

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART: ART IN THE NETHERLANDS

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The Philosophy of Art: Art in the Netherlands by H. Taine & J. Durand

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H. TAINE & J. DURAND

**THE PHILOSOPHY
OF ART: ART IN THE
NETHERLANDS**

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART.

ART

IN THE

NETHERLANDS

BY

H. TAINÉ

TRANSLATED BY

J. DURAND



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1874.

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TO

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

2631

PART I.
PERMANENT CAUSES.



THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART IN THE NETHERLANDS.

DURING the last three years I have explained to you the history of painting in Italy; this year I propose to set before you the history of painting in the Netherlands.

Two groups of mankind have been, and still are, the principal factors of modern civilization; on the one hand, the Latin or Latinized people—the Italians, French, Spanish and Portuguese, and on the other, the Germanic people—the Belgians, Dutch, Germans, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, English, Scotch and Americans. In the Latin group the Italians are undeniably the best artists; in the Germanic group they are indisputably the Flemings and the Dutch. In studying, accordingly, the history of art along with these two races, we are studying the history of modern art with its greatest and most opposite representatives.

A product so vast and varied, an art enduring nearly four hundred years, an art enumerating so many masterpieces and imprinting on all its works an original and common character, is a national product; it is consequently intimately associated with the national life, and is rooted in the national character itself. It is a flowering long and deeply matured through a development of vitality conformably to the acquired structure and primitive organization of the plant. According to our method we shall first study the innate and preliminary history which explains the outward and final history. I shall first show you the seed, that is to say the race, with its fundamental and indelible qualities, those that persist through all circumstances and in all climates; and next the plant, that is to say the people itself, with its original qualities expanded or contracted, in any case grafted on and transformed by its surroundings and its history; and finally the flower, that is to say the art, and especially painting, in which this development culminates.

I.

The men who inhabit the Netherlands belong, for the most part, to that race which invaded the Roman empire in the fifth century, and which then, for the first time, claimed its place in broad sunshine alongside of Latin nations. In certain countries, in Gaul, Spain and Italy, it simply brought chiefs and a supplement to the primitive population. In other countries, as in England and the Netherlands, it drove out, destroyed and replaced the ancient inhabitants, its blood, pure, or almost pure, still flowing in the veins of the men now occupying the same soil. Throughout the middle ages the Netherlands were called Low Germany. The Belgic and Dutch languages are dialects of the German, and, except in the Walloon district, where a corrupt French is spoken, they form the popular idiom of the whole country.

Let us consider the common characteristics of the Germanic race, and the differences by which it is opposed to the Latin race. Physically, we have