

"Applied Perspective".

by

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Applied Perspective

The most obvious relations of visible objects are those of magnitude and distance. The connection between apparent magnitude and distance is one of the questions learned in infancy. The laws that govern this relation involve profound mathematical principles. The art of representing solids on a plane surface is known as perspective. Of the laws of perspective, antiquity had but little knowledge. Lucretius, observing the effects of aerial perspective and kindred phenomena, sought by ingenious explanations to account for them through his system of materialistic philosophy. But even without a knowledge of the principles of projection, so accustomed are we to adjust our ideas of size to our perceptions of apparent distance that a Chinese landscape, with its notable lack of perspective is to us quite confused and well-nigh unintelligible.

Closely associated with the intellectual value of perspective is its aesthetic value. Not only is the mind assisted to form some idea of distance from the apparent diminution of material objects, but it is relieved and refreshed by the softening of color effects. A landscape that set at naught the principles of aerial perspective would not only be faulty in its scheme of color values, but would also lose a subtle value and indefinite charm - the "enchantment of distance".

As in the material so in the spiritual world there are laws of perspective, which not only enable us to estimate the relative importance of ideas, systems, and institutions, but also bring about symmetry of mental development, systemization of knowledge, and harmony of social order, resulting from that form of the aesthetic impulse

which is characteristic of the nineteenth century.

This matter of perspective should be a prominent subject of consideration to the student, partly because he stands in a position from which he is permitted to survey the great panorama of the world, and hence has a special opportunity for the study of the proportions and relations of things, and partly because it is to the educated classes that we look for the correction of popular errors, such as the undue magnification of objects, causes, and systems; the undue emphasis of petty details in the ornamentation of the social structure to the obscuring of the grand building-lines that represent the fundamental principles in architecture.

Every subject involving the matter of form is a question of perspective. Every field of investigation

in which more than one point of view is possible involves the same great principle. Fawns in religion, when rightly used and appreciated, seek not to increase the distance between the worshiper and his God, but to render the former conscious that the Being whom he addresses is infinitely high and holy. The philosophy of history, in seeking to discover the purpose and trend of events, in emphasizing the leading movements of each epoch and their connection and influence, follows the example of the artist, who maps out his picture-plane and fixes his vanishing points.

The problem of all human society is the problem of the relations of men - relations of magnitude and distance. The history of civilization shows marked progress in the development of the general idea of these relations. Once a single figure toward colossal

in the foreground of the stupendous picture, while the mists of distance obscured the rest. This was monarchy. Later, a group of men looking smaller from their contiguity, filled the foreground. This was aristocracy. Let a man be far enough away, and you can not distinguish him from an ox. Even at the present day, in some parts of the world, a deficient sense of proportion has represented one man standing in the foreground, close beside his brother man, so shrunken and dwindled, as if by distance, that he is undistinguishable from a beast of burden. Sometimes the human beings in this living picture have refused to maintain the position assigned them in the background. Amid horrible jostling and trampling of their neighbors, they have made their way to the fore. This is revolution.

In the United States, the great

problem of man's social and political relations is to be solved. All such questions as the relations of Capital and labor, education, treatment of the criminal and unfortunate classes, pauperism, distinctions of color and sex, foreign immigration, extension or restriction of suffrage, have a bearing upon this great problem. The anarchist and over-zealous reformer cry, "Down with the distinctions that exalt one class and oppress another!" An apparently simple solution. But even if distinctions of wealth were abolished, if differences of sex and color were ignored, if ample provision were made for the culture of mind and heart, inequalities would still exist. So long as the word aristocracy retains a whit of its primal significance, the rule of the best, so long will there be an aristocracy. The advantage of a republican government like our own is that everyone may compete for the honors of entering the

rankes of the aristocracy. For some, however, the struggle must ever be vain. They are pinioned by their past - not alone their individual, but their ancestral past.

One striking example of the social and political problems confronting us is the race question. Even those first from prejudice, largest in sympathy with the oppressed and down-trodden, and most abundant in efforts for their advancement, realize the seriousness of the situation. Some friends of the Negro would advise him to insist upon the recognition of all his social and political rights. Others would counsel him to hold them in abeyance where insistence would mean a conflict. Thus the old, old questions, in varying forms, are ever recurring for solution.

The Divine law that governs the relations of human society is the law of love, the love that on the one hand, works no ill to a neighbor, and on the other, resists

not wil. Atrocious as was the system of Roman Slavery, Paul exerted its victims to obedience; brutal as was the tyranny of Nero, Paul urged the emperor's subjects to submission and reverence. But the Gospel that Paul preached diffused a spirit that in time made slavery and tyranny impossible.

From the Divine standpoint, differences in birth and breeding are minor matters, except in their bearing on character. Even then their influence can be largely overcome. Divine grace in the heart may not always make the rude, ignorant labourer a fit associate for the great and learned, but it may make him a worthy and respectable member of society, and eventually prepare him for the companionship of archangels.

As we study these great questions, we are forced to notice the restrictions or limitations placed on individuals in their various fields of activity—

have popular opinion, the great dictator of humanity, rules.

Let the church, popular opinion dictates, and it is wonderful how the people march to its commands. The minister of the Gospel is denied the right to even express a political opinion in a private way, much less to take an active part in exposing public corruptions which have almost destroyed the nation. However much he may know of the fraud and corruption practiced immediately under his own observation, the pad-lock of eternal secrecy is forced upon his mouth, and he says not a word. He is allowed to scold the church for the neglect of duty, to scan the world; but let him say one word in a modern pulpit condemning the political villainy practiced in the administration and he is at once set down as "an anarchist and a socialist" by a lot of political dupes who have not read enough

to know that these terms are directly opposite in meaning. Let the minister offer the slightest criticism of the United States Congressmen for selling out their hands to English money lords and he is at once denounced as "a fool and a crank".

In this great republic, every man is popularly supposed to be his own politician, but is he? No - most men are subject to the mesmerizing influence of successful leadership, and it is when they blindly follow the dictates of their political leaders that the worse results are seen.

In art, this great King of men dictates. To a great extent the success of the artist depends upon his deference to popular opinion. Yesterday everything was realism in all its grandeur, photographic accuracy, and detail, with nothing left to the imagination; to-day it is impressionism in all its vagueness and uncertainty, with everything left to the imagination; to-morrow what?

Hear then, the conclusion. "Dare to do right," because it is right. Emulate only the highest ideals, wear your clothes, write your books, paint your pictures, vote your even tickets, and worship your even God independently and intelligently without waiting to hear this dictator of humanity say whether you shall or shall not. One grain of moral independence in this world of ours is worth more to the human race than a ton of servility.

Not only in society at large, but also in the individual relations of man, in society in the more limited sense of the word, in the family, in all close bonds of affection, the question of respectability must be considered. Forms, rites, ceremonies, imply not only order, but also distinctions, differences, separations. The observance of forms is characteristic of Pharisaeism, but it does not make one a Pharisee. Friendship, even the

closest and most intimate, has its
 formalities and ceremonials. So long
 as human nature has its limitat-
 ions, so long as there are thoughts
 that may hurt and can not be
 uttered, and desires that can not
 be fulfilled, friendship must pre-
 serve its due measure of distance.
 Those who neglect these observances
 are called bores. The bore flourished
 as early as the first century and
 he is not yet extinct. He means
 to be sympathetic and flattering,
 he offers to share with you his in-
 most soul. Impossible! - even were
 it worth sharing! The calling card,
 the formal note, the arbitrary usage
 of social etiquette have their place.
 Primitive simplicity, with its
 childlike innocence, did not
 need them. Angelic simplicity,
 with its lofty purity, will not;
we live in a world of men and women.

Not less important to observe
 than the relations of men and women
 in society are the relations of ideas.

It is from confusion here that confusion in the outer world arises. There is a hierarchy of ideas in the several realms of intellect, sensibility, and will. The spiritual law of the intellect is that the thinker is greater than the thing. Mind is above matter as the phenomena of the former are above those of the latter. Things tangible and visible are not the only sources of information. Not all truths are from without; there are those - and by no means the least important - that come from within. These are to us familiar statements; but how many from a failure to see these relations of magnitude and distance, have distorted not alone their philosophy, but also all the fair pictures of their lives.

The realm of the Sensibility is for many reasons little understood. Its phenomena, it is true, are noted and classified, but the laws of its operation have never been fully formulated. Very many

declare that it has no laws. Aesthetics, with its comparatively narrow field, is the only attempt of philosophy to solve the great question, to determine base-line and horizon and centre of vision in the picture plane. Even in this department, the tangible results to be obtained are meagre. Countless and diametrically opposed theories of the Beautiful float as in a luminous and roseate mist. The superficial student turns away in despair muttering, "not so". We can at least discover some law, some principle, subjective or objective, or, as some hold, a combination of both, which determines the standard of beauty. "A complete rational interpretation of our irrational nature" may seem like a contradiction in terms, but until we are convinced of its impossibility, we shall continue to hope that such may one day be discovered. One thing is true and generally admitted. The great law of habit extends to the

emotions. The significance of this law in its practical application is far from being appreciated. Were it fully understood, it would do much to neutralize the pernicious influence both of those who regard man a mere "passion puppet," and of those who ignore and deny the emotions. It may be that as systems of education advance, greater attention will be given to the culture of the emotions, and the sensibility, like the intellect, will be supplied with a constant stimulus of all that is beautiful, exalting and ennobling.

The idea of moral perspective, owing to the prevalence of ethical instruction and ethical notions, is not unfamiliar. As applied directly to the will, it means the perception of the relations of single and subordinate acts of will to the final and governing purpose. Questions of expediency, of the relations of means to end, of tolerance in judgment, are all questions of moral perspective.

It is to the drama and fiction that we look for a practical exposition of these themes. History and biography, written often with insufficient information, limited insight, and violent prejudice, can give but little aid. In studying the drama and fiction, brilliant and faulty, but magnificent in their setting forth of moral truth, we should never forget the essential principles of morals, the transcendent lesson of all human experience, the sublime cry ever ringing from the world's greatest teachers, that the one fatal error and sin lies in self-seeking, the one supreme duty and felicity of life is self-renunciation.

May 4, 1898. W. Hardy