Originalveröffentlichung in: Westminster Review (1867) S. 80-110

Art. IV.—Winckelmann.

The History of Ancient Art among the Greeks. By John Winckelmann. Translated from the German by G. H. Lodge. 8vo. London: 1850.

Biographische Aufsätze. Von Otto Jahn. Leipzig, 1866.

GOETHE'S fragments of art criticism contain a few pages of strange pregnancy on the character of Winckelmann. He speaks of the teacher who had made his career possible, but whom he had never seen, as of an abstract type of culture, consummate, tranquil, withdrawn already into the region of ideals, yet retaining colour from the incidents of a passionate intellectual life. He classes him with certain works of art possessing an inexhaustible gift of suggestion, to which criticism may return again and again with undiminished freshness. Hegel, in his Lectures on the Philosophy of Art, estimating the work of his predecessors, has also passed a remarkable judgment on Winckelmann's writings. "Winckelmann by contemplation of the ideal works of the ancients received a sort of inspiration through which he opened a new sense for the study of art. He is to be regarded as one of those who in the sphere of art have known how to initiate a new organ for the human spirit." That it has given a new sense, that it has laid open a new organ, is the highest that can be said of any critical effort. It is interesting then to ask what kind of man it was who thus laid open a new organ? Under what conditions was that effected?

Johann Joachim Winckelmann was born at Stendal, in Brandenburg, in 1717. The child of a poor tradesman, he enacted in early youth an obscure struggle, the memory of which ever remained in him as a fitful cause of dejection. In 1763, in the full emancipation of his spirit, looking over the beautiful Roman prospect, he writes, "One gets spoiled here; but God owed me this; in my youth I suffered too much." Destined to assert and interpret the charm of the Hellenic spirit, he served first a painful apprenticeship in the tarnished intellectual world of Germany in the earlier half of the eighteenth century. Passing out of that into the happy light of the antique he had a sense of exhilaration almost physical. We find him as a child in the dusky precincts of a German school hungrily feeding on a few colourless books. The rector of this school grows blind; Winckelmann becomes his famulus. The old man would have had him study, theology. Winckelmann, free of the rector's library, chooses rather to become familiar with the Greek classics. Herodotus and Homer win, with their "vowelled" Greek, his

warmest cult. Whole nights of fever are devoted to them ; disturbing dreams of an Odyssey of his own come to him. "Il se sentit attiré vers le Midi, avec ardeur," De Stäel says of him ; "on retrouve encore souvent dans les imaginations Allemandes quelques traces de cet amour du soleil, de cette fatigue du Nord, qui entraina les peuples septentrionaux dans les contrées meridionales. Un beau ciel fait naître des sentiments semblables à l'amour de la patrie."

To most of us, after all our steps towards it, the antique world, in spite of its intense outlines, its perfect self-expression, still remains faint and remote. To him, closely limited except on the side of the ideal, building for his dark poverty a house not made with hands, it early came to seem more real than the present. In the fantastic plans of travel continually passing through his mind, to Egypt, for instance, and France, there seems always to be rather a wistful sense of something lost to be regained, than the desire of discovering anything new. Goethe has told us how in his eagerness to handle the antique he was interested in the insignificant vestiges of it which the neighbourhood of Strasburg contained. So we hear of Winckelmann's boyish antiquarian wanderings among the ugly Brandenburg sandhills. Such a conformity between himself and Winckelmann Goethe would have gladly noted.

At twenty-one he enters the University of Halle, to study theology, as his friends desire ; instead he becomes the enthusiastic translator of Herodotus. The condition of Greek learning in German schools and universities had fallen, and Halle had no professors who could satisfy his sharp intellectual craving. Of his professional education he always speaks with scorn, claiming to have been his own teacher from first to last. His appointed teachers did not perceive that a new source of culture was within their hands. "Homo vagus et inconstans," one of them pedantically reports of the future pilgrim to Rome, unaware on which side his irony was whetted. When professional education confers nothing but irritation on a Schiller no one ought to be surprised, for Schiller and such as he are primarily spiritual adventurers. But that Winckelmann, the votary of the gravest of intellectual traditions, should get nothing but an attempt at suppression from the professional guardians of learning, is what may well surprise us.

In 1743 he became conrector of a school at Seehausen. This was the most *ennuyant* period of his life. Notwithstanding a success in dealing with children, which seems to testify to something simple and primeval in his nature, he found the work of teaching very depressing. Engaged in this work, he writes that he still has within a longing desire to attain to the knowledge of

beauty; "sehnlich wünschte zur Kenntniss des Schönen zu gelangen." He had to shorten his nights, sleeping only four hours, to gain time for reading. On Sundays, too, there were the rector's sermons, during which, however, he could read Homer. Here Winckelmann made a step forward in culture. He multiplied his intellectual force by detaching from it all flaccid interests. He renounced mathematics and law, in which his reading had been considerable, all but the literature of the arts. Nothing was to enter into his life unpenetrated by its central enthusiasm. At this time he undergoes the charm of Voltaire. Voltaire belongs to that flimsier, more artificial classical tradition which Winckelmann was one day to supplant by the clear ring, the eternal outline of the genuine antique. But it proves the authority of such a gift as Voltaire's, that it allures and wins even those born to supplant it. Voltaire's impression on Winckelmann was never effaced; and it gave him a consideration for French literature which contrasts with his contempt for the literary products of Germany. German literature transformed, siderealized, as we see it in Goethe, reckons Winckelmann among its initiators. But Germany at that time presented nothing in which he could have anticipated *Iphigénie* and the formation of an effective classical tradition in German literature.

Under this purely literary influence Winckelmann protests against Christian Wolff and the philosophers. Goethe in speaking of this protest alludes to his own obligations to Emmanuel Kant. Kant's influence over the culture of Goethe, which he tells us could not have been resisted by him without loss, consisted in a severe limitation to the concrete. But he adds that in born antiquarians like Winckelmann, constant handling of the antique with its eternal outline maintains that limitation as effectually as a critical philosophy. Plato, however, saved so often for his redeeming literary manner, is excepted from Winckelmann's proscription of the philosophers. The modern most often meets Plato on that side which seems to pass beyond Plato into a world no longer pagan, based on the conception of a spiritual life. But the element of affinity which he presents to Winckelmann is that which is wholly Greek and alien from the Christian world, represented by that group of brilliant youths in the Lysis, still uninfected by any spiritual sickness, finding the end of all endeavour in the aspects of the human form, the continual stir and motion of a comely human life.

This new-found interest in Plato's writings could not fail to increase his desire to visit the countries of the classical tradition. "It is my misfortune," he writes, "that I was not born to great place, wherein I might have had cultivation and the opportunity of following my instinct and forming myself." Probably the

purpose of visiting Rome was already formed, and he silently preparing for it. Graf Bünau, the author of an historical work then of note, had collected at Nöthenitz, near Dresden, a valuable library, now part of the library of Dresden. In 1784 Winckelmann wrote to Bünau in halting French. "He is emboldened," he says, "by Bünau's indulgence for needy men of letters." He desires only to devote himself to study, having never allowed himself to be dazzled by favourable prospects in the church. He hints at his doubtful position "in a metaphysical age, when humane literature is trampled under foot. At present," he goes on, "little value is set on Greek literature, to which I have devoted myself so far as I could penetrate when good books are so scarce and expensive." Finally he desires a place in some corner of Bünau's library. "Perhaps at some future time I shall become more useful to the public if, drawn from obscurity in whatever way, I can find means to maintain myself in the capital."

Soon after we find Winckelmann in the library at Nöthenitz. Thence he made many visits to the collection of antiques at Dresden. He became acquainted with many artists, above all with Oeser, Goethe's future friend and master, who, uniting a high culture with a practical command of art, was fitted to minister to Winckelmann's culture. And now there opened for him a new way of communion with the Greek life. Hitherto he had handled the words only of Greek poetry, stirred indeed and roused by them, yet divining beyond the words an unexpressed pulsation of sensuous life. Suddenly he is in contact with that life still fervent in the relics of plastic art. Filled as our culture is with the classical spirit, we can hardly imagine how deeply the human mind was moved when at the Renaissance, in the midst of a frozen world, the buried fire of ancient art rose up from under the soil. Winckelmann here reproduces for us the earlier Renaissance sentiment. On a sudden the imagination feels itself free. How facile and direct, it seems to say, is this life of the senses and the understanding when once we apprehend it! That is the more liberal life we have been seeking so long, so near to us all the while. How mistaken and roundabout have been our efforts to reach it by mystic passion and religious reverie; how they have deflowered the flesh; how little they have emancipated us! Hermione melts from her stony posture, and the lost proportions of life right themselves. There, is an instance of Winckelmann's tendency to escape from abstract theory to intuition, to the exercise of sight and touch. Lessing in the *Laocoon*, has finely theorized on the relation of poetry to plastic art; and Hegel can give us theoretical reasons why not poetry but sculpture should be the most sincere and exact expression of the Greek ideal. By a happy, unperplexed dexterity,

Winckelman solves the question in the concrete. It is what Goethe calls his Gewahrwerden der Griechischen Kunst, his *finding* of Greek art.

Through the tumultuous richness of Goethe's culture, the influence of Winckelmann is always discernible as the strong, regulative under-current of a clear antique motive. "One learns nothing from him," he says to Eckermann, "but one becomes something." If we ask what the secret of this influence was, Goethe himself will tell us: elasticity, wholeness, intellectual integrity. And yet these expressions, because they fit Goethe, with his universal culture, so well, seem hardly to describe the narrow, exclusive interest of Winckelmann. Doubtless Winckelmann's perfection is a narrow perfection; his feverish nursing of the one motive of his life is a contrast to Goethe's various energy. But what affected Goethe, what instructed him and ministered to his culture, was the integrity, the truth to its type of the given force. The development of this force was the single interest of Winckelmann, unembarrassed by anything else in him. Other interests, religious, moral, political, those slighter talents and motives not supreme, which in most men are the waste part of nature, and drain away their vitality, he plucked out and cast from him. The protracted longing of his youth is not a vague romantic longing; he knows what he longs for, what he wills. Within its severe limits his enthusiasm burns like lava. "You know," says Lavater, speaking of Winckelmann's physiognomy, "that I consider ardour and indifference by no means incompatible in the same character. If ever there was a striking instance of that union, it is in the countenance before us." "A lowly childhood," says Goethe, "insufficient instruction in youth, broken, distracted studies in early manhood; the burden of school-keeping! He was thirty years old before he enjoyed a single favour of fortune; but as soon as he had attained to an adequate condition of freedom, he appears before us consummate and entire, complete in the ancient sense."

But his hair is turning grey, and the south is not reached yet. The Saxon court had become Catholic. The way to favour at Dresden was through Romish ecclesiastics. Probably the thought of a profession of the Catholic religion was not new to Winckelmann. Once he had thought of begging his way to Rome, from cloister to cloister, under the pretence of a disposition to change his faith. In 1751 the papal nuncius Archinto was one of the visitors at Nöthenitz. He suggested Rome as a stage for Winckelmann's attainments, and held out the hope of a place in the papal library. Cardinal Passionei, charmed with Winckelmann's beautiful Greek writing, was ready to play the part of Mæcenas, on condition of the necessary change being made. Winckel-

mann accepted the bribe and visited the nuncius at Dresden. Unquiet still at the word profession, not without a struggle, he joined the Romish Church, July 11th, 1754.

Goethe boldly pleads that Winckelmann was a pagan, that the landmarks of Christendom meant nothing to him. It is clear that he intended to deceive no one by his disguise; fears of the Inquisition are sometimes visible during his life in Rome; he entered Rome notoriously with the works of Voltaire in his possession;—the thought of what Bünau might be thinking of him seems to have been his greatest difficulty. On the other hand, he may have had a sense of something grand, primeval, pagan, in the Catholic religion. Casting the dust of Protestantism off his feet—Protestantism which at best had been one of the *ennuis* of his youth—he might reflect that while Rome had reconciled itself to the Renaissance, the Protestant principle in art had cut off Germany from the supreme tradition of beauty. And yet to that transparent nature, with its simplicity as of the earlier world, the loss of absolute sincerity must have been a real loss. Goethe understands that Winckelmann had made this sacrifice. He speaks of the doubtful charm of renegadism as something like that which belongs to a divorced woman, or to "Wildbret mit einer kleinen Andeutung von Fäulniss." Certainly at the bar of the highest criticism Winckelmann is more than absolved. The insincerity of his religious profession was only one incident of a culture in which the moral instinct, like the religious or political, was lost in the artistic. But then the artistic interest was that by desperate faithfulness to which Winckelmann was saved from that mediocrity which, breaking through no bounds, moves ever in a bloodless routine, and misses its one chance in the life of the spirit and the intellect. There have been instances of culture developed by every high motive in turn, and yet intense at every point; and the aim of our culture should be to attain not only as intense but as complete a life as possible. But often the higher life is only possible at all on condition of a selection of that in which one's motive is native and strong; and this selection involves the renunciation of a crown reserved for others. Which is better, to lay open a new sense, to initiate a new organ for the human spirit, or to cultivate many types of perfection up to a point which leaves us still beyond the range of their transforming power? Savonarola is one type of success; Winckelmann is another. Criticism can reject neither, because each is true to itself. Winckelmann himself explains the motive of his life when he says, "It will be my highest reward if posterity acknowledges that I have written worthily."

For a time he remained at Dresden. There his first book appeared, illustrated by Oeser, "Thoughts on the imitation of Greek

works of art in painting and sculpture." Full of obscurities as it was, obscurities which baffled but did not offend Goethe when he first turned to art-criticism, its purpose was trenchant, an appeal from the artificial classicism of the day to the study of the antique. The book was well received, and a pension was supplied through the king's confessor. In September 1755 he started for Rome, in the company of a young Jesuit. He was introduced to Raphael Mengs, a painter then of note, and found a home near him, in the artists' quarter, in a place where he could "overlook far and wide the eternal city." At first he was perplexed with the sense of being a stranger on what was to him native soil. "Unhappily," he cries in French, often selected by him as the vehicle of strong feeling, "I am one of those whom the Greeks call ὀψιμαθεῖς. I have come into the world and into Italy too late." More than thirty years afterwards, Goethe also, after many aspirations and severe preparation of mind, visited Italy. In early manhood, just as he, too, was *finding* Greek art, the rumour of that high artist's life of Winckelmann in Italy had strongly moved him. At Rome, spending a whole year drawing from the antique, in preparation for *Iphigénie*, he finds the stimulus of Winckelmann's memory ever active. Winckelmann's Roman life was simple, primeval, Greek. His delicate constitution permitted him the use only of bread and wine. Condemned by many as a renegade, he had no desire for places of honour, but only to see his merits acknowledged and existence assured to him. He was simple, without being niggardly; he desired to be neither poor nor rich.

Winckelmann's first years in Rome present all the elements of an intellectual situation of the highest interest. The beating of the intellect against its bars, the sombre aspects, the alien traditions, the still barbarous literature of Germany, are far off; before him are adequate conditions of culture, the sacred soil itself, the first tokens of the advent of the new German literature, with its broad horizons, its boundless intellectual promise. Dante, passing from the darkness of the *Inferno*, is filled with a sharp and joyful sense of light which makes him deal with it in the opening of the *Purgatorio* in a wonderfully touching and penetrative way. Hellenism, which is pre-eminently intellectual light—modern culture may have more colour, the mediæval spirit greater heat and profundity, but Hellenism is pre-eminent for light—has always been most successfully handled by those who have crept into it out of an intellectual world in which the sombre elements predominate. So it had been in the ages of the Renaissance. This repression, removed at last, gave force nd glow to Winckelmann's native affinity to the Hellenic

spirit. "There had been known before him," says De Stäel, "learned men, who might be consulted like books: but no one had, if I may say so, made himself a pagan for the purpose of penetrating antiquity." *On exécute mal ce qu'on n'a pas conçu soi-même*"*—words spoken on so high an occasion are true in their measure of every genuine enthusiasm. Enthusiasm—That, in the broad Platonic sense of the *Phœdrus*, was the secret of his divinatory power over the Hellenic world. This enthusiasm, dependent as it is to a great degree on bodily temperament, gathering into itself the stress of the nerves and the heat of the blood, has a power of reinforcing the purer motions of the intellect with an almost physical excitement. That his affinity with Hellenism was not merely intellectual, that the subtler threads of temperament were inwoven in it, is proved by his romantic, fervid friendships with young men. He has known, he says, many young men more beautiful than Guido's archangel. These friendships, bringing him in contact with the pride of human form, and staining his thoughts with its bloom, perfected his reconciliation with the spirit of Greek sculpture. A letter on taste, addressed from Rome to a young nobleman, Friedrich von Berg, is the record of such a friendship.

"I shall excuse my delay," he begins, "in fulfilling my promise of an essay on the taste for beauty in works of art, in the words of Pindar. He says to Agesidamus, a youth of Locri, ἰδέᾳ τε καλὸν, ὥρᾳ τε κεκραμένον, whom he had kept waiting for an intended ode, that a debt paid with usury is the end of reproach. This may win your good-nature on behalf of my present essay, which has turned out far more detailed and circumstantial than I had at first intended.

"It is from yourself that the subject is taken. Our intercourse has been short, too short both for you and me; but the first time I saw you the affinity of our spirits was revealed to me. Your culture proved that my hope was not groundless, and I found in a beautiful body a soul created for nobleness, gifted with the sense of beauty. My parting from you was, therefore, one of the most painful in my life; and that this feeling continues our common friend is witness, for your separation from me leaves me no hope of seeing you again. Let this essay be a memorial of our friendship, which, on my side, is free from every selfish motive, and ever remains subject and dedicate to yourself alone."

The following passage is characteristic:—

"As it is confessedly the beauty of *man* which is to be conceived under our general idea, so I have noticed that those who are ob-

---

* Words of Charlotte Corday. See Quinet: La Revolution. Livre 13e, chap. iv.

servant of beauty only in women, and are moved little or not at all by the beauty of men, seldom have an impartial, vital, inborn instinct for beauty in art. To such persons the beauty of Greek art will ever seem wanting, because its supreme beauty is rather male than female. But the beauty of art demands a higher sensibility than the beauty of nature, because the beauty of art, like tears shed at a play, gives no pain, is without life, and must be awakened and repaired by culture. Now, as the spirit of culture is much more ardent in youth than in manhood, the instinct of which I am speaking must be exercised and directed to what is beautiful before that age is reached at which one would be afraid to confess that one had no taste for it."

Certainly, of that beauty of living form which regulated Winckelmann's friendships, it could not be said that it gave no pain. One notable friendship, the fortune of which we may trace through his letters, begins with an antique, chivalrous letter in French, and ends noisily in a burst of angry fire. Far from reaching the quietism, the bland indifference of art, such attachments are nevertheless more susceptible than any others of equal strength of a purely intellectual culture. Of passion, of physical stir, they contain just so much as stimulates the eye to the last lurking delicacies of colour and form. These friendships, often the caprices of a moment, make Winckelmann's letters, with their troubled colouring, an instructive but bizarre addition to the history of Art—that shrine of grave and mellow light for the mute Olympian family. Excitement, intuition, inspiration, rather than the contemplative evolution of general principles, was the impression which Winckelmann's literary life gave to those about him. The quick, susceptible enthusiast, betraying his temperament even in appearance, by the olive complexion, the deep-seated, piercing eyes, the rapid movements, apprehended the subtlest principles of the Hellenic manner not through the understanding, but by instinct or touch. A German biographer of Winckelmann has compared him to Columbus. That is not the happiest of comparisons; but it reminds one of a passage in which Edgar Quinet describes Columbus's famous voyage. His science was often at fault; but he had a way of estimating at once the slightest indication of land in a floating weed or passing bird; he seemed actually to come nearer to nature than other men. And that world in which others had moved with so much embarrassment, seems to call out in Winckelmann new senses fitted to deal with it. He is *en rapport* with it; it penetrates him, and becomes part of his temperament. He remodels his writings with constant renewal of insight; he catches the thread of a whole sequence of laws in some hollowing of the hand, or dividing of the hair; he seems to realize that fancy of the reminiscence of a forgotten know-

ledge hidden for a time in the mind itself, as if the mind of one φιλοσοφήσας πότε μέτ' ἔρωτος, fallen into a new cycle, were beginning its intellectual culture over again, yet with a certain power of anticipating its results. So comes the truth of Goethe's judgment on his works; they are *ein Lebendiges fur die Lebendigen geschrieben, ein Leben selbst.*

In 1758, Cardinal Albani, who possessed in his Roman villa a precious collection of antiques, became Winckelmann's patron. Pompeii had just opened its treasures; Winckelmann gathered its first fruits. But his plan of a visit to Greece remained unfulfilled. From his first arrival in Rome he had kept the *History of Ancient Art* ever in view. All his other writings were a preparation for it. It appeared, finally, in 1764; but even after its publication Winckelmann was still employed in perfecting it. It is since his time that many of the most significant examples of Greek art have been submitted to criticism. He had seen little or nothing of what we ascribe to the age of Phidias; and his conception of Greek art tends, therefore, to put the mere elegance of imperial society in place of the severe and chastened grace of the palæstra. For the most part he had to penetrate to Greek art through copies, imitations and later Roman art itself; and it is not surprising that this turbid medium has left in Winckelmann's actual results much that a more privileged criticism can correct.

He had been twelve years in Rome. Admiring Germany had made many calls to him; at last, in 1768, he set out on a visit with the sculptor Cavaceppi. As he left Rome a strange inverted home sickness came upon him. He reached Vienna; there he was loaded with honours and presents; other cities were awaiting him. Goethe, then nineteen years old, studying art at Leipzig, was expecting his coming with that wistful eagerness which marked his youth, when the news of Winckelmann's murder arrived. All that *fatigue du Nord* had revived with double force. He left Vienna, intending to hasten back to Rome. At Trieste a delay of a few days occurred. With characteristic openness Winckelmann had confided his plans to a fellow-traveller, a man named Arcangeli, and had shown him the gold medals which he had received at Vienna. Arcangeli's avarice was roused. One morning he entered Winckelmann's room under pretence of taking leave; Winckelmann was then writing "memoranda for the future editor of the *History of Art*," still seeking the perfection of his great work; Arcangeli begged to see the medals once more. As Winckelmann stooped down to take them from the chest, a cord was thrown round his neck. Some time after a child, whose friendship Winckelmann had made to beguile the delay, knocked at the door, and receiving

no answer, gave an alarm. Winckelmann was found dangerously wounded, and died a few hours later, after receiving the sacraments of the Romish church. It seemed as if the gods, in reward for his devotion to them, had given him a death which, for its swiftness and its opportunity, he might well have desired. "He has," says Goethe, "the advantage of figuring in the memory of posterity as one eternally able and strong, for the image in which one leaves the world is that in which one moves among the shadows." Yet, perhaps, it is not fanciful to regret that that meeting with Goethe did not take place. Goethe, then in all the pregnancy of his wonderful youth, still unruffled by the press and storm of his earlier manhood, was awaiting Winckelmann with a curiosity of the noblest kind. As it was, Winckelmann became to him something like what Virgil was to Dante. And Winckelmann, with his fiery friendships, had reached that age and that period of culture at which emotions, hitherto fitful, sometimes concentrate themselves in a vital, unchangeable relationship. German literary history seems to have lost the chance of one of those famous friendships the very tradition of which becomes a stimulus to culture, and exercises an imperishable influence.

In one of the *stanze* of the Vatican Raphael has commemorated the tradition of the Catholic religion. Along a strip of infinitely quiet sky, broken in upon by the beatific vision, are ranged the great personages of Christian history, with the Sacrament in the midst. The companion fresco presents a very different company, Dante only appearing in both. Surrounded by the muses of Greek mythology, under a thicket of myrtles, sits Apollo, with the sources of Castalia at his feet. On either side are grouped those on whom the spirit of Apollo descended, the classical and Renaissance poets, to whom the waters of Castalia come down, a river making glad this other city of God. In this fresco it is the classical tradition, the orthodoxy of taste, that Raphael commemorates. Winckelmann's intellectual history authenticates the claims of this tradition in human culture. In the countries where that tradition arose, where it still lurked about its own artistic relics, and changes of language had not broken its continuity, national pride might often light up anew an enthusiasm for it. Aliens might imitate that enthusiasm, and classicism become from time to time an intellectual fashion; but Winckelmann was not farther removed by language than by local aspects and associations from the vestiges of the classical spirit, and he lived at a time when, in Germany, classical studies were out of fashion. Yet, remote in time and place, he feels after the Hellenic world, divines the veins of ancient art, in which its life still circulates, and, like Scyles in the beautiful story of Hero-

dotus,* is irresistibly attracted by it. This testimony to the authority of the Hellenic tradition, its fitness to satisfy some vital requirement of the intellect, which Winckelmann contributes as a solitary man of genius, is offered also by the general history of culture. The spiritual forces of the past, which have prompted and informed the culture of a succeeding age, live, indeed, within that culture, but with an absorbed, underground life. The Hellenic element alone has not been so absorbed or content with this underground life; from time to time it has started to the surface; culture has been drawn back to its sources to be clarified and corrected. Hellenism is not merely an element in our intellectual life; it is a constant tradition in it.

Again, individual genius works ever under conditions of time and place; its products are coloured by the varying aspects of nature and type of human form and outward manners of life. There is thus an element of change in art; criticism must never for a moment forget that "the artist is the child of his time." But besides these conditions of time and place, and independent of them, there is also an element of permanence, a standard of taste which genius confesses. This standard is maintained in a purely intellectual tradition; it acts upon the artist, not as one of the influences of his own age, but by means of the artistic products of the previous generation, which in youth have excited, and at the same time directed into a particular channel, his sense of beauty. The supreme artistic products of each generation thus form a series of elevated points, taking each from each the reflection of a strange light, the source of which is not in the atmosphere around and above them, but in a stage of society remote from ours. This standard takes its rise in Greece at a definite historical period. A tradition for all succeeding generations, it originates in a spontaneous growth out of the influences of Greek society. What were the conditions under which this ideal, this standard of artistic orthodoxy, was generated? How was Greece enabled to force its thought upon Europe?

Greek art, when we first catch sight of it, is entangled with Greek religion. We are accustomed to think of Greek religion as the religion of art and beauty, the religion of which the Olympian Zeus and the Athena Polias are the idols, the poems of Homer the sacred books. Thus Dr. Newman speaks of "the classical polytheism which was gay and graceful, as was natural in a civilized age." Yet such a view is only a partial one; in it the eye is fixed on the sharp bright edge of high Hellenic cul-

* Herodotus, 4—78.

ture, but loses sight of the sombre world across which it strikes. Greek religion, where we can observe it most distinctly, is at once a magnificent ritualistic system, and a cycle of poetical conceptions. These two sides indicate two component elements, widely asunder in their origin, out of which Greek religion arose. Religions, as they grow by natural laws out of man's life, are modified by whatever modifies his life. They brighten under a bright sky, they become liberal as the social range widens, they grow intense and shrill in the clefts of human life, where the spirit is narrow and confined, and the stars are visible at noonday; and a fine analysis of these differences is one of the gravest functions of religious criticism. Still the broad characteristic of all religions, as they exist for the greatest number, is a universal pagan sentiment, a paganism which existed before the Greek religion, and has lingered far onward into the Christian world, ineradicable, like some persistent vegetable growth, because its seed is an element of the very soil out of which it springs. This pagan sentiment measures the sadness with which the human mind is filled whenever its thoughts wander far from what is here, and now. It is beset by notions of irresistible natural powers, for the most part ranged against man, but the secret also of his luck, making the earth golden and the grape fiery for him. He makes wilful gods in his own image, gods smiling and drunken, or bleeding by a sad fatality, to console him by their wounds, never closed from generation to generation. It is with a rush of home-sickness that the thought of death presents itself. He would remain at home for ever on the earth if he could; as it loses its colour, and the senses fail, he clings ever closer to it; but since the mouldering of bones and flesh must go on to the end, he is careful for charms and talismans that may chance to have some friendly power in them when the inevitable shipwreck comes. Such sentiment is the eternal stock of all religions, modified, indeed, by changes of time and place, but indestructible, because its root is so deep in the earth of man's nature. The breath of religious initiators passes over them; a few "rise up with wings as eagles," but the broad level of religious life is not permanently changed. Religious progress, like all purely spiritual progress, is confined to a few. This sentiment fixes itself in the earliest times to certain usages of patriarchal life, the kindling of fire, the washing of the body, the breaking of bread, the slaughter of the flock, the gathering of harvest, holidays and dances. Here are the beginnings of a cult, at first as occasional and unfixed as the sentiment which it expresses, but destined to become the permanent element of religious life. The usages of patriarchal life change; but this germ of ritual remains, developing, but always in a religious interest, losing its domestic

character, and, therefore, becoming more and more inexplicable with each generation.* This pagan cult, in spite of local colouring, essentially one, is the base of all religions. It is the anodyne which the religious principle, like one administering opiates to the incurable, has added to the law which makes life sombre for the vast majority of mankind.

More definite religious conceptions come from other sources and fix themselves upon this cult in various ways, changing it and giving it new meanings. With the Hebrew people they came from individuals of genius, the authors of the prophetic literature. In Greece they were derived from mythology, itself not due to a religious source at all, but developing in the course of time into a body of anthropomorphic religious conceptions.† To the unprogressive ritual element it brought these conceptions, itself the πτεροῦ δύναμις, an element of refinement, of ascension, with the promise of an endless destiny. While the cult remains fixed, the æsthetic element, only accidentally connected with it, expands with the freedom and mobility of the things of the intellect. Always the fixed element is the religious observance; the fluid, unfixed element is the myth, the religious conception. This religion is itself pagan, and has on a broad view of it the pagan sadness. It does not at once and for the majority become the higher Hellenic religion. That primeval pagan sentiment, as it is found in its most pronounced form in Christian countries where Christianity has been least adulterated by modern ideas, as in Catholic Bavaria, is discernible also in the common world of Greek religion against which the higher Hellenic culture is in relief. In Greece, as in Catholic Bavaria, the beautiful artistic shrines, with their chastened taste, are far between. The wilder people have wilder gods; which, however, in Athens or Corinth, or Lacedæmon, changing ever with the worshippers in whom they live and move and have their being, borrow something of the lordliness and distinction of human nature there. The fiery, stupefying wine becomes in a happier locality clear and exhilarant. In both, the country people cherish the unlovely idols of an earlier time, such as those which Pausanius found still devoutly preserved in Arcadia. Athenæus tells the story of one who, coming to a temple of Latona, had expected to see a worthy image of the mother of Apollo, and who laughed on finding only a shapeless wooden figure.‡ In both, the fixed element is not the myth or religious conception, but the cult with its unknown

---

* Hermann's Gottesdienstliche Alterthümer der Griechen. Th. 1, § 1, 2, 4.

† Ibid. § 6.

‡ Athen. xiv. 2, quoted by Hermann. Th. 1, § 6, 4.

origin and meaning only half understood. Even the mysteries, the centres of Greek religious life at a later period, were not a doctrine but a ritual; and one can imagine the Catholic church retaining its hold through the "sad mechanic exercise" of its ritual, in spite of a diffused criticism or scepticism. Again, each adjusts but imperfectly its moral and theological conceptions; each has its mendicants, its purifications, its Antinomian mysticism, its garments offered to the gods, its statues worn with kissing,* its exaggerated superstitions for the vulgar only, its worship of sorrow, its addolorata, its mournful mysteries. There is scarcely one wildness of the Catholic church that has not been anticipated by Greek polytheism. What should we have thought of the vertiginous prophetess at the very centre of Greek religion? The supreme Hellenic culture is a sharp edge of light across this gloom. The Dorian cult of Apollo, rational, chastened, debonair, with his unbroken daylight, always opposed to the sad Chthonian divinities, is the aspiring element, by force and spring of which Greek religion sublimes itself.† Religions have sometimes, like mighty streams, been diverted to a higher service of humanity as political institutions. Out of Greek religion under happy conditions arises Greek art, *das Einzige, das Unerwartete,* to minister to human culture. The claim of Greek religion is that it was able to transform itself into an artistic ideal. Unlike that Delphic Pythia, old but clothed as a maiden, this new Pythia is a maiden, though in the old religious vesture.

Under what conditions does Greek religion thus transform itself into an artistic ideal? "Ideal" is one of those terms which through a pretended culture have become tarnished and edgeless. How great, then, is the charm when in Hegel's writings we find it attached to a fresh, clear-cut conception! With him the ideal is a *Versinnlichen* of the idea—the idea turned into an object of sense.‡ By the idea, stripped of its technical phraseology, he means man's knowledge about himself and his relation to the world, in its most rectified and concentrated form. This, then, is what we have to ask about a work of art—Did it at the age in which it was produced express in terms of sense, did it present to the eye or ear, man's knowledge about himself and his relation to the world in its most rectified and concentrated form? Take, for instance, a characteristic work of the Middle Age, Angelico's "Coronation of the Virgin," at San Marco, in Florence. In some strange halo of a moon sit the

---

* Hermann, Th. ii. c. ii. § 21, 16. † Ibid. Th. 1, § 5.
‡ Æsthetik, Th. 1, Kap. 3 A.

Virgin and our Lord, clad in mystical white raiment, half-shroud half priestly linen. Our Lord, with rosy nimbus and the long pale hair, *tanquam lana alba et tanquam nix*, of the figure in the Apocalypse, sets, with slender finger tips, a crown of pearl on the head of his mother, who, corpse-like in her refinement, bends to receive it, the light lying like snow upon her forehead. Certainly it cannot be said of Angelico's fresco that it throws into a sensible form our highest knowledge about man and his relation to the world; but it did not do this adequately even for Angelico. For him all that is outward or sensible in his work—the hair like wool, the rosy nimbus, the crown of pearl—is only the symbol or type of an inexpressible world to which he wishes to direct the thoughts; he would have shrunk from the notion that what the eye apprehended was all. Such forms of art, then, are inadequate to the matter they clothe; they remain ever below its level. Something of this kind is true also of Oriental art. As in the Middle Age from an exaggerated inwardness, so in the East from a vagueness, a want of definition in thought, the matter presented to art is unmanageable: forms of sense struggle vaguely with it. The many-headed gods of the East, the orientalized Ephesian Diana with its numerous breasts, like Angelico's fresco, are at best overcharged symbols, a means of hinting at an idea which art cannot adequately express, which still remains in the world of shadows.

But take a work of Greek art, the Venus of Melos. That is in no sense a symbol, a suggestion of anything beyond its own victorious fairness. The mind begins and ends with the finite image, yet loses no part of the spiritual motive. That motive is not lightly and loosely attached to the sensuous form, as the meaning to the allegory, but saturates and is identical with it. For the highest knowledge of the Greek about himself and his relation to the world was in the happiest readiness for being thus turned into an object for the senses. The Greek mind had advanced to a particular stage of self-reflection, but was careful not to pass beyond it. In Oriental thought there is a vague conception of life everywhere, but no true appreciation of itself by the mind, no knowledge of the distinction of man's nature; in thought he still mingles himself with the fantastic, indeterminate life of the animal and vegetable world. In Greek thought the "lordship of the soul" is recognised; that lordship gives authority and divinity to human eyes and hands and feet; nature is thrown into the background. But there Greek thought finds its happy limit; it has not yet become too inward; the mind has not begun to boast of its independence of the flesh; the spirit has not yet absorbed everything with its emotions, nor reflected

its own colour everywhere. It has indeed committed itself to a train of reflection which must end in a defiance of form, of all that is outward, in an exaggerated idealism. But that end is still distant; it has not yet plunged into the depths of Christian mysticism.

But this ideal, in which the idea does not outstrip or lie beyond its sensible embodiment, could not have arisen out of a phase of life that was uncomely or poor. That delicate pause in Greek reflection was joined by some supreme good luck to the perfect animal nature of the Greeks. Here are the two conditions of an artistic ideal. The influences which perfected the animal nature of the Greeks are part of the process by which the ideal was evolved. Those "Mothers" who in the second part of *Faust* mould and remould the typical forms which appear in human history, preside at the beginning of Greek culture over such a concourse of happy physical conditions as ever generates by natural laws some rare type of intellectual or spiritual life. That delicate air, "nimbly and sweetly recommending itself" to the senses, the finer aspects of nature, the finer lime and clay of the human form, and modelling of the bones of the human countenance, these are the good luck of the Greek when he enters into life. Beauty becomes a distinction like genius or noble place.

"By no people," says Winckelmann, "has beauty been so highly esteemed as by the Greeks. The priests of a youthful Jupiter at Ægæ, of the Ismenian Apollo, and the priest who at Tanagra led the procession of Mercury, bearing a lamb upon his shoulders, were always youths to whom the prize of beauty had been awarded. The citizens of Egesta, in Sicily, erected a monument to a certain Philip, who was not their fellow-citizen, but of Croton, for his distinguished beauty; and the people made offerings at it. In an ancient song, ascribed to Simonides, or Epicharmus, of four wishes, the first was health, the second beauty. And as beauty was so longed for and prized by the Greeks, every beautiful person sought to become known to the whole people by this distinction, and above all to approve himself to the artists, because they awarded the prize; and this was for the artists an opportunity of having supreme beauty ever before their eyes. Beauty even gave a right to fame; and we find in Greek histories the most beautiful people distinguished. Some were famous for the beauty of one single part of their form; as Demetrius Phalereus, for his beautiful eyebrows, was called χαριτοβλέφαρος. It seems even to have been thought that the procreation of beautiful children might be promoted by prizes; this is shown by the existence of contests for beauty, which in ancient times were established by Cypselus, King of Arcadia, by the river Alpheus; and at the feast of Apollo of Philæ a prize was offered to the youths for the deftest kiss. This was decided by an umpire; as also at Megara by the grave of Diocles. At Sparta, and at Lesbos, in the temple of Juno, and among the Parrhasii, there

were contests for beauty among women. The general esteem for beauty went so far, that the Spartan women set up in their bed-chambers a Nireus, a Narcissus, or a Hyacinth, that they might bear beautiful children."*

So from a few stray antiquarianisms, from a few faces cast up sharply from the waves, Winckelmann, as his manner is, divines the temperament of the antique world, and that in which it had delight. It has passed away with that distant age, and we may venture to dwell upon it. What sharpness and reality it has, is the sharpness and reality of suddenly arrested life. Gymnastic originated as part of a religious ritual. The worshipper was to recommend himself to the gods by becoming fleet and serpentining, and white and red, like them. The beauty of the palæstra and the beauty of the artist's studio reacted on each other. The youth tried to rival his gods, and his increased beauty passed back into them. Ὄμνυμι πάντας θεοὺς μὴ ἑλέσθαι ἂν τὴν βασιλέως ἀρχὴν ἀντὶ τοῦ καλὸς εἶναι. That is the form in which one age of the world chose "the better part"—a perfect world, if our gods could have seemed for ever only fleet and serpentining, and white and red—not white and red as in Francia's "Golgotha." Let us not say, would that that unperplexed youth of humanity, seeing itself and satisfied, had never passed into a mournful maturity; for already the deep joy was in store for the spirit of finding the ideal of that youth still red with life in its grave.

It followed that the Greek ideal expressed itself pre-eminently in sculpture. All art has a sensuous element, colour, form, sound—in poetry a dexterous recalling of these together with the profound, joyful sensuousness of motion; each of these may be a medium for the ideal; it is partly accident which in any individual case makes the born artist poet or painter rather than sculptor. But as the mind itself has had an historical development, one form of art, by the very limitations of its material, may be more adequate than another for the expression of any one phase of its experience. Different attitudes of the imagination have a native affinity with different types of sensuous form, so that they combine easily and entirely. The arts may thus be ranged in a series which corresponds to the series of developments in the human mind itself.† Architecture, which begins in a practical need, can only express by vague hint or symbol the spirit or mind of the artist. He closes his sadness over him, or wanders in the perplexed intricacies of things, or projects his purpose from him clean-cut and sincere, or bares himself to the sunlight. But these spiritualities, felt rather

---

* Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums, Th. 1, Kap. iv.

† Hegel: Æsthetik. 2 Theil. Einleitung.

than seen, can but lurk about architectural form as volatile effects, to be gathered from it by reflection; their expression is not really sensuous at all. As human form is not the subject with which it deals: architecture is the mode in which the artistic effort centres when the thoughts of man concerning himself are still indistinct, when he is still little preoccupied with those harmonies, storms, victories of the unseen intellectual world, which wrought out into the bodily form, give it an interest and significance communicable to it alone. The art of Egypt, with its supreme architectural effects, is, according to Hegel's beautiful comparison, a Memnon waiting for the day, the day of the Greek spirit, the humanistic spirit, with its power of speech. Again, painting, music, poetry, with their endless powers of complexity, are the special arts of the romantic and modern ages. Into these, with the utmost attenuation of detail, may be translated every delicacy of thought and feeling incidental to a consciousness brooding with delight over itself. Through their gradations of shade, their exquisite intervals, they project in an external form that which is most inward in humour, passion, sentiment. Between architecture and the romantic arts of painting, music, and poetry, is sculpture, which, unlike architecture, deals immediately with man, while it contrasts with the romantic arts, because it is not self-analytical. It deals more exclusively than any other art with the human form, itself one entire medium of spiritual expression, trembling, blushing, melting into dew with inward excitement. That spirituality which only lurks about architecture as a volatile effect, in sculpture takes up the whole given material, and penetrates it with an imaginative motive; and at first sight sculpture, with its solidity of form, seems more real and full than the faint abstract manner of poetry or painting. Still the fact is the reverse. Discourse and action show man as he is more directly than the springing of the muscles and the moulding of the flesh; and these poetry commands. Painting, by the flushing of colour in the face, and dilation of light in the eye, and music by its subtle range of tones, can refine most delicately upon a single moment of passion, unravelling its finest threads.

But why should sculpture thus limit itself to pure form? Because by this limitation it becomes a perfect medium of expression for one peculiar motive of the imaginative intellect. It therefore renounces all those attributes of its material which do not help that motive. It has had, indeed, from the beginning an unfixed claim to colour; but this colour has always been more or less conventional, with no melting or modulation of tones, never admitting more than a very limited realism. It was maintained chiefly as a religious tradition. In proportion

as sculpture ceased to be merely decorative and subordinate to architecture it threw itself upon pure form. It renounces the power of expression by sinking or heightening tones. In it no member of the human form is more significant than the rest; the eye is wide, and without pupil; the lips and brow are not more precious than hands, and breasts, and feet. The very slightness of its material is part of its pride: it has no backgrounds, no sky or atmosphere, to suggest and interpret a train of feeling; a little of suggested motion, and much of pure light on its gleaming surfaces, with pure form—only these.* And it gains more than it loses by this limitation to its own distinguishing motives; it unveils man in the repose of his unchanging characteristics. Its white light, purged from the angry blood-like stains of action and passion, reveals not what is accidental in man, but the god, as opposed to man's restless movement. It records the first naïve, unperplexed recognition of man by himself; and it is a proof of the high artistic capacity of the Greeks that they apprehended and remained true to these exquisite limitations, yet in spite of them gave to their creations a vital, mobile individuality.†

Heiterkeit, blitheness or repose, and *Allgemeinheit*, generality or breadth, are, then, the supreme characteristics of the Hellenic ideal. But that generality or breadth has nothing in common with the lax observation, the unlearned thought, the flaccid execution which have sometimes claimed superiority in art on the plea of being "broad" or "general." Hellenic breadth and generality come of a culture minute, severe, constantly renewed, rectifying and concentrating its impressions into certain pregnant types. The base of all artistic genius is the power of conceiving humanity in a new, striking, rejoicing way, of putting a happy world of its own creation in place of the meaner world of common days, of generating around itself an atmosphere with a novel power of refraction, selecting, transforming, recombining the images it transmits, according to the choice of the imaginative intellect. In exercising this power, painting and poetry have a choice of subject almost unlimited. The range of characters or persons open to them is as various as life itself; no character, however trivial, misshapen, or unlovely, can resist their magic. This is because those arts can accomplish their function in the choice and development of some special situation, which lifts or glorifies a character in itself not poetical. To realize this situation, to define in a chill and empty atmosphere the

---

* The reader may see this subject treated with great delicacy in Mr. F. T. Palgrave's Essays on Art. Essay on Sculpture and Painting.

† Hegel: Æsthetik, Th. 3, Abschnitt 2.

focus where rays, in themselves pale and impotent, unite and begin to burn, the artist has to employ the most cunning detail, to complicate and refine upon thought and passion a thousandfold. The poems of Robert Browning supply brilliant examples of this. His poetry is pre-eminently the poetry of situations. The characters themselves are always of secondary importance; often they are characters in themselves of little interest; they seem to come to him by strange accidents from the ends of the world. His gift is shown by the way in which he accepts such a character and throws it into some situation, apprehends it in some delicate pause of life in which for a moment it becomes ideal. Take an instance from *Dramatis Personæ.* In the poem entitled "Le Byron de nos Jours" we have a single moment of passion thrown into relief in this exquisite way. Those two jaded Parisians are not intrinsically interesting; they only begin to interest us when thrown into a choice situation. But to discriminate that moment, to make it appreciable by us, that we may "find it," what a cobweb of allusions, what double and treble reflections of the mind upon itself, what an artificial light is constructed and broken over the chosen situation—on how fine a needle's point that little world of passion is balanced! Yet, in spite of this intricacy, the poem has the clear ring of a central motive; we receive from it the impression of one imaginative tone, of a single creative act.

To produce such effects at all requires the resources of painting, with its power of indirect expression, of subordinate but significant detail, its atmosphere, its foregrounds and backgrounds. Mr. Hunt's 'Claudio and Isabella' is an instance. To produce them in a pre-eminent degree requires all the resources of poetry, language in its most purged form, its remote associations and suggestions, its double and treble lights. These appliances sculpture cannot command. In it, therefore, not the special situation, but the type, the general character of the subject to be delineated, is all-important. In poetry and painting, the situation predominates over the character; in sculpture, the character over the situation. Excluded by the limitations of its material from the development of exquisite situations, it has to choose from a select number of types intrinsically interesting—that is, independently of any special situation into which they may be thrown. Sculpture finds the secret of its power in presenting these types in their broad, central, incisive lines. This it effects not by accumulation of detail, but by abstracting from it. All that is accidental, that distracts the simple effect of the supreme types of humanity, all traces in them of the commonness of the world, it gradually purges away.

Works of art produced under this law, and only these, are

really characterized by Hellenic generality or breadth. In every direction it is a law of limitation; it keeps passion always below that degree of intensity at which it is necessarily transitory, never winding up the features to one note of anger, or desire, or surprise. In the allegorical designs of the middle ages, we find isolated qualities portrayed as by so many masks; its religious art has familiarized us with faces fixed obdurately into blank types of religious sentiment; and men and women, in the hurry of life, often wear the sharp impress of one absorbing motive, from which it is said death sets their features free. All such instances may be ranged under the "grotesque;" and the Hellenic ideal has nothing in common with the "grotesque." It lets passion play lightly over the surface of the individual form, which loses by it nothing of its central impassivity, its depth and repose. To all but the highest culture, the reserved faces of the gods will ever have something of insipidity. Again, in the best Greek sculpture, the archaic immobility has been thawed, its forms are in motion; but it is a motion ever kept in reserve, which is very seldom committed to any definite action. Endless as are the attitudes of Greek sculpture, exquisite as is the invention of the Greeks in this direction, the actions or situations it permits are simple and few. There is no Greek Madonna; the goddesses are always childless. The actions selected are those which would be without significance, except in a divine person, binding on a sandal or preparing for the bath. When a more complex and significant action is permitted, it is most often represented as just finished, so that eager expectancy is excluded, as Apollo just after the slaughter of the Python, or Venus with the apple of Paris already in her hand. The Laocoon, with all that patient science through which it has triumphed over an almost unmanageable subject, marks a period in which sculpture has begun to aim at effects legitimate only in painting. The hair, so rich a source of expression in painting and, as we have lately seen, in poetry, because relatively to the eye or to the lips it is mere drapery, is withdrawn from attention; its texture, as well as its colour, is lost, its arrangement faintly and severely indicated, with no enmeshed or broken light. The eyes are wide and directionless, not fixing anything with their gaze, nor riveting the brain to any special external object; the brows without hair. It deals almost exclusively with youth, where the moulding of the bodily organs is still as if suspended between growth and completion, indicated but not emphasized; when the transition from curve to curve is so delicate and elusive that Winckelmann compares it to a quiet sea, which, although we understand it to be in motion, we nevertheless regard as an image of repose; where, therefore, the exact degree of develop-

ment is so hard to apprehend. If one had to choose a single product of Hellenic art, to save in the wreck of all the rest, one would choose from the "beautiful multitude" of the Panathenaic frieze that line of youths on horses, with their level glances, their proud patient lips, their chastened reins, their whole bodies in exquisite service. This colourless, unclassified purity of life, with its blending and interpenetration of intellectual, spiritual, and physical elements, still folded together, pregnant with the possibilities of a whole world closed within it, is the highest expression of that indifference which is beyond all that is relative or partial. Everywhere there is the effect of an awaking, of a child's sleep just disturbed. All these effects are united in a single instance—the Adorante of the Museum of Berlin, a youth who has gained the wrestler's prize, with hands lifted and open in praise for the victory. Naïve, unperplexed, it is the image of man as he springs first from the sleep of nature; his white light taking no colour from any one-sided experience, characterless so far as character involves subjection to the accidental influences of life. In dealing with youth, Greek art betrays a tendency even to merge distinctions of sex. The Hermaphrodite was a favourite subject from early times. It was wrought out over and over again, with passionate care, from the mystic terminal Hermaphrodite of the British Museum, to the perfect blending of male and female beauty in the Hermaphrodite of the Louvre.*

"This sense," says Hegel, "for the consummate modelling of divine and human form was pre-eminently at home in Greece. In its poets and orators, its historians and philosophers, Greece cannot be conceived from a central point, unless one brings as a key to the understanding of it an insight into the ideal forms of sculpture, and regards the images of statesmen and philosophers as well as epic and dramatic heroes from the artistic point of view; for those who act, as well as those who create and think, have in those beautiful days of Greece this plastic character. They are great and free, and have grown up on the soil of their own individuality, creating themselves out of themselves, and moulding themselves to what they were and willed to be. The age of Pericles was rich in such characters: Pericles himself, Phidias, Plato, above all Sophocles, Thucydides also, Xenophon and Socrates, each in his own order, without the perfection of one being diminished by that of the others. They are ideal artists of themselves, cast each in one flawless mould—works of art which stand before us as an immortal presentment of the gods. Of this modelling also are those bodily works of art—the victors in the Olympic Games; yes, and even Phryne, who, as the most beautiful of women, ascended naked out of the water in the presence of assembled Greece."

---

* Hegel: Æsth., Th. 3, Absch. 2, Kap. 1.

This key to the understanding of the Greek spirit, Winckelmann possessed in his own nature—itself like a relic of classical antiquity laid open by accident to our alien modern atmosphere. To the criticism of that consummate Greek modelling he brought not only his culture, but his temperament. We have seen how definite was the leading motive of his culture; how, like some central root-fibre, it maintained the well-rounded unity of his life through a thousand distractions. Interests not his, nor meant for him—political, moral, religious—never disturbed him. In morals, as in criticism, he followed the clue of an unerring instinct. Penetrating into the antique world by his passion, his temperament, he enunciates no formal principles, always hard and one-sided; it remained for Hegel to formulate what in Winckelmann is everywhere individualized and concrete. Minute and anxious as his culture was, he never became one-sidedly self-analytical. Occupied ever with himself, perfecting himself and cultivating his genius, he was not content, as so often happens with such natures, that the atmosphere between him and other minds should be thick and clouded; he was ever jealously refining his meaning into a form, express, clear, objective. This temperament he nurtured and invigorated by friendships which kept him ever in direct contact with the spirit of youth. The beauty of the Greek statues was a sexless beauty; the statues of the gods had the least traces of sex. Here, there is a moral sexlessness, a kind of impotence, an ineffectual wholeness of nature, yet with a divine beauty and significance of its own.

One result of this temperament is a serenity, a *Heiterkeit*, which characterizes Winckelmann's handling of the sensuous side of Greek art. This serenity is, perhaps, at bottom a negative quality; it is the absence of any sense of want, or corruption, or shame. With the sensuous of Greek art he deals in the pagan manner; and what is implied in that? It is sometimes said that art is a means of escape from "the tyranny of the senses." It may be so for the spectator; he may find that the spectacle of supreme works of art takes from the life of the senses something of its turbid fever. But this is possible for the spectator only because the artist in producing those works has gradually sunk his intellectual and spiritual ideas in sensuous form. He may live, as Keats lived, a pure life; but his soul, like that of Plato's false astronomer, becomes more and more immersed in sense, until nothing else has any interest for him. How could such an one ever again endure the greyness of the ideal or spiritual world? The spiritualist is satisfied in seeing the sensuous elements escape from his conceptions; his interest grows, as the dyed garment bleaches in the keener air. But the artist steeps his thought again and again into the fire of colour. To the Greek this

immersion in the sensuous was indifferent. Greek sensuousness, therefore, does not fever the blood; it is shameless and childlike. But Christianity, with its uncompromising idealism, discrediting the slightest touch of sense, has lighted up for the artistic life, with its inevitable sensuousness, a background of flame. "I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo, I must die." It is hard to pursue that life without something of conscious disavowal of a spiritual world; and this imparts to genuine artistic interests a kind of intoxication. From this intoxication Winckelmann is free; he fingers those pagan marbles with unsinged hands, with no sense of shame or loss. That is to deal with the sensuous side of art in the pagan manner.

The longer we contemplate that Hellenic ideal in which man is at unity with himself, with his physical nature, with the outward world, the more we may be inclined to regret that he should ever have passed beyond it, to contend for a perfection that makes the blood turbid, and frets the flesh, and discredits the actual world about us. But if he was to be saved from the *ennui* which ever attaches itself to realization, even the realization of perfection, it was necessary that a conflict should come, that some sharper note should grieve the perfect harmony, in order that the spirit, chafed by it, might beat out at last a broader and profounder music. In Greek tragedy this conflict has begun; man finds himself face to face with rival claims. Greek tragedy shows how such a conflict may be treated with serenity, how the evolution of it may be a spectacle of the dignity, not of the impotence, of the human spirit.* But it is not only in tragedy that the Greek spirit showed itself capable of thus winning joy out of matter in itself full of discouragements. Theocritus too, often strikes a note of romantic sadness. But what a blithe and steady poise above these discouragements in a clear and sunny stratum of the air!

Into this stage of Greek achievement Winckelmann did not enter. Supreme as he is where his true interest lay, his insight into the typical unity and repose of the sculpturesque seems to have involved limitation in another direction. His conception of art excludes that bolder type of it which deals confidently and serenely with life, conflict, evil. Living in a world of exquisite but abstract and colourless form, he could hardly have conceived of the subtle and penetrative, but somewhat grotesque art of the modern world. What would he have thought of Gilliatt, or of the bleeding mouth of Fantine in that first part of *Les Misé-*

---

* Hegel: Æsth., Th. 2, Absch. 2, Kap. 3. Die Auflösung der klassischen Kunstform.

rables, penetrated as it is with a sense of beauty as lively and transparent as that of a Greek? He failed even to see, what Hegel has so cunningly detected, a sort of preparation for the romantic within the limits of the Greek ideal itself. Greek art has not merely its mournful mysteries of Adonis, of Hyacinthus, of Ceres, but it is conscious also of the fall of earlier divine dynasties. Hyperion gives way to Apollo, Oceanus to Poseidon. Around the feet of that tranquil Olympian family still crowd the weary shadows of an earlier, more formless, divine world. Even their still minds are troubled with thoughts of a limit to duration, of inevitable decay, of dispossession. Again, the supreme and colourless abstraction of those divine forms, which is the secret of their repose, is also a premonition of the fleshless, consumptive refinements of the pale mediæval artists. That high indifference to the outward, that impassivity, has already a touch of the corpse in it; we see already Angelico and the "Master of the Passion" in the artistic future. The crushing of the sensuous, the shutting of the door upon it, the flesh-outstripping interest, is already traceable. Those abstracted gods, "ready to melt out their essence fine into the winds," who can fold up their flesh as a garment, and remain themselves, seem already to feel that bleak air in which, like Helen of Troy herself, they wander as the spectres of the Middle Age.*

In this way there is imported into Hellenism something not plastic, not sculpturesque; something "warm, tremulous, devout, psalterian." So some of the most romantic motives of modern poetry have been borrowed from the Greek. M. Sainte-Beuve says of Maurice de Guérin's 'Centaure,' now so well known to English readers through Mr. Arnold's essay, that under the form of the Centaur Maurice *a fait son René*. He means that in it Maurice has found a vehicle for all that romantic longing which the modern temper has inherited from mediæval asceticism, and of which the *René* of Chateaubriand is the most distinguished French exponent. What is observable is that Maurice has found that vehicle in the circle of Greek mythology. This romantic element was to increase. It did not cause the decay of Hellenic art; but it shows how delicate, how rare were the conditions under which the Hellenic ideal existed, to indicate the direction which art would take in passing beyond it. In Roman hands, in the early days of Christianity, it was already falling to pieces through the loose eclecticism which characterized the age, not only in religion and philosophy, but also in literature and art. It was the age of imitators, mechanically putting together the limbs, but unable to unite them by the breath of

---

* Hegel: Æsth., Th. 2, Absch. 3, Kap. 2.

life. Did Christianity quicken that decline? The worship of sorrow, the crucifixion of the senses, the expectation of the end of the world, are not in themselves principles of artistic rejuvenescence. Christianity in the first instance did quicken that decay. That in it which welcomed art was what was pagan in it, a fetichistic veneration for particular spots and material objects. Such materialism is capable of a thin artistic varnish, but has no natural connexion with art of a higher kind. So from the first we see Christianity taking up a few fragments of art, but not the best that the age afforded, careless of their merits; thus aiding the decline of art by consecrating it in its poorest forms.

Gradually as the world came into the church, as Christianity compromised its earlier severities, the native artistic interest reasserted its claims. But Christian art was still dependent on pagan examples, building the shafts of pagan temples into its churches, perpetuating the form of the basilica, in later times working the disused amphitheatres as quarries. The sensuous expression of conceptions which unreservedly discredit the world of sense, was the delicate problem which Christian art had before it. If we think of mediæval painting as it ranges from the early German schools, still with the air of a charnel-house about them, to the clear loveliness of Perugino, we shall see that the problem was met. Even in the worship of sorrow the native blitheness of art asserted itself; the religious spirit, as Hegel says, "smiled through its tears." So perfectly did the young Raphael infuse that *Heiterkeit*, that pagan blitheness, into religious works, that his picture of Saint Agatha at Bologna became to Goethe a step in the evolution of *Iphigénie*.* But in proportion as this power of smiling was refound, there came also an aspiration towards that lost antique art, some relics of which Christian art had buried in itself, ready to work wonders when their day came.

The history of art has suffered as much as any history by trenchant, absolute divisions. Pagan and Christian art are sometimes harshly opposed, and the Renaissance is represented as a fashion which set in at a definite period. That is the superficial view; the deeper is that which preserves the identity of European culture. The two are really continuous: and there is a sense in which it may be said that the Renaissance was an uninterrupted effort of the Middle Ages, that it was ever taking place. When the actual relics of the antique were restored to the world, it was to Christian eyes as if an ancient plague-pit had been opened: all the world took the contagion of the life of nature and the senses. Christian art allying itself with that restored antiquity which it had ever emulated, soon ceased to

* Italiänische Reise. Bologna, 19 Oct. 1786.

exist. For a time art dealt with Christian subjects as its patrons required; but its true freedom was in the life of the senses and the blood—blood no longer dropping from the hands in sacrifice, as with Angelico, but, as with Titian, burning in the face for desire and love. And now it was seen that the mediæval spirit, too, had done something for the destiny of the antique. By hastening the decline of art, by withdrawing interest from it, and yet keeping the thread of its traditions, it had suffered the human mind to repose, that it might awake when day came with eyes refreshed to those antique forms.

But even after the advance of the sixteenth century the Renaissance still remained in part an unfulfilled intellectual aspiration. An artificial classicism, as far as possible from the naturalism of the antique, was ready to set in if ever the Renaissance was accepted as an accomplished fact; and this was what happened. The long pilgrimage came to an end with many congratulations; only the shrine was not the genuine one. A classicism arose, based on no critical knowledge of the products of the classical spirit, unable to estimate the conditions either of its own or the classical age, regarding the adoption of the classical spirit as something facile. And yet the first condition of an historical revival is an appreciation of the differences between one age and another. The service of Winckelmann to modern culture lay in the appeal he made from the substituted text to the original. He produces the actual relics of the antique against the false tradition of the era of Louis XIV. A style or manner in art or literature can only be explained or reproduced through those special conditions of society and culture out of which it arose, and with which it forms one group of phenomena. A false classicism, in the unhistorical spirit of the age, had tried to isolate the classical manner from the group of phenomena of which it was a part; it supposed that there was some shorter way of reaching and commanding this manner than a knowledge of the vital laws of the classical mind and culture. In opposition to that classicism become a platitude, Winckelmann says, the Hellenic manner is the blossom of the Hellenic spirit and culture, that spirit and culture depend on certain conditions, and those conditions are peculiar to a certain age. Reproduce those conditions, attain the actual root, and blossoms may again be produced of a triumphant colour. The clearest note of this new criticism was the rehabilitation of Homer. Werther's preoccupation with Homer is part of the originality of his character.

The aim of a right criticism is to place Winckelmann in an intellectual perspective, of which Goethe is the foreground. For, after all, he is infinitely less than Goethe; it is chiefly be-

cause at certain points he comes in contact with Goethe that criticism entertains consideration of him. His relation to modern culture is a peculiar one. He is not of the modern world; nor is he of the eighteenth century, although so much of his outer life is characteristic of it. But that note of revolt against the eighteenth century, which we detect in Goethe, was struck by Winckelmann. Goethe illustrates that union of the Romantic, its adventure, its variety, its deep subjectivity, with Hellenism, its transparency, its rationality, its desire of beauty—that marriage of Faust and Helena, of which the art of the nineteenth century is the child, the beautiful lad Euphorion, as Goethe conceives him, on the crags in the "splendour of battle," "in harness as for victory," his brows bound with light.* Goethe illustrates, too, the preponderance in this marriage of the Hellenic element; and that element, in its true essence, was made known to him by Winckelmann.

Breadth, centrality, with blitheness and repose, are the marks of Hellenic culture. Is that culture a lost art? The local, accidental colouring of its own age has passed from it; the greatness that is dead looks greater when every link with what is slight and vulgar has been severed; we can only see it at all in the reflected, refined light which a high education creates for us. Can we bring down that ideal into the gaudy, perplexed light of modern life?

Certainly, for us of the modern world, with its conflicting claims, its entangled interests, distracted by so many sorrows, so many preoccupations, so bewildering an experience, the problem of unity with ourselves in blitheness and repose, is far harder than it was for the Greek within the simple terms of antique life. Yet, not less than ever, the intellect demands completeness, centrality. It is this which Winckelmann prints on the imagination of Goethe, at the beginning of his culture in its original and simplest form, as in a fragment of Greek art itself stranded on that littered, indeterminate shore of Germany in the eighteenth century. In Winckelmann this type comes to him, not as in a book or a theory, but importunately in a passionate life and personality. For Goethe, possessing all modern interests, ready to be lost in the perplexed currents of modern thought, he defines in clearest outline the problem of culture, balance, unity with oneself, consummate Greek modelling.

It could no longer be solved, as in Phryne ascending naked out of the water, by perfection of bodily form, or any joyful union with the world without; the shadows had grown too long,

* Faust, Th. 2, Act 3.

the light too solemn for that. It could hardly be solved as in Pericles or Phidias, by the direct exercise of any single talent; amid the manifold claims of modern culture that could only have ended in a thin, one-sided growth. Goethe's Hellenism was of another order, the *Allgemeinheit* and *Heiterkeit*, the completeness and serenity of a watchful exigent intellectualism. *Im Ganzen, Guten, Wahren, resolut zu leben*, is Goethe's description of his own higher life; and what is meant by life in the whole, *im Ganzen?* It means the life of one for whom, over and over again, what was once precious has become indifferent. Every one who aims at the life of culture is met by many forms of it, arising out of the intense, laborious, one-sided development of some special talent. They are the brightest enthusiasms the world has to show. They do not care to weigh the claims which this or that alien form of culture makes upon them. But the pure instinct of self-culture cares not so much to reap all that these forms of culture can give, as to find in them its own strength. The demand of the intellect is to feel itself alive. It must see into the laws, the operation, the intellectual reward of every divided form of culture; but only that it may measure the relation between itself and them. It struggles with those forms till its secret is won from each, and then lets each fall back into its place in the supreme, artistic view of life. With a kind of passionate coldness such natures rejoice to be away from and past their former selves. Above all, they are jealous of that *abandon* to one special gift which really limits their capabilities. It would have been easy for Goethe, with the gift of a sensuous nature, to let it overgrow him. But the utmost a sensuous gift can produce are the poems of Keats, or the paintings of Giorgione; and often in some stray line of Shakspeare, some fleeting tone of Raphael, the whole power of Keats or Giorgione strikes on one from its due place in a complete composite nature. It is easy with the other worldly gifts to be a *schöne Seele;* but to the large vision of Goethe that seemed to be a phase of life that a man might feel all round and leave behind him. Again, it is easy to indulge the common-place metaphysical instinct. But a taste for metaphysics may be one of those things which we must renounce if we mean to mould our lives to artistic perfection. Philosophy serves culture not by the fancied gift of absolute or transcendental knowledge, but by suggesting questions which help one to detect the passion and strangeness and dramatic contrasts of life.

But Goethe's culture did not remain "behind the veil;" it ever abutted on the practical functions of art, on actual production. For him the problem came to be, can the *Allgemeinheit*, the *Heiterkeit* of the antique be communicated to artistic pro-

ductions which contain the fulness of the experience of the modern world? We have seen that the development of the various forms of art has corresponded to the development of the thoughts of man concerning himself, to the growing relation of the mind to itself. Sculpture corresponds to the unperplexed, emphatic outlines of Hellenic humanism; painting to the mystic depth and intricacy of the Middle Age; music and poetry have their fortune in the modern world. Let us understand by poetry all literary production which attains the power of giving joy by its form as distinct from its matter. Only in this varied literary form can art command that width, variety, delicacy of resources, which will enable it to deal with the conditions of modern life. What modern art has to do in the service of culture is so to rearrange the details of modern life, so to reflect it, that it may satisfy the spirit. And what does the spirit need in the face of modern life? The sense of freedom. That naïve, rough sense of freedom, which supposes man's will to be limited if at all only by a will stronger than his, he can never have again. The attempt to represent it in art would have so little verisimilitude that it would be flat and uninteresting. The chief factor in the thoughts of the modern mind concerning itself is the intricacy, the universality of natural law even in the moral order. For us necessity is not as of old an image without us, with whom we can do warfare; it is a magic web woven through and through us, like that magnetic system of which modern science speaks, penetrating us with a network subtler than our subtlest nerves, yet bearing in it the central forces of the world. Can art represent men and women in these bewildering toils so as to give the spirit at least an equivalent for the sense of freedom? Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* is a high instance of modern art dealing thus with modern life; it regards that life as the modern mind must regard it, but reflects upon it blitheness and repose. Natural laws we shall never modify, embarrass us as they may; but there is still something in the nobler or less noble attitude with which we watch their fatal combinations. In *Wahlverwandtschaften* this entanglement, this network of law, becomes a tragic situation, in which a group of noble men and women work out a supreme *dénouement*. Who, if he foresaw all, would fret against circumstances which endow one at the end with so high an experience?