty of its religious and civil monuments.

It seems that a mysterious and splendid force is ever urging great peoples to stamp the wealth of their intelligence and activities on a form of beauty.

In all great cities there spring from the earth, as though by a kind of lasting artistic miracle, gorgeous and massive edifices, which sum up the splendour of an epoch, the visible aspect of its Ideas.

Who will one day tell us the profound psychology of the monument?

Who will tell us the secret of that creative power of Art, that innate need of Beauty in human societies, ever apparent in the inexhaustible

imagination of the artist, the artisan, and who will be able to transform the need into a Fairy, the Fairy of *Æsthetics*!

The artist and artisan, exercising upon matter the inventive impulse of their imagination, and at the same time making it conform to the necessities of space and time, are only making the human Idea manifest itself in forms.

Beauty, indeed, is a higher social need.

All substances, gold, silver, stone, silk, paint, wood, marble, iron, etc., which receive the double impress, mental and manual, of the *Æsthetic Will*, are used to gratify this social need of Beauty.

Every excavation made in the vast empire of buried ruins brings to light, to the growing wonder of modern peoples, the glorious example of human effort towards the Beautiful, thus bearing witness that art is an activity of man's spirit that cannot be checked and cannot be exhausted. Whatever may be the particular character of race or age, whatever may be its standard of social evolution, the constructive and artistic genius of humanity shows itself.

That original genius can be seen as well in the primitive decayed lake-dwellings as in the splendour of the architecture of Babylon. The same innate power in man is revealed by the obscure and patient pile-builders of the lake cities as by the Assyrians who hewed,

in the Chaldean quarries, their tremendous monolithic marble blocks.

To build, to adorn, to decorate, what wondrous powers of human intelligence!

Thus the phenomenon of æsthetics, continually to be seen in the private and public life of societies, far from causing the public powers and States of the present and future to be indifferent, ought to be hailed as a social benefit and as one of the noblest aspects of human activity.

Can they take into account the utility of the existence of a body like that of the *International Institute of Public Art*?\* Can they answer its appeal by helping *not to increase the ugliness which threatens modern life*, by waiting for Beauty to spring up everywhere, and for Harmony to become something like a State Religion!

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\* It will not be out of place here to recall that the "International Institute of Public Art" has been founded in Brussels by a Belgian artist, M. Eugène Broerman, to whom belongs the honour of having been able to get together, as a protest against the degradation of Public Beauty, an influential group of leading international personalities, whose aim is to struggle against the indifference and ignorance of the powers that be in matters appertaining to social æsthetics. By a unanimous vote passed at the last Congress of Public Art at Liège, in 1903, an important international illustrated review of public art has been set on foot at Brussels, and will shortly appear, sumptuously produced and ably edited.





L'AMOUR DES AMES (J. DELVILLE).



## X

### The Creed and the Critics

Analogy between works of Genius—The Atavism of Tradition—Personality of the Artist unhampered by Tradition—The Artist not a Creator, but a Discoverer—Art creates the Artist—Great Thinkers and Great Artists obey the same Laws—Ignorance of Modern Criticism—Destruction of the Harmonising Social Influence of Art—Corrupt Art indicative of Corrupt Morality—Idealism the Continuation of "Naturism"—Art an Emotion and an Instinct—No Definite Style prescribed by Idealism—Style the Signature of the Individual, the Impress of the Soul, the Real Presence of Beauty—Bond between Science and Art—Danger of "Art for Art's Sake"—Indestructibility of Beauty.

**A** TRUTH, that many artists foolishly despise, because they do not understand, or pretend to be ignorant of, since it is easier to create "*novelty*" than "*beauty*," is the fruitful influence of Tradition, that *golden chain* spoken of by Homer, the Initiate, which creates a bond between men of genius, though of a dissimilar nature, here below, though as far apart as the poles, and separated by centuries, as Wagner and Æschylus for example.

Who has not been struck by the mysterious analogy between immortal works of genius? The *relationship* between masterpieces suggests the remarkable influence of heredity. The different phases of evolution, which alone classifies them and which contributed to bring them forth, has never been able to destroy this relationship, which I am willing to call the atavism of tradition. But this Tradition, if

I may further insist upon it, does not extinguish individuality, does not restrict personal evolution. It is not a Procrustean bed which the personality is forcibly made to fit. Instead of being the revenge of age on all that is young and vigorous, Tradition is the result of experience, the sum of centuries of knowledge; it is the same eternal truth soaring on high, the cyclic unity round which revolves the perpetual motion of human genius.

All the masters comprehended—" *comprehension is the reflex of creation,*" as Villiers has said!—or knew of the abyss that lies between reality and art, and that the artist must leap this abyss with his thought if he wishes his work to *be*. Beauty has no being where nature and spirit are not linked in the harmony which governs their seeming contrast.

Yes, in a work the harmony of the senses and thought should be perfect. The artist who does not know how to find in himself the intermediate manifestation between his instinct and his consciousness will never completely attain to a masterpiece.

And this is as precise as the mathematical sanctity of numbers: just as the expansion of a principle in substance produces life, the expression of an idea in form produces beauty.

Neither the artist nor inventor create: they discover or re-discover pre-existing laws, independently of their intellectual power, but

which they explain or manifest according to the receptive value of their personality.

There exist somewhere, around us, without or within us, in the depths of the unseen world, spheres where are formed the eternal images reflected in our intellects, and which the artist or poet filch from Mystery by the magic power of their imagination, that mysterious divine faculty which must be known in order to be in tune with the harmony of the World.

“The Artist does not create Art, but he throws into confusion its divine harmony in society when Art does not make the artist. Now, for Art to make the Artist the Science of Art must exist, and this last plays the part of a religion or synthesis of sciences.”

Clear logic and plain truth like this statement by Saint Yves d'Alveydre\* no one would venture to deny without danger of going astray! Furthermore, these words are of greater value when we consider that they come neither from a professional critic nor unreliable virtuoso. Far from being an impostor, he who said it was one of those rare transcendental beings who have nestled against the bosom of the Sphinx to hear the heart of mystery beat the better.

When such a man speaks it is because he has something to say, and the words he utters

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\* St. Yves d'Alveydre, an eminent writer on esoteric philosophy, lately dead. An important work by him is “La Mission des Juifs.”

always shed light ; which indeed never happens when the growing swarms of æsthetics try to debase the dignity of Art to their mean comprehension and low bourgeois taste.

The broad paraphrase of Saint Yves, there is no doubt, is intended to appeal to the weakened understanding of contemporary artists and critics. Both, stained with the mire of a confused and barren system of art, can, nevertheless, if they take the trouble to think about it, gain some insight from it, and be thus again enabled to tread the fair avenues that wind around the vast and splendid gardens of Art.

These few lines, indeed, extracted from a weighty work on esoteric sociology and full of learned philosophy, and which it would be well if some of our smart writers would use as their daily paper or keep at their bedside, solve nearly the whole problem of Æsthetics.

I know that some will argue in the face of its clear masterly logic, being convinced beforehand that it is in no way necessary to try to settle this problem, and that it is better to go on instinctively daubing canvases which are of the least possible utility to the human race.

Others, as dull, will call in question the competence of an esoteric in matters of art, and argue that the artist need not receive laws from anybody, after the manner of Nature, which, it may be said parenthetically,

reverently fulfils the laws prescribed by God! It may be observed, nevertheless, that the ideas of great thinkers agree with those of great artists. This is because, consciously or intuitively, they are filled with the same light, and their genius, though different in character, tends towards the same goal.

Do not the "*Organon*" and the *Parthenon*, using different methods of expression, lay down the same sovereign *laws* for science and beauty?

Do not the *Sistine Chapel* and the *Divine Commedia* utter the same *word* of the immensity of the other world? Are not Plato and Raphael essentially saying the same *thing*? And does not the same ideal influence glow in Wagner's *Parsifal* and Lacuria's "*Harmonies of Existence*?"

But if there exists such an obvious identity of thought between men of genius, of the same power but differing in their method of expression, can we doubt that the same luminous breath—the Divine Breath—wafts, to the mystic and absolute goal of perfection and beauty, the creative spirit of the most precious of beings: the thinkers and artists!

The reason is because, above the whirlwind and chaos of error, the sacred Ideal which they venerate guides them and holds before the eye of the soul the sacred torch of Tradition, in order to light them in their progress towards Truth.

And it is above all in our time of civilised barbarism and intellectual darkness, in which the anarchical negation of principles is so supreme, that we can more easily see the shining path traced by the bright elect of the human ideal on the dawn-tinged sky of the ages. If I insist so much on the perfect analogy between the various views that great men have of all that has reference to the essential mission of æsthetics, it is in order to warn the reader against that inevitable puerile objection which is always employed by the dull-witted, and which claims that a philosopher, whether an *initiate* or not, ought not to intrude into the "business" of Art!

To-day all that is settled, one way or another, by the trivial criticism of the papers. And woe to the artist who does not side with their views! Woe to him who dares to make a wry face at the fine dish of artistic hash which is daily prepared! They will know how to make him swallow all the venom of their backbiting and the poison of their malice!

Indeed, the legion of critics—I say *legion* because the number of petty critics is equivalent to the incalculable number of failures—forms its judgment, not on the artistic principles of the great masters, nor on those of great thinkers, but are content like sheep to follow stupidly that polluted stream of chance or caprice known as the *vogue*. These trivial critics, and with

them, the whole brainless company of impostors, are in fact ignorant of the Goal and the Mission of Art.

Ignorant of the sublime *raison d'être* that gives them the mysterious Law of Beauty as their guide, instead of seeking the Truth they only indulge in idle claptrap. Should a work or line of thought come under their notice conveying any suggestion of a higher life, or whose form or conception possesses an ideal significance, it will escape their dull stolid minds, and they will prefer the stupid ugliness of some painting in which, amid tricks of the palette and vulgarity of conception, no idealism is apparent!

With the soul hermetically closed to the sacred things of Beauty, and urged by some morbid instinct or other towards the ugly and commonplace, these critics, whose paltry opinions exercise such a dangerous influence on the public mind, never hesitate to decry the idealist creed with its synthesis and universality, proclaiming as it does the ideal of plastic form, that is to say, of abstract beauty, and able to regenerate Art, in order to extol the creed of individualism, naturalism, and nationalism, which are calculated to bring about the absolute degradation of Art.

Between the productions of idealism, carried out by a hand at once cunning and sensitive, and where country, place, time, race, and

things are lost sight of that they may be found again in the universal significance of their characterisation, under the living idealism of synthesis, and the productions of realism and impressionism in which all the essential æsthetic qualities are wanting, so as to leave room for a clever and speedy process, delicacy of touch, and sparkle (*flamingâtisme*) of colour, the minor critics, with their narrow views, are in no doubt which to acclaim!

Between Rembrandt,\* that arch-magician (Kabbaliste) of painting, whom some simple folk still rate as a realist, who transfigured beings and things under the magic influence of *his* inner sight, and Hals, that merry rascal, the painter of revellers and swash-bucklers, that wonderfully skilful delineator of nothingness, the buyers of art do not hesitate in their choice!

And it is under the remarkable excuse that a *painter* ought to *paint* that they prefer the craftsman to the artist! It is true that these gentlemen have never asked themselves on what ground Raphael is an inferior painter to Jordaens,† or Vandyck, a greater painter than De Vinci. We are inclined to think that their ideas on this head would be extremely diverting.

Until they can explain this, they will continue to drag Art and artist down to their own level.

\* Rembrandt (1607–1669), Dutch; Franz Hals (1584–1666), Flemish.

† Jacob Jordaens (1594–1678), Flemish painter, pupil of Rubens; religious and mythical subjects.



For these are they who cause the confusion in æsthetics which marks our age. Æsthetics without æsthetics, genteel triflers, foes of harmony, noisy demagogues, upholders of instinct, wild irresponsibles, incompetent quacks, sneering eclectics, amateur judges, idle daubers, wretched failures, wrongheaded artists, and foolish critics—*these* form the heterogeneous mass which represents the miserable idea of art at the present day. I have already said above, and I repeat it here again, that we may form a clear judgment with regard to the intellectual and moral standard of a people, a race, or an age, from its art. How will the future judge us? Alas, to look at the mournful display at our triennial shows, those great official fairs, to see the majority of our private drawing-rooms, those shows on a small scale, where we are *free* to exhibit the marvels of painting in all the confusion arising from a spurious “individualism” in art, to behold the general stupor and complete lack of power which most works exhibit, it is not difficult to form an opinion, with a sorrowful glance, of the condition of soul and spirit in this age of materialism. In fact there is no longer *thought, style, or technique!* No Beauty either in *idea, or form, or execution!* We see that Art no longer creates the artist, but that it is the artist who wishes to create Art. And in the judicious phrase

of Saint Yves d'Alveydre, it is clear that "*the artist is throwing into confusion the divine harmony of Art in society, when Art does not make the artist!*"

Art withers and dies when the idea of Perfection, which is the condition of our psychic life and even of that of our works, is absent. Every time that Art falls into decay and becomes puerile, it is because the part played by the artistic genius of a race or age undergoes a change simultaneously with the corruption of its moral genius. Now—and so much the worse for those who do not perceive it—we are passing through such a period of depression. It was inevitable. Like all that deviates from the mighty impulse towards harmony, from that living love of unfading and fertile Beauty, all that rebels against that universal movement which forms the flux and reflux of eternal and divine laws bearing within themselves the elements of durable creations, all that runs counter to order, which is the consciousness of the world and our being, Modern Art, degraded by its illicit intercourse with materialism, bears within it the seeds of death.

There have been men, crabbed theorists, who, unconscious of the errors of an incomplete and materialistic philosophy, have proclaimed the absolute freedom of instinct, denying principles, theories, laws, denying, in short, the science of Art! Rightly aiming at a reaction

against the barren conventions of academic training, but overstepping in their ardour the limits of legitimate reaction, it followed that these men, though in a different way, fell into the same mistake. The impressionist school, which at the present is supreme, excellent though it may be in intention, since it has managed to clean the mud from the palette, has confined the practice of art to degrading trivialities by restricting the powers of the artist. Born with the taint of realism, these good people assume that a picture should take the place of a mirror, and should repeat natural objects with the most absolute fidelity. That is the business of the inferior.

Exhibitions and museums of modern art afford a painful commentary on this subject, and one is as much overcome with nausea by the shameless perpetrations of men like Ensor, Monet,\* Seurat, and Gauguin, who, under the pretence of freedom in art, with the silly approbation of ignoramuses, frame the most shocking studio daubs, as by the photographic "*clichés*" of Meissonnier and Van Beers!† The disgust has become so symptomatic and so general that a reaction has arisen among

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\* Claude Monet and Gauguin, both French Impressionist painters. Monet (b. 1840) may be termed the leader and founder of the school, since its name is said to have been derived from a landscape of his entitled "An Impression." His work is solely landscape.

† Meissonnier (1815-91), French, historical and military subjects, mostly on small scale and of elaborate finish. Van Beers, Belgian, delineator of feminine coquetry.

new literary centres. Ill-distinguished from "Naturalism," and with its feet still clogged with the mire out of which Zola moulded material for his novels, "Naturism" is a logical evolution, of which "idealism" is the central continuation or culminating point. In this mystic pantheism, in the limbs of which the "naturists" seem still plunged, it is easy to recognise the beginnings of a definite movement towards complete Idealism. One of them has already proclaimed the necessity of "*harmony*," of "*proportion*." The divine sense of natural objects corresponds with the æsthetic sense of most people, in spite of the gross prejudice in which they still persist, of thinking that it is necessary to know how to incarnate the national aspirations of a people in order that art should become "heroic," or be the synthetic expression of life.

It is idealist art, above all, that soars above limitations, that truly realises life in all its fulness, since it enables the Universal to be seen in the individual. This definition, however, must not be confused with the allegorical expression of the idea. If form without idea is of small value in art, idea without form is not worth much more. The artist is he who produces depth of *feeling*, and knows how to transmit this feeling into the domain of the will: one is impossible without the other. First there is the state of passive emotional

receptivity, and then that of active intellectual conceptivity. From these two functions working in harmony springs the work of idealist art. The artist allows the powerful instincts which move the *natural world* to sink into his heart, and absorbs into his soul the powerful ideas which move the *spiritual world*. The work of art is at once an emotion and an instinct. Separated, or allowed to run riot, these two divine movements become, one of them amorphous, the other conventional. Someone has said that Art is Nature continuing her work in the Spirit. We might reverse the definition and say: Art is the Spirit continuing its work in Nature. Inspiration is not, as some pretend, the dazzled bewilderment of the Spirit, but the supreme moment of the harmonious concentration of the emotional and intellectual faculties, which constitutes Will. And *Genius* is nothing more than this! Analyze the best masterpieces and, if they are only the product of a spontaneous instinct, you will observe this mistake or untruth which underlies contemporary psychology.

Superficial critics have thought, either through simplicity, or puerile malice, that idealist art pretended to lay down the inviolable formula and deliberate tyranny of an impersonal style. We must protest with all our strength against this way of misrepresenting our intentions, and denying again the existence of a definite

style. If idealism assumes the need of style, as being one of the means by which a work of art may attain perfection, it does not therefore mean to impose any particular style, which would be to absurdly fall into the trap set by the schools that the wings of the artist may be clipped.

*Style* is the signature of the individual, the impress of the soul, the spirit. It always indicates the dominating quality of the artist perceptible beneath the plastic writing of form. It indicates what degree of psychic elevation the personality that manifests it has reached. But since style is the absolute reflection of a condition of soul or spirit, it is to the artist's advantage to seek the moral and intellectual perfection of his *ego*.\*

If style is the same as the man, then the more a man rises, the more elevated will his style become! Now, idealism invokes style, because it knows that it is the *real presence* of beauty in form. There can be no beauty without style—no style without beauty.

Style is, moreover, the synthetising element which is the product of the science of æsthetics, and that science consists, as far as the artist is concerned, in considering the laws of conception with regard to the laws of life. The science of art, possessed by all the great masters, does not destroy life, but illuminates it. Science has

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\* The *Ego* is not understood here in the narrow egotistical sense that Maurice Barrès wrongly gives to it.

never even paralysed the creative idealism of the artist. Of this Leonardo de Vinci and Goethe are striking proofs. The study of the laws of the universe, far from checking the exercise of the æsthetic faculties, affords them a wider field in their search for the ideal. Behind the birth of worlds shines the secret light of the spiritual universe. All men of genius have known it. To great minds there is no chaos ; everything is linked together and perfect.

Pheidias was a true philosopher familiar with deep metaphysical problems. He is in some ways the Plato of sculpture. The great artists of the Italian Renaissance assiduously studied the Platonic philosophy, and the splendour of Medicean palaces was enhanced by their learned converse.

How can the study of the laws of natural phenomena check æsthetic emotion? Has the mathematical investigation of universal motion prevented De Vinci, "the man of all ideas and all emotions," as Arsène Houssaye terms him, from reproducing the movements of the human soul? Science is the matrix of the Ideal!

Shakespeare, there is little doubt, was acquainted with magic science, and escaped being burnt as a sorcerer. The great tragedian possessed, indeed, the secrets of the Kabbala, the most wonderful of human knowledge.

Taine on one occasion used a fine phrase :  
"*The relationship which links art to science is*

*an honour to both; it is a glory for the latter to furnish beauty with its chief supports, and for the former to rest its noblest constructions upon truth.*" In fact the *analogy* of relationship exists in perfection between Art, Science, and Religion.

By speaking in this way I do not mean to confuse them, which would be utter nonsense, but I dare to affirm, without fear of contradiction, that artistic intelligence should not be the exclusive mechanical belonging of a single profession, and that artists who are only "painters" never rise above the common level of fools. Art is not a trade; the artist is not an artisan.

Has not even the insane Chardin,\* the very type of a painter of subordinate details, been forced to admit: "When I paint a violin or a saucepan, I am still only a professional painter, but when I paint a face, then only am I an artist."

Into the difficult task of realising beauty there passes unceasingly the breath of the living spirit, which ever gains new strength wheresoever it finds it. The theory of *art for art's sake*, beautiful in itself, necessary in itself, and defensible whenever unskilled popular writers attack it to the gain of speculations which are outside the province of æsthetics, can never be

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\* Jean Baptiste Chardin (1701-1779), French genre painter; painted scenes of a domestic character, allegorical subjects, and fruit.



considered as absolute and may become a danger. Rigorously applied it lowers art to the mechanical technique of narrow conceptions.

The artist must be universal. If he confines his creative power to a piece of cleverness, or a landscape, he weakens his personality, and is usually likely to degenerate.

We will close with that hypocritical admission which some artists, and some inferior critics, make, which pretends that the facial expression of a monkey is as proper for artistic treatment as the mask of Olympian Jove! Be it observed that *idealist art* is a synonym for Beauty!

In the sphere of conceptions Beauty is the immediate reflection of the divine world, and every work unilluminated by it will be dead and null.

And what we affirm will last as long as our strength allows us to cry aloud to all the deaf and all the blind who hear without listening, and look without seeing!

There is nothing true but Beauty. To strive towards it is to project oneself into the very substance of its laws of light. To believe in it, to believe in its existence, its reality, is to come into closer communion with the wisdom of the world.

Like Truth, Beauty causes the divine principle which slumbers in the depths of our imperfect nature to again become quick within us. To manifest it is the most eager, pacific, and earnest

delight of the soul. In the same way as prayer, it causes all the energies of the spirit and heart to vibrate.

The demon of war may pass over the world with its trail of horror, and Beauty will not perish. For it can no more be destroyed than the stars, from which it borrows its resplendent harmony.

And though the red rain of barbarism fall upon the abodes of mortality, there will ever blossom anew, in the sunrise of a loving dawn, the great dream of Order and new-born Beauty !

## XI

### Idealism in Art : Some Mistaken Notions

Ignorance of Materialism—Form the Sister of Number—Physical Ugliness expressive of Moral Ugliness—Ugliness advocated under the pretext of Emotion—Harmony the Highest Emotion—Separation of *pure* from *impure* by agency of the Spirit—Instinct due to the obscuring of Spirit—Ugliness the Animal Sign of Instinct—Distinction between Nature and Matter—Idealist Artists close students of Nature—The Artist must strive towards the Harmony of the Individual—Beauty is Unity in Variety—Idealism confused with Conventionalism—Idealism does not pretend to regulate Inspiration—It demands *moral beauty*—It rescues the Artistic Temperament from Materialism—It is not antagonistic to the Physical Universe—The Domain of Ugliness limited, that of Beauty infinite—Idealism develops Style and Personality alike—“Style is the Soul”—Importance of Choice of Subject—Synthetic Nature of Idealism—Idealist Genius “*super-conscious*.”

**I**F BEAUTY were not the divine impress of the spirit upon matter, and if our senses were not the instruments by which the soul works this transformation, perceptible only to our thought, how should we explain in a rational way the astounding prestige of æsthetic magic—of Art? Whence could a work of art derive its power of enchantment, if not from the ideal source of the divine principle which illumines the depths of the human being, and if the heart of Mystery did not actually beat in the bosom of Art?

Considered in its metaphysical sense Beauty is one of the manifestations of the Absolute Being. Emanating from the harmonious radiance of the divine plane, it traverses the intellectual plane in order to further irradiate

the plane of nature, where it is quenched in the darkness of matter. Matter, in itself, has neither proper form or beauty, but it is the passive primordial element, in which the beauty of the spirit, traversing another element, the astral element, is reflected and made external.

The great error of the realist or materialist theory is due to its absolute ignorance of what, in theosophical language, is called *the generating ray of the Image of God in Man traversing the three principles of Being*.

I know that many strong-minded people, in their calm and self-satisfied contempt of the Other World, who meet lofty mysteries with idle negation, and who, nevertheless, at the decisive moment of death, brought face to face with the nothingness in which they have made themselves believe, tremble and despair, I know that for them this theosophical phrase only contains words void of sense and reality?

But the mystery—the evidence of its occult genuineness can be obtained—which creates and generates forms in Nature and Being, which organises them in accordance with the laws of order, proportion, and harmony—the *Word*—“the exemplary form of created things,” as St. Thomas says, “determining and formulating Form, that Form which renders the world intelligible”—has it been understood, has it even been suspected by such as gaze at and listen to Life through the mists of instinct alone?

Did they ever guess that Harmony is the Soul of the World, and that—all honour to æsthetic reasoning!—it exists—that Form is the sister of *Number*?

However, just as the root of the soul is to be found in the centre of Nature, so Form has its root in *Number*, since Number is the fundamental law of all created things.

Hugo, whose genius, when not dominated by the light and shade of his Romanticism, sometimes rose to metaphysical heights, saw this clearly: "*The Infinite is an exactitude. The profound word Number is the basis of human thought; it is, to our intelligence elemental; it signifies harmony as well as mathematics. Number is revealed to Art by Rhythm, which is the heart-beat of the Infinite.*"

Is it, as some superficial thinkers believe it to be, speculative, superannuated, and vain? No. It is eternal!

All Form is the union of Essence with Substance. All Form is Thought. The world of ideas becomes the world of *forms*. In the imposing symbolism of forms expressing realities in which the Word-Image is the secret interpretation of the language of Beauty, the work of creation appears like a permanent transmission of Rhythm to Form; that is to say, the production of living forms in the realms of nature, or, better still, Rhythm in its true state inscribed in a material form.

Form is explanatory. It is the great revealer of meanings. There is always an agreement between Form and Expression. Each thing, each being, has an exact form corresponding with what it is destined for, or according to its degree of evolution. The destiny of mankind is *measured out*—O wonder of the ignorant!—because it is governed by the laws of *number*. The physiognomist and astrologer, more *positive* than is supposed, know it, and, better still, prove it.

No, nothing indubitably will transmit the rhythm of a statue by Pheidias into the body of a gorilla. No ignoble idea, no trivial sentiment, could be expressed by a form that had good rhythm. Physical ugliness always represents moral ugliness.

*Numbers, Ideas, Forms*, that is the analogical mystery of the whole of creation! The Bible—why not quote it since it utters what is true?—says: “*God ordered all things by weight and measure.*” And the whole of nature, from the atom to the universe, is a demonstration of this. One of the immortal masters of modern hermetics has proclaimed, moreover, that these beautiful words are also just, and that the wonders of the natural world are a symbolic system of mercies and glories. They are not chance definitions.

The hazy-minded advocates of impressionism, vague-minded and vague-sighted, would profit

by knowing that the generation of numbers is analogous to the association of ideas with the production of forms. Face to face with life they would have a worthier and surer artistic consciousness. But they prefer—it is easier, no doubt—to disparage this life which is continued afar into the infinite and above into the world beyond further than they suspect; this life which vibrates, not with passing moods, but with the tremendous thrills of the Invisible; this life about which they speak with such literary ostentation and of which they do not know the occult principles which generate it; this life which they debase, I say, through I know not what vague or superficial instinct, which, sadly enough, procures for them their fleeting emotions. Their artistic creed has confined the influence of emotion to things which are obscure, formless, crude, and wanting in harmony. They thus propagate the mysticism of Ugliness under the pretext of Emotion.

Now, there is no loftier emotion than that of Harmony.

And Harmony, whether we like it or not, has been, is, and will ever be, Proportion and Equilibrium. Harmony is Perfection. When there is no Perfection, there cannot truly be Genius. Genius does not proceed from instinct, but from the Spirit. There is no *inspiring force* in instinct, the Spirit alone inspires. That is why all great works of art are willed. The

Spirit makes use of the will. Contrary to instinct, the ideal function of the Spirit is to separate the *pure* from the *impure*, and this wonderful creative function, instead of attacking individual initiative, instead of leading to loss of personality, gives to the artist a power more conscious of itself.

Woe to the artist who has never found it necessary to meditate upon the mystery of his art! Woe to him, for he will never see the glorious blossoming of the human ideal arising from the chaotic darkness of instinct, and will never know the splendours of the true life!

“ He who has never watered with his tears the bread that he eats, he who, with anguished heart, has not through long sleepless nights remained seated in sorrow on his bed, such a one will never know you, *Heavenly Powers!* ” once exclaimed Goethe.

All instinctive emotions are due to the clouding of the Spirit.

All Ugliness is the animal sign of Instinct. Artists who make ugliness their favourite theme are dominated by instinct, and have lost the memory of the divine ray in the soul. They suffer, for the most part, from a particular kind of madness or a particular kind of perversity. Every time that one makes a concession towards, or tolerates, ugliness, that is to say, whatever lacks form, or is misshapen, a bond is entered into with the lower regions



of the astral plane, wherein lurk the forms of lower beings and inorganic things, and where the phantasmagoria of elementals ever streams !

What makes one despair is the ignorance that the artist and critic display when confronted by the mental phenomenon of Art. How many know that the Mission of Art is a mission of Light ?

*“ Art,” protests the seer Zanoni, in the great Rosicrucian novel of Bulwer Lytton, “ profane not thus that glorious word. What nature is to God, art should be to man ; a sublime, beneficent, fertile, and inspired creation. That wretch may be a painter, but an artist never ! And for you, who aspire to be a painter, has not that art, whose progress you would hasten, its magic power ? Ought you not, after a prolonged study of beauty in the past, to be able to grasp new and ideal forms of beauty in the future ? Do you not see that for the poet as for the painter great art seeks the true and abhors the real ? Ought one not to treat nature as a master, and not follow it like a slave ? Has not art, which is truly noble and great, the future and the past for its province ? What is a picture, then, but the concrete representation of the invisible ?*

*“ Are you discontented with the world ? This world was never made for genius, which must, to exist, create another for itself. By two outlets we escape from the petty passions and terrible calamities of earth—both lead us to heaven and*

*rescue us from hell—Art and Science. But art is more divine than science. Science makes discoveries, art creates . . . Astronomy which numbers the stars cannot add an atom to the universe; a universe by a poet can be evolved from an atom. The chemist, with his substances, can cure the infirmities of the human body; the painter, the sculptor, can give to the human form divine and eternal youth which sickness cannot destroy or the ages wither.”*

In order to penetrate it, then, in the mighty interests of Art, Nature must appear as other than matter. Nature is a spirit, the spirit of the Universe, of which matter and the elements compose the body. Nature can feel, and is capable of suffering and sorrow, whilst matter cannot feel. We can, and we ought, in æsthetics as in philosophy, to distinguish Nature from the Real.

I know that many will not accept this distinction, which they will hold to be too subtle, but I must warn them that for the simple illusion of the senses it is not enough to deny this truth of cosmogony, that the universal plastic force, which shapes the visible world, is independent of the physical forces of matter, that lowest degree of the involution of the Spirit. The notion of the Real and the Spiritual, we may now clearly say, has been perverted, on the one side by a petrifying positivism, and on the other by an inconsistent spiritualism.

Art has been governed by two contradictory influences at the same time. Hence the chaos at the present time : realism which deals with allegory, and impressionism which concerns itself with symbolism, in which Beauty is rejected or misconceived, because the harmonious relations of life and the ideal are unknown to it.

With the idealist artist it is the eye that *looks* and the spirit that *sees*. If it is the eye, the most wonderful and translucent of organs, which establishes a connection between the external world and himself, it is the spirit which reveals light and form to his consciousness.

Can it be said, finally, that idealism, as some opinionated people of weak understanding suggest, is mistaken in its views of *life*? There are, indeed, no greater lovers of Nature than the idealist artists, since they *see* her under her twofold aspect, the most trivial spectacle of the physical world becoming for them a world of ideas. Material images, real forms, fill not only their eyes but their *intelligence* too. They not only see in Nature the matter of created things; they perceive *what is expressed* in forms, namely, *Intelligence*. The elements of which the external world is composed are used by the idealist to recreate and rediscover an ideal world in his thought. The ideal he knows to be the logical vision of his thought towards harmony, Beauty. Certain

æsthetic writers, philosophising upon art in a fanciful and impulsive manner, declare harmony to be a proposition and beauty an illusion. To make a distinction between harmony and beauty is a fundamental mistake. There is no beauty without harmony, no harmony without beauty. Instead of being an illusion, an abstraction, Beauty is the very *realising* of the Ideal.

As Love is characterised by Charity, so Beauty is characterised by Spirit. Spirit, holding the balance between Will and Intelligence, is inseparable from Beauty. The genius of Art is expressed by the *genius* of Nature, which, by virtue of the principles of evolution and selection which governs it, ever tends towards Beauty. It is the genius of Nature which the artist ought to seek behind the confused appearance of the real. His soul should enter into communion with it, if he wishes to find the ideal. For the ideal is nearer to man than he thinks. Unfortunately he does not know how to seek it, and since he does not find it he denies its existence. We are thus led to conclude that the weaknesses of a work are due to weaknesses of thought, to something lacking in the soul, to an infirmity of a real or psychic nature. There exists, in fact, in the sensibility of one and the other flagrant discords. And it is usually in the name of these native or accidental, psychic

or physiological, discords, that impressionist critics and artists reprobate the fundamental laws of æsthetics. This undoubtedly gives rise to that deplorable individualism in art which is at bottom merely the idle indulgence which mediocre and unskilful artists allow themselves.

It is usually overlooked that the *Ego* of each individuality, as the esoteric physiognomy clearly indicates, has different aspects, either contradictory or complementary. Man, in fact, has, so to speak, four *temperaments*. There are these four moral psychological contradictions which it is his business to harmonise and balance one against the other. In every man there is manifested, in different degrees, a *lymphatic*, *sanguine*, *nervous*, and *bilious* temperament, and it is only when these four different sides of his individuality are brought into harmony that the man becomes perfect and evolved. Lack of balance is due to the abnormal preponderance of one of these aspects over the others. This is what makes a man's nature *objective*, *subjective*, *passive*, or *active*.

The harmony of the individual is the psychological end towards which the artist should strive.

There is no other individualism.

All great artists know that Art, without belonging to analytical science, without being bound by conventional rules or barren precepts, contains a science whose laws are naturally fixed by the supreme logic of beauty. They

know also that beauty, in order to be different according to the idiosyncrasy of the masters, is not the less governed by a mysterious unity, which centralises things similar, and which is its greatness and strength, realising a sovereign formula : Unity in Variety.

I say again that to give up æsthetics to the caprices of individual sensibility, to deliver it over to the idle fancies of the incompetent, to all kinds of degenerate influences, constitutes the great mistake of contemporary eclecticism.

Many have attempted to oppose the idealist tendency with arguments as vain as ridiculous. Some coolly wish to confuse it with the conventional school. People may be found who at the very name of idealism give a melancholy shrug of the shoulders and assume quaint airs of repulsion. They say—without believing it!—that the name conceals a superannuated assembly of Buddhist priests laying down automatically with square and compass inviolable rules and calmly drawing up a table of recipes for the use of wise artists—something like the chrestomathy of the perfect scholar! They have argued against this wide and liberal tendency without understanding it. Consequently their argument is practically nothing more than a clumsy tissue of prejudices.

We are forced to cry aloud, with all the strength of our lungs, that the idealist creed

of art, in spite of its apparent dogmatism, is not a doctrine to induce narrowness ; on the contrary, it affords an impetus to the artist's personality, which remains unfettered, completely unfettered, as far as it can be before the imposing logic of art, which contains a science of harmonies in which reason is mingled with emotion, and in which law amplifies sensation. It is wholly the development of personality in the direction of loftier conceptions, of personality which perceives more clearly the great possibilities of art. It brings the artist back, not to preconceived forms, not to decaying academic ideas, but to the ideal and eternal principle of art. Just as science makes clear to us that general laws govern the relations between man and the elements, so idealist art, correctly defined, proves that there are laws governing the relations of nature to art. It is about these laws that personality with its ideas, sentiments, and sensations, performs its evolutions.

The sign of great art is Beauty. The sign of Beauty is Harmony. The sign of Harmony is Unity.

In concentrating in his spirit and will his manifold various vital sensations, which should be, not confused or fanciful, but vigorous, clear, and distinct, the artist will be enabled to perceive æsthetic unity, without which there is no perfection possible.

Unity is one of the great secrets of the beautiful. Unity is the very soul of style, and since style is personality in its most subtle expression, the more personality is evolved, morally and spiritually, the more enlightened will the artist become through the idea of unity.

Does this mean that idealism consists in sacrificing everything to thought? That would be absurd. It refuses nothing to the senses. It devotes them to higher ends by rendering them more subtle. Between sensation and temperament is placed notion.

It in no way subordinates the subject to the painting, or the painting to the subject. Neither does it place style above idea. It does not pretend to regulate inspiration. It enriches and fortifies it, revealing its power by its union with the absolute. Idealism rejects none of the artistic faculties. It harmonises and welds them together. It aims at concentrating and complementing faculties tending in diverse directions. It desires the synthesis of the divine word, of the human word, of nature's word.

Idealism lays down a hard and fast condition: *Moral Beauty*. It rejects the black magic of art, which consists in spiritualising what is evil. It has an educational and general socialising influence, quite apart from any particular scheme of socialism. It knows nought, for instance, of aristocracies or



democracies. It sees humanity in the immense vitality of its ideal growth. If the artist would become conscious of *that*, his personality must be purified and elevated. He must likewise know how to bring his life into harmony with natural and occult bond which links the sense to the soul, and soul to the spirit.

The duty of modern idealism will be to rescue the artistic temperament from the fatal scourge of materialism, to save personality from the dangers inherent in the worship of uncomprehended matter, to lead it away from the degrading appeal of the ugly, in order to guide it, definitely, to the pure regions of an art which proclaims a spirituality about to be made manifest. It can do it, it must do it, without needing to have recourse to the imaginings of morbid dreams, to superficiality, and all the wretched unnatural creations of diseased minds and the baneful stupefying of the intellect, the disgrace and misery of art!

What is the artist, then, whether he be painter, sculptor, poet, or musician, if he be not the *man* who seeks to recover the traces of that invisible world of harmony and beauty, that spiritual world whence his struggling soul has preserved, throughout its period of gloom and intuition, a reflected radiance; that is to say, the ideal and divine attraction.

From this progress of art and the artist to transcendental heights must it then be assumed

that idealism recoils in disdain from physical nature? Certainly not. Idealism attracts life, all life, to itself, by spiritualising it, by projecting its form and colour on the splendours of the spiritual world, of which the artist possesses the inner interpretation. Between the material passiveness of the object, and the lively suggestion of sensation, the idealist allows the harmonising energy of conception to move within him. The principle of his work does not consist, as it has been falsely thought, in a cold delineation of the abstract from which emotion is excluded. Idealist art must not then be libelled by having the mystico-burlesque nightmares of certain incompetent painters attributed to it, such as revive the rudimentary deformities of early times, and fall back miserably into an amorphous and incoherent past, in which protoplasm is confused with larva

The obvious end of idealist art is the purification of art.

The modern art movement, if it would voyage to the bright horizons of the ideal, must struggle against the continual encroachments of *the ugly*, no matter beneath what mark this is hidden: whether beneath the hypocritical pretence of symbolism, characterisation, impressionism or realism, those inferior methods of expression by which those who dally with it are led astray.

It has not been sufficiently observed that the domain of ugliness is confined to narrow limits, whilst that of pure beauty is infinite. The former holds art captive and forces it to breathe an impure atmosphere, and is the æthetics of darkness. Art then falls a prey to the lower influences of the *astral world*, which act upon the ready imagination of the artist unconscious of the phenomena. The other renders active all the latent powers of the higher influences. Into the now unclouded imagination peers, if I may so express it, the third eye, which receives the reflection of a world become spiritualised . . . Must it be ever repeated that beauty depends no more on sensibility than on a cunning ordering of accepted rules.

Idealism does not lay down a particular style. It develops the personal style side by side with the development of personality. It has been said: "Style is the Man"; it should have been: "Style is the Soul." Style is the imprint of the soul coming in contact with Essence and Substance. Through the soul the spirit descends to matter; matter ascends to the spirit through the soul.

If I insist on the mediating influence of the soul, it is because it is a folly to wish to bring spirit and matter into immediate connection. That is why Idealism does not aim at the awful sublimity of an ideology without emotion

and does not demand the extinction of emotional forces.

What it proclaims and realises is the individuality of the artist seeking synthetically a supreme accord with plastic harmony, moral harmony, and intellectual harmony!

Can beauty be reasonably detached from the idea expressed in the work, and is the choice of "*subject*," which is ever in relation to the personal worth of the artist, an additional and needless preoccupation, and one that may be neglected? The theory of "*no matter what*" borders dangerously on depravity. It enfeebles the artist. It lessens the importance of his function. It falsifies his aim. It strangles his thought and brings the fertile and idealising principle within him to a standstill. The species of eclectic—sceptic pantheism which finds beauty everywhere—especially where it is not—on the ground that beauty in art is on an equal footing with and in no way different to beauty in nature, results in degrading art as much the opposite theory of originality, that intrusive originality under cover of which are produced such absurd and grotesque abortions.

Let us pass on.

We know: neither one or the other have hitherto conceived a harmonious notion of nature and art, nor have they known how to understand the mutual relationship between

the real and the ideal image. That is precisely the synthetising power of idealism in art; it possesses the sense of universal harmony and the sense of divine harmony. It knows—it has the desire too—that before there can be the desire of creating the wing of a seraph, there must be ability to draw the wing of a swallow. Nature and the ideal are not in opposition. Truth and beauty are not irreconcilable. Logically the two are different, but they are linked by extraordinary points of resemblance. Those who remain the slaves of instinct will never guess the secret that these similarities reveal. Someone has well said: “*Idealism soars aloft to a complete synthesis.*” Has it not reached those heights when art can be illumined by the magic and stupendous magnificence of Beauty?

It is here, indeed, that the artist learns how to realise the law of infinite relationship, the philosophy of line and of colour, their universal significance, the inner meaning of gesture, the power of ideas and of form, the motion of the body and of the soul, the connection between the visible and invisible, the communion of beings and things, and the sublime mathematics of eternal harmonies.

Here finally the regenerated artist discovers a power of æsthetic expression proportioned to the sublimity of his aspirations and thoughts. Here finally the whole glorious life of art is unrolled in its majesty.

The time has arrived when genius will no longer be unconscious. The genius of the idealist will, we boldly prophesy, be *superconscious*.

And what will this *superconsciousness* be? An abstract sensibility? An intellectual orthodoxy? A psychic pedantry? Will it involve closed eyes, systematically closed, to the bright blossoms of life, or mean that the heart and senses should become atrophied, voluntarily atrophied, when confronted with the enormous and ineffable palpitation of the world?

No, it will be nothing so insane. But it will be the *knowledge* that life is not limited to the senses and that it is extended into the splendours and forces of the Invisible, where it will be purified in the inevitable Ideal.

And *that* will be—in THE WORK!

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