V.—THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF ART.

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WHEN Baumgarten 150 years ago introduced the theory of "liberal arts and beautiful thinking" as a new discipline in the literary world, he was anxious to defend in advance his *Æsthetica* against those who might find it *infra horisontem suam*. Within one generation of the time when it was thus considered necessary to apologise for a treatment of the phenomena of "sensitive knowledge," the new science had already acquired a fixed method and a rich literature. So deeply had the theories and ideas, which were first brought together under a common heading in Baumgarten's short manual, influenced contemporary thought, that the most important questions of life came to be treated as æsthetic problems. This glorious period, however, has in its turn been succeeded by an age which neglects speculation on art and beauty for other tasks which are regarded as far more important. Such rapid changes within a few generations appear almost incomprehensible. But they can easily be explained if we take into account the intimate connexion which always exists between æsthetic speculation and prevailing currents of thought.

In Mr. Bosanquet's *History of Æsthetic* it has been pointed out with great clearness to what extent the prosperity of æsthetic studies was caused by the general philosophical situation. Æsthetic epistemology, as set forth in Baumgarten's chapter on *cognitio sensitiva*, and further developed in Kant's *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, described, as is well known, a form of judgment which is neither purely rational nor purely sensual. For philosophers who had to struggle with the apparently irreconcilable opposition between reason and the senses, this conception of a mediative faculty must have satisfied a most urgent need. Similarly we may suppose that the ethical observer felt himself emancipated from the narrow antagonism between body and spirit by looking at our actions with æsthetic attention. In proportion, however, as

general science has been able to reconcile the old dualism of higher and lower faculties, the judgment of taste has necessarily lost importance. In the development of monistic philosophy and monistic morals we may thus see one important factor, by the influence of which æsthetic has been ousted from its central position.

The evolution of modern art has been still more injurious to æsthetic speculation than the progress of science. In the golden days of art-philosophy conditions were eminently favourable to universal generalisations. The great periods of art, classical antiquity and the renaissance, were so remote that only their simplest and most salient features were discerned. Nor did the art of the period exhibit the bewildering multiplicity of a fertile age. The formative arts were less important than ever before; music, which was so soon to eclipse all other arts, had not yet awakened the interest of philosophers. The crafts were dying; landscape-gardening is indeed the only kind of applied art that we hear about at this time. Beauty, art, the ideal, these and all other general notions must have been suggested with unsurpassable simplicity by this uniform and monotonous artistic output. It is easy to understand the eagerness and the delight with which the earlier writers on æsthetic, once the impulse given, drew conclusions, made comparisons, and laid down laws. But it is equally evident that speculative zeal was bound to fall off as soon as the department of art was enlarged and its products differentiated.

Even the more intimate knowledge which was subsequently gained of classical culture necessitated important corrections in æsthetic dogmas. The artistic activities of savage tribes, which have been practically unknown to æsthetic writers until recent years, display many features that cannot be harmonised with the general laws. And in a yet higher degree contemporary art defies the generalisations of a uniform theory. With greater mastery over materials and technique, the different arts have been able to produce more and more specialised forms of beauty. The painter's ideal is no longer that of the poet or the story-teller, nor the sculptor's that of the actor. Pure music, pure poetry, pure painting thus develop into isolated, independent arts, of which each one establishes its own laws and conditions for itself. The critic who in spite of this evolution tries to apply a narrow æsthetic standard of beauty to all the various arts may indeed—according to his influence—delay the public appreciation of modern works and thus indirectly impede artistic development. But no amount of theorising will enable him

to arrest the growth of artistic forms whose very existence contradicts the generalisations of the old systems. And he is equally powerless to stop such violations of the supposed frontiers of the different arts, as continually occur, *e.g.*, in modern picturesque poetry and descriptive music.

It is only natural that in times so inopportune general speculations on art and beauty have been more and more abandoned in favour of detailed studies in the technicalities of art, historical researches in which works of art are considered chiefly as documents bearing on culture, and experiments on the physiology and psychology of æsthetic perception. For art itself and its development it would perhaps be unimportant, if a science which has never been of any great positive and direct influence on artistic production should completely disappear. But from the theoretical point of view it would be matter for regret, if artistic activities ceased to be considered as a whole. And so it would also be if æsthetic feelings, judgments of taste, and ideals of beauty came to be treated only in appendices to works on psychology. It is true that all these notions have irremediably lost their former metaphysical and philosophical importance. But in compensation art and beauty have for modern thinking acquired a social and psychological significance. To determine the part which artistic activities and æsthetic appreciation play in their relation to the other factors of individual and social life—that indeed is a task which is momentous enough to be treated in a science of its own. Modern æsthetic, therefore, has still its own ends, which, if not so ambitious as those of the former, speculative, science of beauty, are nevertheless of no small importance. These ends, however, can no longer be attained by the procedure of the old æsthetic systems. As the problems have changed with changing conditions, so too the methods must be brought into line with general scientific development. Historical and psychological investigation must replace the dialectic treatment of the subject. Art can no longer be deduced from general, philosophical and metaphysical principles; it must be studied—by the methods of inductive psychology—as a human activity. Beauty cannot be considered as a semi-transcendental reality; it must be interpreted as an object of human longing and a source of human enjoyment. In æsthetic proper, as well as in the philosophy of art, every research must start, not from theoretical assumptions, but from the psychological and sociological data of the æsthetic life.

Such a procedure, however, is encumbered with difficulties,

which the writers on speculative æsthetic were scarcely aware of. When theories of art and beauty were based on general, *a priori*, principles, there could not possibly be any doubt as to the point of departure in the several researches. But when we have no assumptions to start from, the very demarcation of the subject may become a matter of uncertainty. In the philosophy of art, to which department of æsthetic I wish to restrict my observations on the present occasion, this difficulty of formulating the *data* and *quasita* constitutes the first, and by no means the least important, problem.

If we embark upon a scientific treatment of art without any preconceived definitions, the aim and conditions of such treatment can only be determined by examining the prevailing notions on the subject, as they are expressed in language and in literature. As an objective interpretation, a theory of art can claim attention only if it conforms to the recognised usage of the principal æsthetic terms. In the various definitions of art which are contained in the different æsthetic systems, we must therefore try to find some point of unity, from which to approach our subject. The difficulties of such a task are evident to any one who has gone through the discouraging experience of reading a history of æsthetic. The investigator who seeks an accurate demarcation of the whole area of art, as distinguished from other departments of life, meets with partial definitions which can be applied only to certain fixed forms of art. We need mention but a few of the most typical instances. Even an ardent admirer of Taine is compelled to admit that his generalisations are too exclusively derived from the study of poetry and the formative arts. In the same way it is only by laborious adjustments that the theory of Vischer can be applied to music and lyric poetry. The aphorisms of Ruskin cannot seriously claim to apply to any but the formative arts. And Mr. Marshall's *Æsthetic Principles*—to adduce one of the most recent attempts in general art-theory—are too obviously those of an expert in architecture. In none of the modern systems has sufficient room been made for certain forms of art which, from the evolutionist's standpoint, are of the highest importance: such as acting, dancing and decoration. All the one-sided definitions are moreover so inconsistent with each other, that it seems impossible to make up for their individual deficiencies by an eclectic combination. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if some writers on art, confused by the bewildering contradictions of æsthetic theories, have called in question the very existence of an universal art-criterion.

By those who adopt this attitude—which seems the more justified in the present state of artistic differentiation—the possibility is denied, not only of all general art-philosophy, but also of all sociological and psychological treatment of artistic manifestations as a whole. Even if all other hypotheses are banished, æsthetic research cannot possibly dispense with the fundamental assumption of the unity of art. But, if we do not insist on too minute and positive demarcations, we shall after all be able to find in most systems at least one common quality which is ascribed to all the different forms of art. Notwithstanding the mutual contradictions of art-theories, the believers in general æsthetic can always appeal to the unanimity with which the majority of authors have upheld the negative criterion of art. Metaphysicians as well as psychologists, Hegelians as well as Darwinists, all agree in declaring, that a work which can be proved to serve any utilitarian, non-æsthetic purpose must not be considered as a genuine work of art. True art has its one end in itself, and rejects every extraneous purpose: such is the doctrine unanimously stated by Kant, Schiller, Spencer, Hennequin, Grosse, and others. And popular opinion agrees in this respect with the conclusions of science. This distinctive quality of independence seems therefore to afford us a convenient starting-point for the treatment of art in general.

Owing to its negative character, this criterion does not give us much information as to the real qualities of art. But even the poorest definition is enough to begin with, if it only holds good with regard to all particular cases. Unfortunately, however, we need only apply the test of independence to existing works of art to find that even this single point of agreement between the different theories is open to dispute. There is scarcely any author, however he may formulate his general definitions of art, who would assess the relative value of art-works according to their degrees of disinterestedness. For instance, no candid man would, nowadays seriously contend that an arabesque composition is *per se* on a higher æsthetical level than a statue or a poem. But we may even go farther. We must question whether every work of art ought to be degraded from its æsthetic rank, if it can be convicted of having served any external, utilitarian purpose. This strict conception of the æsthetic boundaries has been eloquently attacked by Guyau in his celebrated treatise *Le principe de l'art et de la poésie*. Though the ultimate conclusions of this work are perhaps not so clear as might be desired, yet we do not see how his attitude in estimating concrete manifestations of art can be

assailed. It would, to take an example, be absurd to contend that the singing of Taillefer lost in æsthetic value by contributing to the victory of Hastings. And however strictly we may insist upon the requirement that every genuine work of art should have been created purely for its own sake, we cannot possibly conceal the fact that some of the world's finest erotic lyrics were originally composed, not in æsthetic freedom, which is independent of all by-purposes, but with the express end of gaining the ear and the favour of a beloved woman. The influence which such foreign, non-æsthetic motives have exercised on art will also become more and more apparent with increased knowledge of the conditions of æsthetic production. The further the psychological biographer pushes his indiscreet researches into the private life of individual artists, the more often will he find that some form of interest—personal, political, ethical, religious—enters into the so-called disinterested æsthetic activity. Such instances must induce undogmatic authors to relax to some extent the strict application of the artistic criterion. And even those philosophers, who in spite of the historical evidence insist upon applying it, will be compelled to admit having taken for works of genuine art productions which, from their point of view, have no claim to the title.

The danger of such mistakes is all the greater when one has to deal with the lower stages of artistic development. In point of fact recent ethnological researches have conclusively proved that it is not only difficult, but quite impossible, to apply the æsthetic criterion of independence to the productions of savage and barbarous tribes. It is true that the large department of primitive art has not as yet in its entirety been made the subject of systematic study. But in compensation the results which have been arrived at with regard to decoration, its most typical form, are so much the more striking. In almost every case where the ornaments of a tribe have been closely examined, it has appeared that what to us seems a mere embellishment, is for the natives in question full of serious, extra-æsthetic significance. Carvings on weapons and implements, tattooings, woven and plaited patterns, all of which the uncritical observer is apt to take for purely artistic compositions, are now explained as religious symbols, owners' marks or ideograms. There is still room for discussion as to whether in certain individual interpretations the tendency to look for concealed meanings has not been carried too far. But there can be no doubt that the general principles which to many students seemed so fantastic when first formulated by Stolpe, Read, Ehrenreich and

others, have derived additional support from every fresh examination of primitive systems of decoration.

The isolated researches which have been carried on within the department of primitive literature and drama all point in the same direction. Wherever ethnologists have the opportunity of gaining some insight into the inner life of a savage tribe they are surprised at the religious or magical significance which lies concealed behind the apparently most trivial of amusements. And it is to be remarked that they have learned to appreciate this esoteric meaning, not by a closer examination of the manifestations themselves, but through information acquired by intercourse with the natives. There is often not a single feature in a savage dance which would give the uninitiated any reason to suspect the non-æsthetic purpose. When North American Indians, Kafirs or Negroes perform a dance, in which all the movements of the animals they hunt are imitated, we unavoidably see in their antics an instance of primitive, but still purely artistic drama. It is only from the descriptions of Cathin, Lichtenstein and Reade that we learn that these pantomimes have in reality quite as practical a purpose as those imitations and representations of animals by which hunters all over the world try to entice their game within shooting distance. According to the doctrine of sympathetic magic it is indeed an axiomatic truth that the copy of a thing may at any distance influence the thing itself, and that thus a buffalo dance, even when it is performed in the camp, may compel the buffaloes to come within range of the hunters. But the deceptive appearance of disinterestedness, which in these cases might have led one to mistake a mere piece of hunting magic for a specimen of pure dramatic art, is apt to make us cautious about accepting as independently æsthetic any manifestations of primitive man.

In the songs and dances by which savages exhort themselves to work and regulate their exertions we find an aspect of utilitarian advantage which is real and not imaginary. It is also evident that it is this advantage, and not any independent æsthetic pleasure, which is—intentionally or unintentionally—aimed at in the war-pantomimes, the boat-ing songs, dances, etc. And it is no doubt for this reason that music and dance have attained so surprising a development in the lower stages of culture. In trying, therefore, to explain the historical development of art, we are compelled to take into account that foreign purpose which is never acknowledged in art-theory.

If every work of art were really a *Selbstzweck*, standing

quite isolated from all the practical utilities of life, it would be nothing less than a miracle that art can be met with in tribes, which have not yet learnt to satisfy, nor even to feel, the most elementary necessities of life. In such a case it is not music only which would, as Wallace thinks, have to be explained by supernatural causes; primitive art in all its departments would baffle our attempts at rational interpretation. By studying, however, the artistic activities of savage and barbarous man in their connexion with his non-æsthetic life, authors on evolutionary æsthetic have succeeded in solving this great crux of art history. The dances, poems, and even the formative arts of the lower tribes possess indeed, as every ethnologist will admit, unquestionable æsthetic value. But this art is never free and disinterested; it has always a usefulness—real or supposed—and is often even a necessity of life.

An historical conception of art is thus, it appears, incompatible with a strict maintenance of the æsthetic criterion. But it may still be asked whether we are therefore compelled to join Guyau in abolishing all distinctions between art and other manifestations of life. By doing away with the only definition which is common to the majority of æsthetic systems, we should dissociate ourselves from all previous views on art. And it seems hard to believe that all dogmatic writers on æsthetic, one-sided as they may often seem, have founded their theories on a pure fiction. The independent æsthetic activity, which simply aims at its own satisfaction, cannot have been invented for the sake of the systems. The mere fact that so many theories have been proposed for its explanation furnishes, it seems to us, a sufficient proof that the conception of this activity corresponds to some psychological reality. The "self-purpose" has certainly not played so important a part in the practice of artists, as writers on æsthetic would have us believe. It is also impossible to distinguish its effects in individual æsthetic manifestations. But from all we know of the life and work of artists, there appears to be a tendency—more or less consciously followed, it is true, in different cases—to make the work its own end. And in the public we can in the same way notice an inclination—which grows with increasing culture—to regard art as something which exists for its own sake, and to contemplate its manifestations with independent æsthetic attention. Whatever we may think about the genesis of particular pictures and poems, we know that they at least need no utilitarian, non-æsthetic justification in order to be appreciated by us. And with as much assurance as we can ever

feel in comparative psychology we may take it for granted that the same way of looking at art has prevailed in other stages of culture as well. However cautious one may be in drawing conclusions from analogies between higher and lower forms, a closer study of primitive art must needs compel every one to admit that these dances, poems and ornaments, even if they originally served practical, religious or political aims, may at least have come by degrees to be enjoyed in the same way as we enjoy our art. By denying such subjective independence in the creation and enjoyment of art, we should be guilty of the same one-sidedness as those authors who deny that genuine art has ever been influenced by "foreign purposes". If it is presumptuous to adduce any particular works or manifestations in proof of free and independent production, it may be no less audacious to contend that even the most primitive form of art has flourished in tribes destitute of all æsthetic cravings. There is room for discussion on the degree of influence which self-motivated artistic activity has exercised in particular works and manifestations. It may also be made an object of research to determine at which precise stage of development æsthetic attention becomes so emancipated as to entitle us to speak of a pure and free art-life. But we do not think that such inquiries can ever lead to any positive result. The more one studies art, especially primitive art, from a comparative and historical point of view, the more one is compelled to admit the impossibility of deciding where the non-æsthetic motives end and the æsthetic motives begin. The only result we can reach is the somewhat indefinite one that it is as impossible to explain away the artistic purpose as it is to detect its presence in a pure state in any concrete work of art.

For art-philosophy as a science of its own even this non-committal conclusion is of vital importance. It gives us a right to regard all the forms and developments of art as witnesses to an activity which tends to become more and more independent of the immediate necessities of life. But on the other hand an historical study of art shows us that this activity can never be explained by examining concrete works, as we meet with them in reality. Whenever we have to deal with art as a "self-purpose" the need of theoretical abstraction forces itself upon us with irresistible cogency. It is of no avail to argue from the data of art-history, because we can never fully know the psychical origin of the works. The problem presented to us by the tendency to engage in artistic production and artistic enjoyment for

their own sake can only be solved by studying the psychology both of artists and of their public. The "art-impulse" and the "art-sense," as referring to subjective tendencies in creators and spectators are the chief notions with which we have to operate in such an investigation. And when we are obliged to introduce the notion of the "work of art" we have to remember that this term, strictly speaking, refers to an abstract and ideal datum. Only by thus restricting our attention to the psychical facts can we attain any clear conception of that autotelic aspect of art on which so much stress has been laid in all æsthetic philosophy.

It is needless to say, however, that even a purely philosophical interpretation of art would be impossible without a knowledge of the works and manifestations as they appear in real life, with all their extraneous, non-æsthetic elements. The psychological examination must therefore necessarily be supplemented by an historical one. The methods of the latter research cannot be the same as those used in a strictly æsthetic inquiry. And the words will naturally be employed in a different sense. We shall not demand of a poem, a painting or a drama that it should fulfil more than the technical requirements of the several arts. The ornamentation of a vase, *e.g.*, is in this sense a work of art even if it serves a magical, *i.e.*, a supposed practical purpose. Indeed it is most advantageous, if we wish to bring out the influence of sociological factors with the greatest possible clearness, to concentrate our attention upon the very qualities which we have to disregard in the treatment of purely artistic activity. The productions of primitive tribes, in which art is so closely connected with life, supply the most profitable material for such a study. After having examined, in these simple forms, all the sociological aspects of art, it will be possible to place the two art-factors in the most illustrative antithesis, and to study their mutual influence. Thus we shall learn why it is that the concrete work of art, although its historical origin may be entirely non-æsthetic, has always proved so eminently adapted to serve the needs of the purely æsthetic craving. And by starting from the conception of æsthetic activities which has been arrived at on psychological grounds, it will be possible to determine the particular qualities in individual works of art which make them more or less able to satisfy this craving. The peculiar tasks of æsthetic proper, such as the critical estimation of works of art or the formulation of laws for artistic production, can therefore be undertaken only by constant reference to the psychological and sociological principles of art-theory.

If it be admitted that the psychological interpretation of the art-impulse and the sociological interpretation of the work of art are the two important, mutually indispensable problems of evolutionistic art-theory, the order in which these problems are to be treated becomes a mere matter of convenience. In the larger work, to which this paper is intended as an introduction, I have deemed it most convenient to begin with the psychological and end with the historical, or rather sociological, investigation. But it might possibly be quite as methodical to proceed in the inverse order. And it may even be thought unnecessary to divide the treatment into different parts. What I wish to contend is only that a clear and sustained discrimination between the two points of view is indispensable to a successful treatment of the science of art.

It is naturally with a feeling of reluctance that one resorts to new abstractions in a science which has already suffered so much from overabstraction. Art, one would think, ought to be protected against the pedantry of hair-splitting analysis. The inconsistencies of æsthetic theory are, however, of a nature to justify insistence on what may perhaps appear to be unnecessarily subtle distinctions. I can but think that much confusion and futile discussion could be avoided if authors agreed to uphold the distinction between subjective tendencies and objective works.