

PAINTING AND SCULPTURE.

IN the days of Michel Angelo, perhaps even in the earlier time of Grecian Art, certainly often since, the question has been discussed of the comparative dignity of Painting and Sculpture. The generous critic shrinks from the use of the words higher and lower, when applied to art, and yet I sometimes feel that these terms of comparison are among the limitations to which we must submit, while we continue human, as we accept our bodies and language itself, availing ourselves of them as best we may, until we gain that mount of vision, from which nothing is high nor low nor great nor small. Doubtless for everything that is gained something is lost, and yet if the thing gained is more than the lost, then comes in legitimately the idea of superiority. In my lonely hours of thought, I love to substitute, for these objectionable terms of comparison, those of means and ends, results, causes and effects, and so forth, and though deeply conscious of my ignorance on the subject of Art, I have often thought of the relation of its different departments to each other, and always end with the conclusion that Sculpture is the result of all the other arts, the lofty interpreter of them all; not in the order of time, but in the truer one of affinities. Phidias sits by the side of Plato, uttering in marble, as his brother philosopher in words, his profound interpretation of all that had gone before, the result of his deep penetration into what Greece had acted, Homer sung, and Æschylus and Sophocles elevated into the region of sculpture and philosophy. The Homeric poem, the Orphic hymn, the Delphic temple, the Persian war, each was entire of itself, and contained within itself the hint, the germ of all that after time might ever be, but it waited the sculptor's touch, the sage's insight, to tell its history, to detect its immortality, to transmute it from an historical fact to a prophecy. The preparatory art of painting probably existed too in Greece, as certainly as the epic and the drama, though the traces of this art are faint in her history; for painting is the epic poem, the drama, uttering itself in another form, and the soil that produces one will produce the other. My theory is confirmed to me by the

experience of life. With every individual, after the feeling that prompts to action has died away, and the action is achieved, the mind pauses, and without any conscious reviewing of the details of experience, looks with quiet eye into its present state, which is the result of all before. This state of lofty contemplation, of deepening knowledge of oneself and the universe, is the end for which feeling warms and action strengthens the intellect. He that doeth shall know. Love prompted the divine essence to pass into the varied existence of this fair outward creation. Then followed the pause, and the sentence passed in the three words, "it is good," contains all that the highest thought has since discovered of the universe in which we dwell. Sculpture is the pause of art in the swift current of the life of nations, which is depicted glowing in the drama and on canvass; poetry and color idealizing it somewhat for its master's hand. The drama and painting are transfigured by philosophy and sculpture, as the human countenance by death. The departing soul, in the pause between its two lives, impresses itself as it never did before on the form of our friend. We read in this last impress the interpretation of its past history, the clear prophecy of its high possibilities, always deciphered confusedly before amid the changing hues, the varying lights and shadows of its distracted earthly life.

It seems to me that sculpture has not completed its circle. It is finished for Grecian life, and so is philosophy; but the modern world, modern life, is yet to be stamped with the seal of both. The materials for a future philosophy will be less pure and simple, but richer and more varied than those of the elder world. There can be no pure epic, no single motive for a nation's action, no severely chaste drama (almost approaching sculpture in its simplicity), no bursting forth of burning lyric, one gush from the soul in its primal freshness. Modern life is too complicated for this, but a nobler and sterner sculpture in words or marble, than our race has yet known, may be in reserve for it,—gifted with a restoring power that may bring it back to unity. Jesus loved and lived, then came the pause—It is finished. This little sentence summed up all the agitated moments of his yet unrecorded individual earthly history. The Plato of *Christianity* is yet

waited for. "The hands of color and design" have reproduced to Christendom every event of Jesus's sacred history, working in the church and for the church. Will the gazing world wait in vain for the Christian Phidias, who shall lift this history out of the dim twilight of experience, and plant it in marble for eternity?

The old fable of the stones arising and forming themselves into noble structures at the sound of the lyre, has been used to prove that Music and Architecture are sister arts. Does it not prove quite the reverse, that Architecture arose at the bidding of Music, is kindred, but inferior; not a vassal or equal, but an humble friend, unless the Scripture announcement holds good in arts as in the moral world—let him that is greatest among you be as a servant?

Such are the limitations of humanity that inequality is a proof of the inspiration of our work, perhaps also of our life. We are vessels too frail to receive the divine influx, except in wide measure, at wide intervals; hence the patched up nature, the flagging and halting of an epic, often of a drama of high merit.

Goethe has said that "art has its origin in the effort of the individual to preserve himself from the destroying power of the whole." This for the origin of the useful arts seems an adequate explanation, but not for the fine arts; for if any one thing constitutes the difference between the two, is it not that the useful resist nature, and the others work with it and idealize it? Architecture, as it arises protectingly against the unfriendly external powers, takes a lower place than the other fine arts, and at its commencement can hardly be considered as one of them. It is hardly a satisfactory definition of art, though nearly allied to Goethe's, that it perpetuates what is fleeting in nature; not even of statuary, which snatches the attitude and expression of the moment, and fixes it forever.

I have been watching the flight of birds over a meadow near me, not as an augur, but as a lover of nature. A certain decorousness, and precision, about their delicate course has, for the first time, struck my eye. They are free and bold—but not alone free and bold. Perhaps perfect freedom for man would have the same result, if he grew up in it, and did not ruffle his plumage by con-

tending for it. If it were his unalienable birthright, and not his hard-earned acquisition, would he not wear it gracefully, gently, reservedly? Poor human being, all education is adjusting fetters to thy delicate limbs, and all true manhood is the strife to burst them; happy art thou, if aught remains to thee but strength!
