

Culture of Aesthetic Emotion.

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CULTURE OF AESTHETIC EMOTION.

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### Culture of Aesthetic Emotion.

"Aesthetic emotion has its origin in the perception of the beautiful." The beautiful really exists in nature, in art, in spiritual character and life. Even the pleasurable feeling with which we greet the apprehension of the beautiful is itself beautiful. An object can not be beautiful if it can give pleasure to no one. It is an ultimate good and must satisfy a natural function to some fundamental capacity of our minds.

But when asked what beauty really is we might reply as St. Augustin said of Time. "If unasked I know but when asked I know not."

The plastic arts, with poetry and music, are the most conspicuous monuments of this human history. They have attracted to their service an amount of effort, genius and honor which is little inferior to that which is given to industry, war or religion. It is not only in fine arts that man shows this susceptibility to beauty but in all the products of human industry he is attracted by appearance, and great sacrifice of time and labor is given to beautify even its most vulgar manufactures. Our clothing, our dwellings and our companions are not selected without reference to their aesthetic qualities. The forms of many animals are due to the survival by sexual selection of the colors and forms most attractive to the eye.

Aesthetic pleasures, however, were practically unknown in the barbarous age of man when all his energy was needed to protect

himself and family and to get a living. But as civilization advanced more time and thought could be given to the consideration of the beautiful. Even the lower classes today, who constantly labor for the necessities of life, have little energy left for aesthetic activity. The earliest attempts of ornament of any kind was the result of a real conception of the beautiful but rude. Through many efforts and failures arose the earliest theorizing of beauty .

"In the poetry, art and music of each nation and period we have evidence that the general mind of the race has from the first been struggling as it were with the ideas of the subject of the beautiful - Ideas which it has never been fully able to grasp. The ideas have not been created by the historical evolutions of the race although sometimes they have been latent, and although their possessors' have been quite unconscious of them. An appreciation of the beauty has followed rather than accompanied the times of greatest natural aspiration and success; so long as political freedom was esteemed the most precious thing a nation could enjoy and so long as it lasted there was much less interest in the beautiful than afterwards."

Aesthetic taste has suffered much from its prejudice against the subjective. It is from the experience of beauty and happiness, from the occasional harmony between our nature and our environment that we draw our conception of the divine life. We may then call beauty a manifestation of God to the senses. To feel beauty is a better thing than to understand why we come to feel it. "To have imagination and taste to love the best, to be carried by the contemplation of nature to a vivid faith in the ideal, all

this is more than any science can hope to be." Those poets and philosophers who impress and stimulate aesthetic activity in us by their experience and examples do a great service for mankind and desire higher honors than the discoveries of historical truth. Beauty has been shown to be the natural and often times the supreme expression of the common principles of our nature.

Aesthetic taste varies with the individual, one may like a certain book, another positively detest it, and as is also true the aesthetic taste changes from age to age as for instance in landscape gardening:- formerly the evergreens were clipped into all sorts of shapes to imitate all kinds of animals, later, geometrical figures, while at the present time they are allowed to assume their natural form. Man's taste varies according to change in the nervous system, his education and his associations. In childhood one may have regarded a certain object as beautiful which to him now is positively in attractive. No two men have exactly the same faculties therefore things can not have for any two exactly the same values. If their dispositions, training and association were the same, objects would appear alike to each, but since they are not what may be entrancing to one may be disagreeable or not even noticed by another. But there is no value unless there is some appreciation of it. There must be in us some trace of sensible delight, otherwise there can be no trace of aesthetic emotion. If we appealed more often to actual feeling, our judgements would be more diverse but much more instructive. If we approach a work of art scientifically for the mere sake of its historical connection or proper classification we do not approach it aesthetically. The discovery of its date, or its author may be otherwise interesting and only

remotely affects our aesthetic appreciation by adding the new association to the direct effect of the piece of work. We learn to value truth more and more as our love and knowledge of nature increases.

There is something artificial in the deliberate pursuit of pleasure. We feel no duty in that direction; but we should and do take naturally to enjoyment after the necessary work of life is done. The freedom and tendency to pleasures without restraint is what is most essential to them. But we no longer mean by work what is done usefully, but what is done unwillingly and by necessity. By pleasure we no longer designate it by what is gained through fruitlessness but by whatever is done naturally and for its own sake, whether it has or has not further profit. The degree of happiness and civilization to which any nation has attained is measured by "the proportion of its energy which is devoted to free and generous pursuits, to the adornment of life and the culture of the imagination." Slavery is a most degrading condition. Man is a slave when all his energy is spent in avoiding suffering and death.

Aesthetic enjoyment may be divided into three elements. The sensuous, the intellectual and the associative.

Sensuous beauty is not the greatest nor most important but it is the most primitive and fundamental and the most universal. Fewer factors are needed to produce it and less training is required to appreciate it. The perfect development of the senses produces a harmony which is the source of continual pleasure. This sensuous beauty enriches the poor man without adding to his labor. When a person looks at a flower or listens to music the nerves of sight or hearing may be so acted upon that aesthetic pleasure is the immediate result of the sensation. The object is at once felt to be

beautiful without stopping to analyze it. Persons, especially children, have almost danced with delight the moment their eyes fell upon the exquisite tints of a hillside of maples in the autumn. In music it is certain simple sensibilities of the ear that are affected. Aesthetic pleasure is largely dependent upon the activity of the eye, the ear, the memory and other functions of the brain.

The sensuous element does not contribute the highest order of pleasure, but the possession of healthy nerves containing stored up energy, capable of responding under the proper stimulus is certainly an addition to those aesthetic pleasures where the associative and thinking elements figure largely. Nerves differ in their power of aesthetic sensibility. As Allen says "The vulgar are pleased by great masses of color especially red, orange and purple which gives their coarse nervous organization the requisite stimulus. The refined with nerves of less caliber but greater discriminativeness require delicate combinations of complementaries and prefer neutral tints to the glare of the primary hues. Children and savages love to dress in all colors of the rainbow." Children's songs are often nothing more than noise, while the primitive songs are but very little better. This, however, does not show an absence of taste but rather the beginning.

If a person is incapable of admiring a picture except in a costly frame or unless it is the work of the great masters, we know that he lacks the aesthetic sense. To cultivate this element of beauty one must be able to give close attention to whatever he is doing, whether it be work or play. When emotion is aroused we should act, if not, half the beauty will be lost.

There are certain colors which give all men pleasure and others which give equal displeasure. Everything which gives indi-



vidual pleasure has a form and meaning of its own. The form will be enjoyed as soon as attention accustoms us to discriminate and recognize these variations, and meaning will gather around them which will give a sympathetic influence in the mind. The colors of the sunset have a brilliancy that attracts attention, and the associations of the evening and of heaven gather around it and give it added beauty and charm. It is thus that the most sensuous of beauties can be full of sentimental suggestions.

There must not be a single element of desire for the beautiful object, otherwise it is not a pure aesthetic emotion. There need be no relation between the person and the object except the opportunity to perceive it. The blue sky, the starry heavens, the rainbow, the music are not impaired by the spectators or listeners. Any number of persons may be delighted with the beautiful without destroying its source. In pleasure it is said we gratify our senses while in the contemplation of the beautiful we are raised above ourselves, the passions are silenced and we are happy in the recognition of a good that we do not seek to possess. The painter does not look at a spring with the eyes of a thirsty man nor does the appreciation of a picture lie in the desire to purchase it. The beauties of nature or of the plastic arts are neither destroyed nor impaired by being enjoyed, but left to remain for the enjoyment of a second beholder.

The fact that one person can see beauty where another can not shows that to a great extent it is intellectual. The sense of beauty differs at different times and periods of an individual life, and that of the race. The mind requires to be educated up to the perception of the higher kinds of beauty. Mere physical beauty may be felt and enjoyed by all who have healthy bodily organs; but to

see and enjoy higher forms of loveliness requires intelligence and training. The person of cultured intellect has the power of concentrating the mind or of giving close attention. He discovers unity, ~~myth~~ rhythm, order and symmetry and sees additional beauty as he traces out these elements. In the construction of the pine tree he discovers that the entire contour of the tree is a cone. Each branch has the conical shape of the conical tree, and that each little branch growing on a larger one is also conical. Any portion that may be cut off is a cone, even the fruit organs are cones. He sees beauty in the discovery of unity between heat, light and electricity. Thus unity and harmony may be traced throughout the whole universe. "He feels a touch of aesthetic feeling in discovering the unity of relation between anything so varied as the leaves of a tree and the lung of man, or the analogy between the human soul and the butterfly." Frances Hutchinson maintains that mere unity or uniformity gives no beauty but with variety there is beauty in proportion to the variety or if given variety alone there is no beauty, but if there be unity combined with the variety there is beauty in proportion to the variety; as for instance, - "When one views a cultivated landscape where bright colors and graceful forms are harmoniously blended he is instantly conscious of a serene pleasure." - This is the emotion of beauty."

There is a marked difference as to the appreciation of beauty. An educated person whose tastes are cultured can discern and appreciate all the manifestations of beauty in nature, in art and also in a person's conduct and appearance. That one whose tastes are not cultivated is blind to all these manifestations except in their simplest aspects. "To conceive and express beauty through colors as in painting; through forms as in sculpture; through sound as in

music; and through metrical language as in poetry is the province of art." The degree of mental refinement to which we reach depends upon the special culture that improves our fitness to judge of that which excites the emotion of beauty.

The study and memorization of poetry is especially conducive to aesthetic emotion. If an educated person takes a journey he will see far more beauty than an ignorant person possibly could. When looking at a building a large part of his pleasure comes through tracing out the symmetry and comparing part with part, or if he knows something of the development of architecture before going he will gain greater pleasure.

Association is a great factor in aesthetic emotion; for instance when viewing a wide field of waving grain, a great part of our aesthetic feeling comes from the thought of the many to be fed and sustained by the grain and of the blessing associated with it; or when looking at a ruined tower which is nothing more than an aggregation of stone and lime, our minds go back to the past days and deeds of chivalry. There are persons who can see no beauty in a ragged mountain simply because they lack the associative power. To get the fullest amount of beauty from association requires broad culture. One must be well acquainted with history, literature, and especially the biographies of our greatest poets and historians. If a traveler visits a noted place without knowing its history he gains comparatively little pleasure to what he otherwise would. The more one knows of the associations clustering around the various places he visits the more aesthetic pleasure he will receive. A word, for instance, is often beautiful to us, simply by virtue of its meaning and association.

One form of beauty is that of order. Every aesthetic

phenomena expresses the idea of order; that the world is not a confused mass of units with no bond of unit but a perfect system of law, harmony and truth. In appreciating all beauty the mind projects its own life of joyful and worthy activity into the object appreciated as beautiful. If one has no beautiful thoughts he can not express himself beautifully, so it is with viewing a landscape or listening to music, if he has no beauty to give he receives none. If one meets a sweet innocent child and has nothing but hate in his heart he can discern no beauty there,- to him there is no beauty.

To see beauty one must cultivate a love not only for nature but for humanity. He must free his attention from self and make it the secondary thought. If a person thinks only of himself it is hard for him to see beauty in anything but self. If one cultivates the habit of discovering all the beauty possible from an object and leaving unnoticed all disagreeable and ugly elements, he has taken a great step in not only making his own life happy, but the lives of all those with whom he comes in contact. For we know if one cultivates a melancholy mood and always looks on the dark side of life, he receives little enjoyment, so it is with beauty, unless the heart is open ready to receive and give,- beauty passes unnoticed. Each one realizes the ethical ideal in himself as best he may by shaping after it his own character and conduct. In contemplating beautiful objects a person derives suggestions and chooses to shape some kind of an artistic object for himself and this aids in enobling mankind.

Imagination is necessary fully to admire beautiful objects. The simplest landscape, picture or melody which is to appear beautiful requires a free movement of the constructive imagination.

Music, architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry and the drama are acknowledged by almost universal consent by those regarding them from appropriate points of view as possessing the power of awakening aesthetical appreciation.

Certain combinations of certain factors of real being when perceived appear beautiful to the perceiving mind but we can not tell why. Change is necessary to the characterization of every beautiful object. The change is the suggestion or representation of movement. "The movement which is beautiful must have a certain semblance of freedom and this must be used in self limitation to an idea."