

## ART.

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GOETHE said once: "Fortunate is he who at an early age knows what art is;" which you may take as a platitude, but Philip Gilbert Hamerton has said that in the whole realm of art literature you will hardly find a sentence of equal significance.

We all have had the experience, either in ourselves or in others, of trying to overcome years of neglect or bad teaching; and often no amount of information, no amount of subsequent training, will neutralize the mistakes of the schools. I fancy most of us have gone through some sort of art-training. Unfortunately for many, that usually has meant merely a sort of encyclopædic survey of the great painters and sculptors of the world. Unless we can learn some of the elements of art, we cannot by mere knowledge of art products remedy our deficiencies.

I want to speak here very briefly about the function of art with respect to occupation, social welfare, and culture, believing that we shall satisfy these needs best if in preparation for occupation we give students a knowledge of form, color, and design; if in preparation for social welfare we consider especially the beauty of environment; and if as a contribution to culture we consider the fine arts and the lesser arts in harmonious relations. Those of us who were educated in the public schools, or even the private schools, twenty or thirty years ago, will have had scarcely any instruction in form, color, and design. I remember very well the style of public-school instruction—if I may quote a personal experience—which obtained in Philadelphia at that time. I stayed in the country late one autumn, and came into school every day, with permission to take one session until two o'clock. The teacher of my class stayed through the lunch hour every day, and for the first time I learned something of her skill in free-hand drawing, when she prepared the blackboard

by a slate pencil for the coming chalk lessons. That was the character of instruction given throughout the schools of Philadelphia at that time. At the end of fifteen years of school life in Philadelphia I am perfectly sure the average student did not have the remotest conception of the elements of art. I presume the other schools were not much better. Even today you go into schools where teaching in art is given; it is still called drawing, and that drawing is still too seldom the means of recording one's own impressions.

Tolstoi defines art as the power of telling someone else what one sees. A little boy gave to his teacher at one time in a sketch his impression of the vacation school by an attempt to show the boy who went and the boy who did not—two very grotesque figures, suggestive of the before and after of patent-medicine advertisements. I have used it as a lantern slide, trying to show how we should make use of our impressions, no matter how rude the art. The grotesqueness of it always strikes the audience, and I have taken it as a reflection not on the boy, but on the audiences, that they did not get an idea when they saw it carried out, because of the crude form. He showed the idea as it came to him, but of course without training he did not have the power of recording it skilfully, of making it vivid. The kindergarten is supposed to begin the removal of those deficiencies from which we suffer, by teaching children form and color. As the kindergarten methods penetrate into the grades, there is given more of the conception of design. I have had the pleasure of visiting some of the manual-training schools in this country, and I would speak especially of the Mechanic Art School in St. Paul, where the endeavor and actual accomplishment with every child are teaching him to express his own ideas. In Chicago there has been the introduction of color-work with children, and it has been found that, while only 50 per cent. can reproduce in black and white, about 99 per cent. succeed in the use of color; which implies that the child has in him usually some artistic idea until crushed out by false methods of instruction.

It has been the custom to stuff children full of facts; as some-

one said recently, we paraphrase the old idea about the little star: "Twinkle, twinkle little star, teacher's told me what you are." Occasionally now they are allowed to find out these facts for themselves. Very few of them, however, acquire these very simple fundamental things—a conception of form, color, and design.

What is the economic value of this form of teaching? The greatest necessity of the workman of today is adaptability. He is frequently stranded for lack of it. I remember living with a friend in London who kept bachelor quarters, and marveling at the skill of his domestic—a man who seemed equally capable in the garden, kitchen, or garret. I wondered that such a versatile man should be found in domestic service. My friend told me he had been a skilled watchmaker who had perfected his special skill so assiduously that he had failed to do anything else, so that when they invented a machine which could do his work, and that was taken away from him, he was stranded; and so he became a house servant. That is the condition of the majority of workmen today, if good workmen; if comparatively inferior and unambitious, the condition will not be so difficult. In the schools of today the power of adaptability should be given chief attention; children should be taught to use their hands to express the ideas of their minds. It is astounding to see what little children can do with clay. Those of us who never got beyond the crude mud pies which we taught ourselves to make after we had escaped from school can scarcely realize what children can do in the schools today.

I think sometimes we hear rather excessive denunciations of the value of reading and writing from such people as John Ruskin; yet, after all, it is asked whether in learning so much from books we have unlearned the capacity for observing with the eyes and executing with the fingers. Beginning with clay and other plastic materials, we can carry children up to a recognition of what a soft finish on a table means, contrasted with the mirror-like tables with which we have been familiar—to realize that the texture of wood signifies something. This is an equipment for industry which it may take years for us to appreciate.

You will witness this curious phenomenon in the world today: a man who can manage men can go with ease from one situation to another; he can go from being an engineer on a railroad like the Illinois Central to the position of an engineer on the Panama Canal—as happened here recently— simply because he has that power of adaptability. But the average workman has not that capacity, and is thus limited in his occupation.

John Ruskin's famous dictum in regard to good architecture is, first, that the material should be good and true; second, the ornament natural; third, the designer left free to work from his heart. We have stifled that capacity in the workman, if he ever had it. I do not believe, of course, that the change of methods in schools will immediately bring large rewards; it will probably bring rebuke from employers. But, after all, there is a growing demand for individual products, and the workmen themselves will not long be content with the humdrum limitations of today. People say, however, that this development of handicraft is reactionary. But that is not the case. There is a movement which is running counter to that of machine industry, which comes very largely from the fact that even in the midst of the mechanical triumphs of today we are insisting upon individual workmanship. The time is coming when either we must go back to lead a primitive life, or we must have the opportunity to express individuality in workmanship; and it is being hastened in the schools today by giving children, not a knowledge of the great sculptures, but the power of design, which emanates from a knowledge of form and color.

A few years ago, after an extension lecture which I gave in an Iowa town, the drawing teacher in discussing the subject gave a little exposition on the blackboard of the meaning of proportion, and drew the outline of a house, and put the windows and doors in where they ought to be. That was twenty years after I left the grade schools, and yet it was the first intimation I had had of what proportion meant in a building. I am afraid there are a great many people quite as ignorant as I was as to any proper conception of form. The most graphic illustration of this is in the decline of colonial architecture at the time we supplanted humble bricklayers by skilled architects. The old colonial build-

ings are invariably satisfactory in form and color. The builders had no education in the schools—only instinct. They had a tradition of form. The moment that generation died out and the trained architects of the schools undertook to draw their conception of colonial architecture, it began to decline. They have not in their souls any tradition of proportion, and they draw something out of their minds which is mathematical and not artistic. Half a century ago in England they were talking about the significance of the oval. Everything was built upon the oval. Everything today is built upon the city building lot. The conception forced upon the architect is the city building lot, and this again is mathematical, being compelled to produce a thing which a mechanical civilization wants.

A friend of mine was standing, or rather sitting, reverently looking at the Venus di Milo recently, when a woman brought in a troop of American girls; and they all stood, craned their necks, and looked at the Venus. Then she led them over, and they looked at the fragments. They looked as tenderly at the fragments as they looked at the statue. They had seen every element of it preserved, and they were satisfied—checked it off, and went home. That is not the attitude of the illiterate. It is the attitude of the average untrained mind until he has seen such an amount of true art that he *knows*. That is the remedy—to see enough until one knows. We can do this in the schools. I repeat, therefore, that in preparation for occupation the most necessary thing is to get the power of adaptability; and that can best be done, not by definite technical training, but by elementary teaching in form, color, and design.

To secure social welfare we must secure beauty in environment. We have made the greatest progress in the decoration of schools, and the landscape architecture outside the building has advanced marvelously in our day. Many will remember the bare white walls and blackboards of the old-time schoolhouse, with nothing to relieve the bleakness unless some teacher could not resist the impulse to put in plants. Now we have frequently good pictures, although too little discrimination and too many of them. Then we have better school grounds. Unfortunately, some schools have none. I have in mind one in Chicago which

stands flush with the sidewalk. The children must play in the street. Back of the school are two very little spaces where the children could not all stand up at once. Of course, we cannot decorate those tiny spaces. We must have courage to attempt greater things. We must get a beautiful environment for the school. Not that the children shall be told just what that means, or that they shall be taken up in order to these pictures, as we would in a good religious ceremony go around and reverently view each one; but in some way or other they will absorb the influences, if given the opportunity. In our efforts to teach new ideas we have unfortunately too often taught them in the same way as the old ideas. An example of this is the two vacation-school children who were viewing with the greatest possible interest the eagles in a cage in Lincoln Park. One said: "Come on, let's go away, or we will have to draw them." They enjoyed them to the utmost until they thought of some formal task. The unconscious influence of those noble birds would have been equally beneficial.

But what are you going to do even with a beautifully decorated building, if after leaving it the children must be turned loose amid the conglomerate architecture of Lake avenue? The best teacher cannot eradicate the influence of bad grammar at home, and the best art teacher cannot eradicate from children the impression of the advertisements along the elevated and steam railroads. Even private residences bear advertisements, probably because the backs and the sides of almost all houses in Chicago are unworthy of anything but advertisements. I am not so sure but the owner is right to have some sort of paint to cover up the sort of brick that you see in some of those buildings. The child cannot go out of this building and keep all that he gets here. Consequently we shall have to undertake a reformation, training this generation as well as the next. That again means going down to the fundamentals. A great many people have on their walls beautiful oil paintings and in their houses hideous furniture; and they do not know it. I do not know whether it is that they put all their souls into the old masters and divest themselves of their surroundings. It is true that music and the fine arts are of infinitely less importance than the

furniture, the hangings, and the kitchen fittings. We can never eradicate those impressions by any amount of education in the fine arts. Until the environment becomes harmonious we are going to undo the work of the schools. If the schools are going to effect anything, they must be met half way by civic and home improvement.

Of course, in cultural improvement we must get a considerable notion of the fine arts, because they are intimately related to culture. Music, literature, sculpture, and painting — we must know something of these if we are to get a knowledge of art; but they are rather the means of finding out things than real knowledge. The average woman's art study club is merely learning to finger the lexicon by cataloguing art products. That is valuable knowledge, but it gives us not one single æsthetic conception. There again we have to go down to the fundamentals. As Ruskin said, to study carefully the Grand Canal in Venice was worth a visit to all the galleries of Europe.

Sargent has painted many beautiful portraits of the millionaire and the millionaire's beautiful daughter, but he has never done anything for a private patron like his decorations for the Boston Library. No painter could rise to such heights in painting the picture of any millionaire as in painting some beautiful and ennobling subject, something that touches his soul. A wonderful influence is sweeping over the country, giving the people a conception of the difference between mural painting and easel painting — a work of art related to a building and a work of art not related to anything. We gain thus not only greater artists, but a culture not merely for the favored people who can go to Europe, but for the multitude who, if they cannot have this abundant knowledge, at least can grasp the fundamental principles that will teach them something of harmony. I take it that it is not impossible with the forces already at work in the schools to teach form, color, and design so as distinctly and valuably to influence the mind of the child and lay the foundation for this culture which will give us that sense of harmony and make for the child of the future a more beautiful environment for the expression of his ideas.