

spirit of genius which has marked, learned and digested the spirit of the age. Force, colour, magnificent contrasts of light and shade, truthfulness of outline which depicts the birth-throes of a grand young nation struggling into freedom, and fascinating word-texture; these are some of the features which render their pictures inimitable. They stand out from the page in real landscapes, peopled with real flesh and blood, people and prospect being ever in sympathetic accord. We follow the footsteps of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Marlowe and Webster, with a breathless interest. We lose ourselves, our identities, in the actors and the actions of the pieces; and, like Macbeth, are brought to ourselves, to the realization of everyday nineteenth century life, only by some knocking at the gate of commonplace existence, which startles us into the reality of the present and warns us that it is but the dead past we have been contemplating.

As I have spoken of the spirit of art, the question may here be propounded, What is art? and especially, what is art in literature? Art I take to be the product of the science of taste—a self-evident corollary following; the purer the taste the higher the art. Again, art is partly the faithful imitation of the real by processes of observation supplemented by processes of expression, partly the embodiment of the unreal or imaginary by processes of conception rendered apparent by the same expressional processes as before. This latter definition is specially applicable to the sister arts of painting and sculpture, but art in literature is somewhat distinct from these. It is the power to produce by written words, themselves representatives of articulate sounds, effects as vivid, as life like, or as fanciful as any due to painter's brush or sculptor's chisel. The magic power to reproduce by mere sound, through

the proper combinations of certain symbols, tangible objects and tangible attributes, form, size, proportion, colour, light, shadow, ay, even the shadow of sound itself, the voice-echo of the poet; all in fact that pertains to the highest type of literary excellence—word-painting.

The truest art is, after all, but the representation of the natural, either direct or idealized. If art be itself natural and spontaneous it must be true, if forced and exaggerated beyond reasonable bounds it becomes itself artificial and meretricious. Again, art must conform to the times. It is the expression of the spirit of the age in a certain direction, consequently what was tolerated yesterday may be condemned to-day and become monstrous to-morrow. Look at the transitions which sculpture and painting have undergone. What a panorama of symbolism we have as the result of conflicting sentiments—classic beauty, attenuate middle age, voluptuous, because licentious, renaissance, Puritan prudery and solemnity, Christian idealism, modern æstheticism.

Take Grecian art. Here we have distinctly the worship of the beautiful. It is principally the human figure that is portrayed, and the human figure carried to a degree of excellence rarely if ever met with in nature. One may perhaps be tempted to say this is not true art; art cannot be true which excels its model,—this is not art but a second creation. Well, it must be remembered art embodies the ideal as well as the real. We must consider the motive power behind the accomplished work. That power, in all true art, is mind. The work is but the utterance of mental conception or perception. What then is the characteristic or trend of the Greek artistic genius? Mythological inspiration.

Taine says of Sophocles, "First in song and palæstra, ever loving the