

THE BEAUTIFUL.*



UN man there is a power which makes him admire, love and seek certain objects more than others. This faculty at the same time so sweet and so powerful; this sentiment so noble and so pure which it produces, whence do they come, or rather what is the object of their exercise? The object of this inclination of ours, the source of the pleasure which its satisfaction affords, is the beautiful.

Unsurpassable quality of a being, irresistible magnet that draws to itself every intelligence that understands it and every heart that feels it, the beautiful, when it is found, is like a balm to one's miseries, it is an oasis in the rugged desert of this life.

Three great notions are revealed to us in all things, unity, truth and goodness. But on these is founded beauty, another great property of beings, which is as grand, as universal, and as transcendental as its sisters. On this triple pedestal Beauty stands, and in her universality reflects upon all creation the splendor of the one whom we call the Infinite Beauty. *Pulchrum est splendor unitatis, bonitatis et veritatis.* These are then four convertible notions. All things are beautiful, at least with an essential beauty, that is, a beauty independent of all institutions, human or divine. Of this great principle we are convinced not only by intrinsic demonstration, but also by the knowledge of our own tendencies. Why is it in fact, that we shudder at the sight of a venomous serpent, although it be covered with the richest colors? Is it not because we know that there is no good for us in that dangerous animal? No one will ever find the beautiful in an unfaithful picture or in a story which implies contradiction. And why? It is because we do not find truth therein. In fact what is art? What is poetry? Is it not a creation? Those productions which have for object to please, do they not better attain their end the more they are in accordance with nature, the more they are true? In fact it is a fundamental notion that art is the faithful representation of nature. There-

fore I say, there is no beauty where there is not goodness, there is no beauty where there is not truth.

Having shown the relation which exists between the beautiful and the other transcendental notions, I come now to the beautiful in itself. After treating of its nature, elements and effects, I will, in the second part of this essay treat of its different divisions in particular. Although the beautiful be a thing so commonly spoken of, although it be found everywhere in nature, although we may detect it easily and naturally, yet there is nothing so complicated in its nature and so diversified in its elements. To perceive beauty all the faculties of a man are set to work, and yet it is perceived instantly. So mysterious in fact is its action that very often it seizes upon us, produces its effect and we are at a loss to know why and how it is felt. *Pulchrum est splendor ordinis*, says St. Thomas. This definition, brief as it is, expresses in itself all the elements of the beautiful. Beauty is the splendor of order. To have order it is essential to have variety, since order means the arrangement of many things, and to have unity according to which those several elements are arranged. Moreover we say also that beauty is a splendor. What are the principal constituents of this splendor? Proportion and fitness. Now, whatever possesses these qualities to a greater or less degree is said to be more or less beautiful, and in fact produces within us the pleasure wherewith we can detect true Beauty. Let us for instance look upon nature or even the works of art, and we will perceive that all that pleases, all that is beautiful, possesses to a certain degree those above mentioned qualities. What is more beautiful than nature? And yet what can be more diversified, what can be more *one* than nature? There is an idea unique and universal, which pervades the whole creation, the glory of God. Man, who is the ruler of this vast domain, has for occupation to praise and to know his Creator; brute animals are the servants of man, and the inanimate objects enjoy their highest perfection by assisting their lord and ruler in his great

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