

The whole tendency of naturalism is to cramp and confine us, that of conventionalism to expand, and give variety by allowing free rein to the inventive faculties. The natural imitation of an object is not ornament, it is a picture of the object represented. In conventional ornament we have fancy and invention governed by taste. We have the starting points, the just proportion of ground and ornament so arranged that they produce a pleasing effect to the eye by their just balance of parts. And it is wonderful to contemplate the amount of beauty the ancient Greeks contrived to develop out of so few natural ornaments. This is owing to their conventional treatment of the types of nature chosen, as the echinus, or horse-chestnut, generally termed the egg and tongue, or egg and dart, the astragal, the anthemion or Greek honey-suckle, the plat, the volute, and the acanthus. It is a simple thing to copy an object, but it demands something more to treat it conventionally, and it is this invention which aims at producing a natural form that shall only be suggestive of its origin. In the inventive form we have man's power of dealing with the natural, making it subservient to ornament, and that ornament should combine unity, variety, contrast, simplicity, richness and symmetry. To jumble together fruit and flowers, &c., without taste and discrimination, is not designing. We have too much of that in the present day. What may be styled the rose, pansy and forget-me-not craze and naturalism have taken such a strong hold upon us that the eye encounters flowers upon everything. We gaze upon them on our walls; we tread them under foot in our carpets; we blot them out with trifle or jellies upon our plates; we crush them under us upon our chairs and couches, &c. Yet there appears a spirit abroad among us calling for emancipation, and this might be easily accomplished if we would but attend to the necessary cultivation of our tastes. We have seen a room lately decorated in this city by one of our own mechanics which reminded us when we saw it of a well-toned picture; this is as it should be, a harmony throughout.

To those who have their furniture, and much of it through association has become valuable, we cannot say, sell it off, and to the many who have taste and not the means to indulge it, we cannot dictate, but those having the power to gratify their taste, and who are beginning upon the first formation of a home, we would say to give their attention to it, and not trust too much to others; avoid auction sales, a prevalent source of much of the confusion perceptible in our modern houses, making many of them appear as bazaars for the sale of every style and form of furniture. If you have little, let it be good. Good taste is more to be admired than vulgar display. The question should be, not how much show there must be in this or that article, but what taste does it display? How does it harmonize with the surroundings? All this will afford you pleasure, and in the end prove profitable. That some of our leading citizens have turned their attention to the study of decorative art is plainly visible in the many changes being wrought in their homes. This indicates a progressive art spirit which, we hope, will spread and prove beneficial. J. W. Gray.

THE DECAY OF REVENGE.

"Man is a spiteful animal," says Molière; but there are signs that man's spitefulness is gradually wearing away. It may become a rudimentary thing, like his tail, or (in the shape of playful banter) a decorative survival, like his whiskers. Tails were useful, if Mr. Darwin is right, when our fathers lived up trees, and a hairy covering was serviceable when the ancestors of the race went as bare as Tam o' the Linn in the old song. Spitefulness, in the same way, was necessary for self-preservation when every man's hand was against his neighbour. Centuries of more peaceful years have modified this early ferocity, and we may trace the decay of spite in the decline of the passion for revenge. Revenge was once man's highest duty; revenge became his choicest pleasure. Now it has sunk in the scale of enjoyments to the rank of wife-beating and skittles. No one (in civilized society) cares much for revenge, except the burglar, who throws his boot from the dock at a policeman, or the literary stabber, who libels his rivals or his reviewers in some journal of the town. The novelist, it is true, still keeps vindictive baronets and revengeful earls among his characters; but the earls and the baronets of the novelist are the noble savages of fictitious society. They have learned nothing, and forgotten nothing; they are still capable of designs on rural virtue, and of getting their nephews *lettres de cachet* in private lunatic asylums. It is not quite impossible to trace the moral history of revenge—a study which proves that human nature may be modified on its ethical side.

In savage society—that is, in any society where law has no force, from Texas to Queensland—revenge takes the place of faith, hope, charity, and justice. It is the virtue without which the social organisation would cease to exist. Tribes and families could scarcely have survived if the members of either association had good-naturedly abstained from revenging themselves. Nothing could have prevented the scores of rival families and tribes from exterminating people who did not resent an injury. Now it is imprudent to make a duty, which is universal, too difficult of accomplishment. It would have been difficult always to hit upon and slay the man who was guilty of each particular offence to person or property. Early custom, therefore, permitted

revenge to be taken on any blood relations of the culprit within seven degrees. A man speared your grandmother because your uncle had devoured his nephew. Your duty was done if you tortured his second cousin to death over a slow fire. Honour and custom were satisfied for the moment. This does not seem a promising state of things, and yet it was full of the seeds of milder manners. Families became interested in preventing even their poor relations from using axe or bow too hastily. There was no satisfaction in being speared because some long-lost uncle or cousin with whom one was not on speaking terms had indulged himself in a manslaughter. Thus the members of all families found it convenient to keep an eye on each other's movements, and to give up their culprits to be dealt with by a central authority. Gradually law came into existence, and revenge ceased to be the chief end of man.

Duty is generally unpleasant, as becomes the "stern daughter of the voice of" Mrs. Grundy. Still, there are examples of duties which have gradually been transmuted into pleasures. The duty of supporting a family, for instance, is one of which natural man, "the empirical self" as philosophers say, is impatient. Probably the best modern type of the natural man is the British tramp. In him we all see the result of the free play of impulse. Now the British tramp is the modern Ahasuerus, a life-long fugitive from the duty of maintaining a family. This duty was no more to the mind of undeveloped than of civilised man. Yet, constrained by circumstances, he did his duty; he was industrious, and his industry took the shape of hunting. As time went on, as cities were built and fields ploughed, hunting ceased to be a duty, and became the pleasure of the upper classes and the affluent—of kings, dukes, brewers, publishers. In exactly the same way, revenge became the pleasure of the nobility. In the Italian States of the Middle Ages, among the most refined people, amid the gentlest superficial manners, revenge ranked with painting, poetry, the fine arts. Tyrants and reigning dukes were amateurs. When Ezzelin captured Friola, "he caused the populations, of all ages, sexes, occupations, to be deprived of their eyes, noses, and legs, and to be cast forth to the mercy of the elements." Out of 11,000 soldiers whom he captured, only 200 escaped the slow cruelty of his vengeance. Galeazzo Maria used to bury alive the people against whom he had a grudge, like that dilettante in revenge, the hero of Poe's "Cask of Amontillado." In cases where our Court of Probate and Divorce exercises a genial sway, an Italian noble would have made his wife dine off her lover's heart, or would have bricked her up in a wall, with her mirror for company and consolation. The tastes for these violent delights have gone by, and we could as soon eat a peacock at luncheon, in the Roman fashion, as hand over our rivals or reviewers to the pincers, the rack, the boiling lead, the thumbscrew, and the boot.

Modern revenge, except among the lower classes, has almost declined into a state of momentary morbid feeling. Some one injures our vanity, and we feel that we could say very disagreeable things about his pictures, poems, or personal appearance. We do not say them, and there is an end of the matter. It is difficult even to wish that misfortunes should befall our critics or successful competitors. What good would it do us if the investments of Jones, who has maligned us, proved unsound, or if his house were burned down? Obviously none at all. The mere idea of revenge (in modern society) is what logicians call an *ignoratio elenchi*—a wandering from the question at issue. There is something actually illogical as well as something mean and personal in the theory of revenge. Our wrongs are not redressed by the sufferings of the wrong-doer. Even political rivals feel this; and even a Christian statesman would not be happier if the rooks were to build their nests in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields with tresses torn from the mouldering skull of his adversary. What circumstances have produced this great change in human character? Has Christianity subdued vindictiveness? have men become poor of spirit? or do the arrangements of modern life permit a certain noble disdain of self, and a kind of inborn good temper to have their way? Probably the latter course has been the most effective. The law is powerful enough to redress most of the important injuries, and men do not need (except in the case of gambling debts) to take the law into their own hands. People have also ceased to do each other much harm. A man's enemies are content to call him a puppy, or an ass, behind his back, or to honour him by underhand attacks in society journals. If these things once seemed to deserve the stab, they now appear scarcely worth the notice of a momentary spleen. In other ways people are too busy to plot each other's injury, or to contrive schemes of revenge. "The pace is too good to inquire"; modern life is so rapid that we don't even ask why Baggs is our enemy; still less cast about for means of injuring Baggs. Indeed, the bare idea of an enemy is ridiculous, and breathes of the decadent melodrama. Only the returned convict in the novel says, "Oh, you enemy!" and gnashes his teeth. People are aware, too, that if they injure a man in earnest, merely because he had wronged them, they would suffer from a reaction of pity. And old as the passion of revenge is, the reaction of pity must be nearly as ancient. There is a well-authenticated story of an Australian black fellow, who was allowed by native practice to beat another man who had robbed him. The savage gave one blow on the head of the thief, and then, when the blood flowed, he burst into tears, embraced, and rubbed noses with his enemy.