

His will, and with a desire in *some* way to serve our God or our fellowmen. Whereas on the other hand, what seems the most Sacred work, the work of the preacher in the pulpit, or the pastor by the bedside of the dying—if that work be done simply to earn a living or to win the praise of men—then it is Secular work, just *as* Secular as any of the ordinary businesses or occupations of men. Now it seems to me that in a very special way, we have a right to expect that Art should be a *Ministry for* God, for in a very special sense it is a direct gift from God. Men have always deemed the artist, whether he be poet, painter, sculptor or musician—all cultured people I say have deemed the artist, as if by divine right a man inspired, a man whose soul is fired, and whose whole life is glorified by the inrush of a divine breath. In all Art, no doubt there is much, *very* much that is the outcome of tireless industry and limitless perseverance, so much so that genius itself has been defined as “an infinite capacity for taking pains,” and yet at the root of all this there lies something that no industry can of itself produce; an often unconscious but no less real *power to create*: making out the artist of every kind as a true *poet*—a *maker* (for that is the meaning of poet). And this singular, this heaven-born, this God-given power that is the true artist’s special prerogative sets him aside from his fellows, as a man apart; for has he not climbed celestial heights, has he not bathed his soul in visions of unutterable loveliness; and is it not his mission to bring down to us dwellers in the plain, some hints and reminiscences of those glories which shone round him on the mountain top; that so he may touch to a new brightness the often sad and sordid lives of men? Because God *has* given the artist peculiar gifts we expect him to be God’s minister to pass on some share of those gifts to men. *Again*, the artist may be a minister for God, by becoming in a way the prophet of God, he may become indeed a most eloquent and enduring preacher of righteousness and truth. I wish I could speak to you aright, of the preaching power of pictures. Take that marvellous picture of Albrecht Durer’s, representing the Christ as having come down to see how His church is carrying on His work in winning the world for Him. The Christ still crowned with the diadem of thorns is represented, as sitting in the midst of a dreary weed-grown wilderness; the head bowed in his hands, and the whole attitude of the drooping figure eloquent of deep dejection and bitter disappointment. We can almost hear the cry of sorrow with which He chides His church for having done so little to regenerate that world which He had died to Save. So pitiful and pathetic is that picture, that it is said Durer himself, used often to weep over it. *Such* a picture as that will touch the heart, more than some of the most eloquent missionary sermons ever listened to.

Or again, you all know what a power for good, in the evangelization of the world, has been the Moravian Brotherhood; few Missionary Societies in the world, have done as much genuine self-sacrificing work as have they. And yet, it was to a great picture, that that Society owed its birth. Count Zinzendorff, with very little thought of religious effort in his mind, stood one day, before Murillo’s great picture of the Crucifixion; and as he looked up into

that kingly face seamed with sorrow, and that royal brow pierced and bleeding with the cruel thorns, and as all the awful agony, stole into his soul and mastered his heart; he turned his eyes, streaming with tears, down to the words written at the foot, “This have I done for thee, what hast *thou* done for me. Words and picture together, smote him like a voice from the opened heavens, and then and there he laid his life in utter sacrifice at his Saviour’s pierced feet; and the result was, the foundation and the subsequent work of the Moravian Church.

Or take again, Turner’s wonderful picture of the Slave ship. Well might Lord Beaconsfield say of that picture, “That’s Turner’s sermon against the slave trade, and a splendid sermon it is.

Who can look long at Fra Angelico’s Angel-faces, with out feeling as if the pearly gates had indeed opened for him, and earth, and all its sin and care had sunk far away beneath his ascending feet.

Correggio’s picture of the Holy Family—who can see the glory that streams from the cradle of the Holy Infant and fills all the room with its radiance, and not see in this, an exquisite prophecy of the world-wide influence of the Babe of Bethlehem.

For myself I can say, that the truth of God has sometimes come home to me more vividly, more intensely, more really from pictures, than from some of the most forcetful and fervid sermons to which I have ever listened. And the artist may be not only God’s prophet, but his *priest* as well. His service may become *Sacramental*. For is it not *his* above all others, beneath the outward and visible forms of nature, to reveal the inward and spiritual grace of Divine goodness, and mercy, and beauty and power; thus enriching with a new meaning, even the commonest sights, and sounds and scenes that lie around us everywhere. The artist opens our eyes, to read, written large over all the face of nature, the autograph of God’s present and prevailing love. He lifts for us, a little corner of the curtain of nature, and peering through to the glory land beyond, we catch gleams and glimpses of “the light, that never was by sea or shore.”

The artist shows us nature, as our dim and sense bound eyes can never see it; for pictures, if *true*, and the production of the seer, unfold nature to us, as it never *would* unfold itself to our unaided sense: they are thus revelations to us, of a new world lying back of the mere surface of nature: windows, through which the devout soul may look through from the seen to the unseen; from the earthly to the heavenly; and so to the eye, informed by this priestly ministry of the painter’s art, the whole world becomes radiant with the foot-prints of a present God.

No pebble at my feet, but proves a sphere,
No chaffinch, but implies the cherubim;
No hum of lily-nauffled bee, but finds
Some coupling music with the spinning stars;
Earth’s crammed with heaven—
And every common bush afire with God.