

ARTISTS AND THINKERS

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Artists and Thinkers by Louis William Flaccus

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LOUIS WILLIAM FLACCUS

**ARTISTS
AND THINKERS**

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BY

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ARTISTS AND THINKERS

I

INTRODUCTORY

EACH of these essays stands by itself as a record of a man's thoughts on art and as a study of the man himself, of his methods of work, his aims and his outlook on life. But they are bound together, even if only in the slenderest of ways: they all have a window open on a problem. A philosopher must have his problem; his comfort demands it—a trade weakness, I admit, but one in which I must confess a share. I have taken my material from the borderline of art and philosophy. I have chosen three artists—Rodin, Wagner, and Maeterlinck—who have achieved greatness in such widely different arts as sculpture, music, and the drama; and three thinkers—Tolstoy, Hegel, and Nietzsche—who are quite unlike and fairly representative. All these men have had much to say on art; they have discussed special points and formulated general theories. Many of these theories are fanciful, unsound, clumsy; these

I have given as well as others which show remarkable insight. Incidentally I may have touched on the truth of a theory or weighed it historically, but the main interest has been elsewhere: in the problem of the interplay of art and philosophy; in tracing the Thinker in the Artist and the Artist in the Thinker.

The problem might be put brutally in its most general form: Is the Artist at heart a Thinker, and the Thinker an Artist? But little would be gained by such a headlong impatience of results. In a mechanical puzzle the solution is the thing. Bits of steel must be twisted about in a certain way or helter skelter balls of mercury must be driven to cover; the sooner it is done, the better. With scientific problems it is much the same. But in philosophy we are often interested in the question rather than the answer; in the whereabouts, the variants, the ins and outs rather than the solution. Not every one would admit as much. There are some who dig a problem in with a spade; they much prefer to have it stay put. To me it seems more important to get the life-beat of a problem in all its unruliness. William James does it successfully because of his open mind and his taste for the individual: he indulges a problem, gives it free play, enjoys its waywardness and uncovers its richness; his work is a protest against the philosopher's idol worship of the general as such. What then should we gain by asking the general question: Is the Artist a Thinker and the Thinker an

Artist? We might answer Yes or No; the result would still be the same: a washed-out answer to a washed-out problem. I do not, of course, mean to defend the ingenious way of keeping problems alive by linking them with others and breaking them into a thousand puzzles, offering a new one as soon as the old one has become lifeless. But I do wish to suggest the liveness, the colorfulness and richness of the problem of tracing with some detail the thought strain in certain artists and the artistic groundwork of certain philosophies. To say that Nietzsche, for instance, is an artist philosopher amounts to little, but it might be worth while to try to give the artistic quality of his thought, to get its stamp, to disentangle some of the motifs in which it is so rich. It might be worth while to show parallelisms between Rodin's technique and his reflections on art; to give the world-view of a Maeterlinck, a Tolstoy or a Wagner as it reflects their imagination and defines their outlook on the world of art; to explain Hegel's philosophy as world-romance of the boldest. I realize quite well that to attempt something of the sort is to set out on the road to the individual, and means a complicated rather than simplified task. It would have been much easier to have given the ordinary schematized interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy—a few high lights and a bit of outline—but why make so little of the richness of a problem? why lose so much by your haste to turn it inside out and tuck it away?