

## THE INFLUENCE OF FINE ARTS.



PEOPLE of to-day are in general eminently practical. This is a fact clear and admitted by all. Such a principle, however, that whatever has not an immediate usefulness should not be done, although possessing many advantages in itself, can certainly become dangerous when carried to extremes. For very often, an act may in its immediate results, seem quite indifferent, and yet have ultimately most important consequences which, perhaps, not every one will foresee. Music, painting, sculpture, architecture, all this is useless, we hear a great many say. I do not wish to have my son learn music, the *paterfamilias* sometimes says, it is a loss of time. Or if he does permit him, it is merely because fashion so dictates.

My intention now is to answer briefly the question whether fine arts have some influence on man's happiness here below, whether they help him to perform his moral duties, whether in a word, fine arts serve a useful purpose or not?

We must, in the first place, clearly determine the nature of true art and distinguish it from the apparent and so-called art, whose object is simply to give pleasure to the senses. The end of art is to produce the beautiful. But what is the first essential of beauty? A thing is beautiful when it is true in the speculative order and true in the moral order, that is, directed to man's ultimate end. Oftentimes, people will call beautiful music which certainly does not possess those essentials, or call a magnificent tableau that which has no other merit than that of depicting human nature too crudely. Speaking of music, which of the fine arts is certainly the most commonly cultivated, Plato says: "We should not judge of music by the pleasure it affords, nor look after that which has no other object than man's pleasure; but we should, on the contrary,

"appreciate that music which contains a 'resemblance to the beautiful.'" There is, indeed, a wide difference between those two effects; the one satisfies the material sense of man and debases his sentiments, the other satisfies the mind and will and elevates the soul by developing its nobler faculties; the one generates low desires, the other inspires actions of self-sacrifice; the one is material and wicked, the other spiritual and divine. Since the day on which man's intelligence was weakened and his heart depraved by sin, he incessantly tends to create for himself sensual ideals and to deform his sense of beauty. With this criterion before us, we may safely assert that, though our opera-houses and concert-halls be continually overflowing with numbers of intense listeners, and though we be surrounded by musicians and art-galleries of all kinds, containing the most diversified and costly works of sculpture and painting, the cultivation of these fine arts, with a view to being elevated and ennobled by them is not so often met with.

After this preamble on the nature of the object of art, let us come to the question put in the beginning: What is the usefulness of the fine arts?

If we consider the subject from a mere natural and even material point of view, we find that fine arts claim our attention and respect. Of all the safeguards provided by the Creator, to protect and strengthen the family-spirit; of all the causes that make man cherish his home, none, in my opinion, is stronger than the joy, cheerfulness and love therein enshrined. Family intercourse and family amusements are things indispensable to the welfare of society. The more the family circle is kept bright and cheerful, the more it will be loved and remembered. But to obtain that "cheerfulness at home," which Mr. Maurice F. Egan recommends as the safeguard of morality, what is more efficient than the cultivation of such fine arts as music and painting? It was this idea that inspired the poet to bid us:—