

ART AND RELIGION.

BY THE EDITOR.

ART, religion and philosophy are kin; all three work out a conception of the world, of life and the purpose of life for the satisfaction of our mental needs. Philosophy is a scientific world-conception satisfying the demands of the thinker; religion is a social philosophy, the world-conception of a group of people actualizing itself in an historical movement; and art is the world-conception of genius, of the man who molds his views of life in forms of beauty.

It is a matter of course that the large masses are not philosophers. Their philosophy, called religion, is based upon the thoughts of their leaders which can not be pure science, but popular presentations of the thoughts of impressive personalities, of prophets, preachers and moral guides. A philosopher who is merely a thinker can never become a religious prophet; a religious prophet must be a man of the people and must speak the language of the people. Certainly he must be superior to the common people, but his superiority must be due more to his character than to his intellect, and his intellectual superiority must be more that of the poet and orator than that of the philosopher. He must be a powerful personality, but if he is a thinker who is far above and ahead of his time, he will not be serviceable as a religious leader.

Religion makes use of symbols, of parables, of allegories which appeal to the average man, and these symbols harden into dogmas. The meaning of the symbols may be, and frequently is, true; yet under all circumstances their acceptability depends solely on the endorsements they find among the masses of the people.

Art is the main vehicle of religion; indeed religion can never dispense with art. Religion needs art, most of all the art of words—poetry.

It is true there are religions which seem hostile to art, but only to certain kinds of art which are opposed to this or that religion,

and they are sculpture and painting. This is the case with dualistic religion which spurns bodily life and seeks a satisfaction in the realm of pure spirituality. Such religions develop grand poetry and music, hymns, psalms, masses, etc. and may also develop architecture, the rearing of mosques, temples and cathedrals, also arabesques, but they will abhor the presentation of human forms unless they are fully draped and the beauty of figure is concealed.

When dualism gives place to a monistic conception of life, the plastic arts will naturally assert themselves. Education will not remain limited to a development of the mind, but will adopt the principle of *mens sana in corpore sano*, a sound mind can develop only in a sound body.

We repeat therefore: Art is kin to religion. Both are products of a world-conception and as there are high and low religions, so there are high and low art-conceptions. True religion is elevating; low and false religion introduces superstitions and aberrations from the straight path. So the right kind of art is inspiring and elevating; however, it will be noticed that the difference between high and low art is not conditioned by an avoidance of corporeal beauty, but by the truthfulness and the seriousness of the artist. There is a higher or lower degree of nobility of heart and mind, for the true artist feels himself to be the priest on the altar of beauty. Who would dare to look upon the Venus of Milo as improper or less noble than even the Sistine Madonna of Raphael? Yet for all that there is a difference between that art which uplifts the mind and sanctifies the soul with a conception of the grandeur of the all-life, and another art which drags us down in the dirt, and sullies our souls with degrading thoughts.

Every piece of art is the expression of a sentiment, of an interpretation of life, of a world-conception, and religion too will seek artistic expression; but an ascetic tendency which scorns bodily beauty will sometimes seek an expression of the spiritual in mystic symbols, sometimes even in positively ugly forms. This has been shown in the mania of representing the ideal of mankind in a corpse or a crucifix.

The writer remembers as one of the most repulsive instances of presenting the dead saviour a life-sized figure of Christ in the tomb which is preserved in the crypt of the romantic old chapel on a steep hill at Wurmlingen near Tübingen. The place is probably of pre-Christian sanctity, but it seems that the grewsome spectacle of the realistic corpse in the crypt adds not a little to the great awe and

reverence in which this church is held not only by the parishioners but also by other pious people of the neighborhood.

Another grisly show is exhibited in St. Blasien where a skeleton over the altar is gaudily dressed in red velvet, and in sundry places in Italy there are chapels decorated exclusively with skulls and dead men's bones.

When we call figures showing the decay of death ugly, we must bear in mind that though they are ugly to us, they are noble and glorious to the ascetic worshiper to whom the beauty of bodily life is an abomination, while death is a victory over transiency, an outlook into the realm of pure spirit.

There is a peculiar contrast between Pope Leo IX and the reformers such as Luther and Calvin. The reformers were serious Christians and as such they were dualists, while the pope was practically a pagan, to whom the "fable of Christ" was a mere allegory in which he saw a clever device to rule the masses of mankind. The Renaissance is a revival of classic antiquity and of the pagan spirit which cultivated the natural. Michelangelo, Raphael and other masters of that period have worked out a compromise between the Greek ideal of beauty and the dualistic spirit of Christianity, by means of which art, even the art of painting, was introduced into the Roman Catholic church while Protestantism, which took the Christian dualism quite seriously, only tolerated the arts of bodily form while it cultivated the arts of audition, religious poetry, as instanced by Luther's songs, by Milton and by Klopstock, and the music best represented by Bach.

When now the plastic arts are beginning to assert themselves, it is a sign that a monistic world-conception is dawning upon Protestant mankind. Bodily beauty is no longer denounced as a machination of the devil by which he attempts to lead astray the worldly minded.

Our age has not yet developed an art of its own for the simple reason that it is still an age of transition, an age of fermentation which has not yet attained to clearness. There is still lingering with us the thought that art is a frivolous occupation, and this is most felt in the Protestant churches of America. Altar pieces have disappeared with the disappearance of the altar, and there is little hope at present that the plastic arts will be admitted to Protestant sanctuaries. While as a rule it pays the traveler, especially in the old world, to visit Catholic churches, Protestant houses of worship, and especially those of America, are empty and unattractive. They are at best pleasant meeting halls; sometimes they spread an agree-

able warmth of colored light through painted windows; but otherwise they are characterized by an apparent absence of art.

Art is a factor in life which should not remain neglected. Art ennobles and transfigures life, and it serves many of us as a surrogate for religion, as Goethe says:

“He who has science and has art,
He also has religion;
But he who neither of them has,
He ought to have religion.”