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Devoted to the Science of Religion,  
the Religion of Science, and the Extension  
of the Religious Parliament Idea

FOUNDED BY EDWARD C. HEGELER

OCTOBER, 1928

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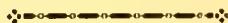
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# THE OPEN COURT

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Volume XLII (No. 10)

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## ART AND APOLLO<sup>1</sup>

BY CORNELIA STEKETEE HULST

THE term Art for Art's Sake, which is a modern expression, has been given such various and conflicting definitions and implications that it has come to be another Serbonian Bog, in which whole armies of critics and artists have sunk; and the confusion appears among those who subscribe to the new doctrine as well as among those who will have none of it. It has occasioned intense feeling, the extreme perhaps that expressed by Tennyson in a stanza not published among his collected writings but in his Life by his son:

Art for Art's sake! Hail! truest Lord of Hell!  
Hail, Genius, Master of the Moral Will!  
"The filthiest of all paintings painted well  
Is mightier than the purest painted ill!"  
Yes, mightier than the purest painted well,  
So prone are we toward the broad way to Hell!

This was the poet's rejoinder when his "Idylls of the King" had been criticized because they showed a strong moral element, or purpose.

It is to be supposed that the confessors of Art for Art's Sake do not press the limits of their doctrine to the extreme that the poet did in this instance, and certainly few would subscribe to it if it must be reduced to this interpretation: but they do contend that Art has nothing to do with morals, not to speak of religion, which opinion artists like Tennyson would judge heresy; and many hold that moral purposes are not artistic, but a detriment to the artist's creation. Thus, of Homer, the most vital and influential of poets, held by many to have written the Bible of the Greeks, one of greatest

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Dinner Meeting of the Michigan Authors' Association.

scholars and critics, who is also one of the greatest lovers of Homer and the writer of excellent books about him and his influence, says, in italics:

*"The Iliad and the Odyssey are simply imaginative, ecstatic, poetic creations, unhampered by any ulterior historical, theological, or philosophical purposes."*

Here the word "unhampered" expresses the general principle that moral and intellectual elements are to be regarded as less in poetry than imagination and passion, that moral, historical, theological, and philosophical purposes would hamper a poet, be a positive detriment in his poem. It is probable that this is the opinion held by the larger number of critics today.

Fortunately it is not for us to enter directly into the controversy which has raged about these questions and we can skirt the safe boundary of the perilous Bog, to find a point of vantage in the far Past, long before the paths of the contending schools had parted. Such a point of vantage is the Greek, the god of the Arts, and Homer, where the ground is safe, undisputed.

The first great difference that we note between ancient and modern Art is that almost all of the great Greek Art which has outlived the centuries was not private, but public, not secular, but religious, and deeply religious, felt to be from and for God. All of the Arts, and the very impulse toward Art, its inspiration, were of God, of Apollo through the Sacred Nine Muses, who were his handmaidens. Without this god there was no Art, and in this conception the ancient Greeks agreed with those Christians who live by the principle, SINE DOMINUS FRUSTRA, WITHOUT GOD ALL THINGS ARE VAIN . . . . *all* things, of which works of Art constitute a very important proportion.

Judged by this principle, Grecian and Christian, the modern doctrine of Art for Art's sake, is seen to ignore one of the two essentials of Greek Art, and that the fundamental one, the god who inspired it and informed it with his ideals and his purposes. Homer did not class as High Art even the wonderful landscape and the figures in hammered gold on the shield of Achilles, though they were marvelous work, for this was not of the Muses and Apollo, but only of Hephaestos, god of the forge, whose interest lay in his skill. Such work lacks ideals, and inspiration, the Divine Light of the Sun, the Divine Heat of his passion. The shield of Achilles was

a work of mere craft, and this distinction between Art and Craft must have been clear to the Greeks from Homer's time and so long as the ancient gods were adored. Homer's myth embodied a philosophy of Art.

The Greeks were a people who lived in the presence of their gods, who felt them in every impulse within their own minds, in every phenomenon in external Nature—if it thundered, Zeus was speaking to some one; if a wise thought came to mind, it was thanks to Athena; if an impulse was felt toward creative Art, it was thanks to Apollo. For us of a late age and a unified view of science and religion, it has not been easy to understand the gods of the ancient world, or to take even Apollo quite seriously. They have usually been presented in a crassly literal way, encyclopaedia fashion, with little appreciation that they were guides in life, judges who meted rewards and punishments in this world and the next, and that they expressed the highest aspirations, the hopes and the fears of the people. Speaking of the Egyptian Sungods, Dr. Breasted says what is equally true of Apollo:

"There is no force in the life of ancient man the influence of which pervades all his activities as does that of the religious faculties. Its fancies explain to him the world around him, its fears are his hourly master, its hopes his constant mentor, its feasts are his calendar and its outward usages are to a large extent his education and the motive toward the gradual evolution of Art, literature, and science."

Count Keyserling, also, appreciates how profound Sunworship was among the ancients:

"The man who believes in myths knows nothing of the sun of the physicist. He prays before what he feels as the immediate source of life. The man of later days, whose emancipated intellect raises the question of correctness in the first instance, must, of course, deny Sun-worship; for him there is only the fact of Astronomy, and this is undoubtedly no divinity. The spiritualized being turns once more to the ancient faith. He recognizes in it a beautiful form of expression of a true consciousness of God. He knows that all truth is ultimately symbolic and that the Sun expresses the nature of all divinity more appropriately than the best conceptual expression."

What was the character of this god Apollo, who held such a

determining place in Greek Art? Did he exercise his influence in other spheres of life besides that of Art, and what ideals did he stand for . . . were the moral, the historical, the theological, and the philosophical among them? or were these too commonplace for his Muses? Were the Good and the True as essential in his Arts as the Beautiful?

Apollo was the God of Beauty, but his realm was by no means confined to the goodly kingdoms of the Fine Arts, and he was certainly not a weakling god confined to inspiring weakling poets such as Keats styled contemptuously "versifying pet lambs." He was a god of exceeding power, who slew the great Python, the snake of evil, as Horus slew Set; and equally he held his hand of power over the affairs of practical life. No individual so humble but Apollo protected him or punished the person who wronged him; and he presided over the Marketplace and the Fair as well as over the Banquethall with its King and heroes and epic singers . . . always inspiring men to Justice and punishing them if they violated his Law. In the central spot of the Marketplace his altar was erected, a perpetual reminder that his Law should prevail there between man and man in their commercial life and a sanctuary where men might take refuge in case of dispute and threatened violence until hot tempers had cooled and right counsels had been adopted.

It was in this Marketplace of Apollo's that his Arts were evolved and practiced, for men used their time, when they were not trading, in athletic adventures, leaping, running, boxing, wrestling, shooting, throwing the stone, playing quoits, over all of which Apollo presided, to be sure of fairplay; and to the winner was presented the prize of the god, the wild olive, which had no cash value. The Agora was a pleasant and profitable and stimulating place to spend the time, the center of intellectual activity as well as of trade and athletics, where minstrels went to sing their songs with pantomime and dancing, and poets went to recite their verses. There travelers told their news and the tales of their adventures, there soothsayers uttered their prophecies, and those who had wrongs to be redressed called an Assembly together and stated their case to the people, appealing to Zeus and Apollo. This was the way of getting Justice before Courts were instituted; and when the court of the Arcopagus was later established, tradition told that Apollo, with Athena, tried the first case. That Court was held on the top of a high hill, where

the sun could shine in over deliberations and no shadows would darken counsel. In general, and in little, every village Agora, the Marketplace, was a Delos, a Delphi where those inspired by the



THE APOLLO BELVIDERE.

Muses could find an audience and be answered by their enthusiasm face to face. Oh, the pity, that our modern Fairs and Marketplaces have so little to do with Apollo and those dear to his Muses! What

might all of our people not rise to it if we had Apollo and his inspired artists with us in daily life, not separated and treated as things unessential and apart!

Many practical Greek institutions were developed because of Apollo's festivals. The pilgrimages to his shrines at Delphi and Delos, to Olympia (where titular honor was given to Zeus but Apollo awarded the prizes), became so numerous from all parts of Greece that good roads had to be built. A National Council had to be formed to collect and administer funds for the undertakings; and the Amphityonic Council was established to enact laws for the nation as a whole and to try cases rising between state and state. To Delphi and Delos and Olympia information was brought from distant colonies and foreign lands by those who came to trade and to worship; there stories were told about ancient times, and History was started; there Homer's Epics were recited, and the story of how all Greeks, in those pre-historic days, united for common action at the siege of Troy drew the listeners together with a sense of race-unity, of common purposes, and common hopes. To prepare athletes to take part in the contests, gymnasiums were started; schools were made necessary by competition in the different arts. Apollo's crown of wild olive was the proudest honor ever bestowed in Grecian life, and those arts over which he presided were directly out of life, out of the whole nation's life, not out of the life of a few, detached, or decadent, as Art and artists and art patrons often become in less fortunate periods and places. There was no decadence, and no nonsense, or frumpery about Greek Art in those great centuries, but splendid health, strength, seriousness, and elevation . . . that Art was God-given, untainted therefore by vice, never inane, never common. The common people, under Apollo, in Greece, attained the highest level of culture that the world has seen, because Apollo was of the Marketplace as well as of Helicon and Parnassus.

In all instances where Homer shows Apollo, the god's constant purpose is (1) to make Justice prevail, (2) to reward those who are worthy, be they swineherd or King in station, (3) to punish those who are guilty, be they goatherds or nations. The sins that Apollo punished range from insolence to adultery and murder, and he never violated poetic Justice as Homer understood it. Apollo's Law included Moderation—if a hero goes too far in his wrath and his vengeance, though his wrath is righteous and vengeance his right, as



they see it, the gods point out to him how far he may go and he checks himself and obeys them. Now, if this was the purpose of this god, could it be that the purpose of Homer was not to show this . . . a moral and a religious purpose?



DETAIL OF THE APOLLO BELVIDERE

Returning to our Homer with this question of purpose in mind, we find him consciously justifying the ways of the righteous gods to man. The very first scene in the *Odyssey* is a case in point, where the gods are shown in Olympus discussing the death and punish-

ment of Aegisthus, an adulterer and murderer, who has just fallen at the hand of the son of the man he wronged. Zeus is exculpating himself from all blame for what has happened by saying that he had given men laws against committing such crimes and had sent this particular man a special message of warning; and Athena, Wisdom embodied, approves the punishment, exclaiming, "Surely, that man lies in fitting ruin! So perish all who do such deeds!" Here is clear moral and religious purpose in Zeus and Athena, and Homer is fundamentally moral and religious in telling this; in fact, Homer's whole poem, the story of how the righteous gods helped a righteous man to return to his Home, is Apollo's answer to his prayer to the Muse in the opening verses: "O Muse, sing the man who wandered far."

Do not Homer's Epics also show a strong feeling for History? They glorified the great Trojan War, in which all of the Greek people had united to capture a strong Eastern city that, he charged, had broken the Law of the righteous gods, misguided by the Love Goddess, a "strange and guileful" deity, as Helen called her, not of the Greeks, but of Cyprus, also called Paphos. This Aegean island was possessed by Phoenicians in Homer's time, Eastern people who did not worship Athena but who had a farfamed temple to this Love Goddess of theirs, who was called in Syria Ashtaroth—the same Ashtaroth with whom Israel contended. Homer calls her not Ashtaroth, but Aphrodite, the Frothy, no compliment among a people who worship profound Wisdom; and he shows her a temptress and a trouble-maker, the ruin of those who yield to her counsels, be they individuals or fortified royal cities. Though Helen has yielded to Aphrodite, she reproaches her and rebels; heroes and heroines do not pray to Aphrodite or say a single good word for her; and throughout Grecian history the Greeks never built a temple in her honor, but represented her as cruel and hateful to the end. Homer showed her overthrown by Athena on the battlefield and taunted, reduced to tears; she was completely defeated in the Trojan War as a whole; and she was expelled from Olympus amid the jeers of the gods after Apollo had led to her disgrace in the incident of the Golden Net. After that, she returned to Paphos, and if Paphos received her back and continued to do her honor, then, in the eyes of the Greeks, the worse for Paphos! And the worse it seems to have been, since the Greeks must have made their attack on Paphos

shortly after Homer, for at the dawn of History they were in possession, their own gods established there, but no far-famed temple of the Love Goddess. These facts, along with what Homer reveals of the character of the Love Goddess, argue for the conclusion that Homer had a stronger historical purpose than has been supposed, that, in short, he was helping to create future History by rousing a moral, religious, and theological sentiment against Paphos and her Love Goddess, with a view to the attack and conquest that he wished to follow. The founding of new kingdoms and the taking of land and loot must, as a matter of fact, have been strong motives with many of those who fought in these wars of Greeks advancing against the Eastern peoples, but the poet did not present this economic side of the question. The one sufficient cause of the War at Troy, as he presented it, was the elopement of Paris and Helen under the influence of the Love Goddess and the wrong that the Trojans did in harboring them . . . a strongly moral and religious theme!

"Glorious Apollo," as he was called in Homer, was the Archer, whose silver arrows of Retribution destroy what is evil in the moral world just as the rays of the sun cause physical carrion to decay, so purifying the atmosphere. If his name is derived, as has been suggested, from AP-OLLUO, *I destroy utterly*, it is appropriate to this character, and it explains the stern expression of the Apollo Belvedere—he has just shot one of his arrows and is looking upon the pain the punishment has brought to the guilty. Those who are glad that this world has a moral order must rejoice at this stern beauty. His rule of life, inscribed in letters of gold on the temple of Delphi, was NOTHING TO EXCESS, and this, if obeyed, would correct most of the wrongs of the world. It was strictly obeyed by Greek artists, and this accounts for their chaste and severe style.

We should far exceed our limits if we said all that it were well to say of Apollo as Homer reveals him; and it is hard not to grow rhapsodical in treating of him in prose, as Keats rightly does in his *Hyperion*:

For lo! 'tis to the father of all verse!  
 Flush everything that hath a vermeil hue,  
 Let the rose glow intense and warm the air,  
 And let the clouds of even and of morn  
 Float in voluptuous fleeces o'er the hills;  
 Let the red wine within the goblet boil,

Cool as a bubbling well; let faint-lipped shells,  
 On sands, or in great deeps, vermilion turn  
 Through all their labyrinths; and let the maid  
 Blush keenly, as with some warm kiss surprised.  
 Chief isle of the embowered Cyclades,  
 Rejoice, O Delos, with thy olives green,  
 And poplars, and lawnshading palms, and beech,  
 In which the Zephyr breathes the loudest song,  
 And hazel thick, dark-stemmed beneath the shade:  
 Apollo is once more the golden theme!

In him, Grecian mythology touched a height sublime, the Sun, by whom his father, Zeus, from high Heaven, gave Light to this world, by whom, through his Arts, man rises above his brute estate. By means of Apollo's Art man can create ideal works which will not die. The Greek word AREIN, from which our word *Art* is derived, means a *fitting*, or *joining together*, applied to painting, poetry, drama, sculpture, music—all of Apollo's Arts; and the exaltation of spirit which the artist feels when he has crowned the Good and the True with Beauty was called enthusiasm, from EN and THEOS, meaning *God-within*, recognizing that it was God-given. All true artists were so because they themselves had this God-within and could arouse it therefore in others.

Compared with the Art of Glorious Apollo in Greece a very large proportion of modern Art seems pitifully lacking in significance—but not our greatest . . . not that of such as Keats! True artists are still moved by the mystic impulse and are devoted in their efforts to give it expression under hard conditions, where Mammon is too often their employer and Hephaestos their competitor, and where the men who frequent our Marketplace do not respond to their enthusiasm with enthusiasm, so inspiring and rewarding them. Too often it is forgotten that the glorious god had anything to do with their fine frenzy, their Divine frenzy, and they are judged by the Market audience to be just frenzied, mad. If they had such conditions as the Greek artists had, with Art and the god of Art in the Marketplace, radiating from there to the tops of the hills crowned with courts and temples, Apollo shining everywhere, we also would have many works of the highest Art, public, religious, democratic in the best sense of the word . . . of the people, for the people, by the people, as was the Greek. Artists are ready and waiting, starving at their chosen calling rather than turn to

commercial work or to commercialize their work for the money that it would bring. Art for Art's Sake seems the refuge of these despairing, a protest against the modern hard spirit in an age mechanical and commercialized so that it does not feel that in God we live and move and have our being, though it says such things on Sunday . . . an age that feels a little queer when God is introduced into practical discussions, such as this on Art. For both artists and men of the Marketplace, Art for Art's Sake is an abstraction better than Art for Mammons' Sake and the Dollar, or Art for Hephaestos' Sake and the Craft, but hopelessly inadequate to proclaim the Divine Source of the High Arts, their divine inspiration, divine purpose, divine passion . . . that they are a radiation, through the artist, of the Light of the Sun.