

**THE DESIRE OF BEAUTY:
BEING INDICATION FOR
AESTHETIC CULTURE**

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The Desire of Beauty: Being Indication for Aesthetic Culture by Theodore Child

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Being Indications for Æsthetic Culture



THEODORE CHILD

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Out

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

IX



CONTENTS

AFTER	PAGE
I. PROLOGUE.....	I
II. THE SOLITUDE OF THE SOUL.....	9
III. THE INVENTION OF BEAUTY.....	24
IV. VARIOUS KINDS OF CRITICISM....	44
V. THE JOY OF ART.....	79
VI. THE ERROR OF REALISM.....	100
VII. PAPIER INGRES.....	123
VIII. AN ART CRITIC OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.....	137
IX. THE EDUCATION OF THE EYE....	151



THE DESIRE OF BEAUTY

I

PROLOGUE



IN the course of the past winter it was frequently my privilege to dine at the table of a Parisian lady whose habitual guests are artists and literary men, together with a few persons of social eminence, whose wealth enables them to realize certain modern ideals of luxurious life with its accompaniment of material and intellectual elegance. The hostess herself is a cultivated and charming lady who is generally credited with great dis-

crimination in matters of literature and the fine arts. As for the artists and writers whom she gathers round her, they are all men of distinction, but of widely different degrees of intellectual development; indeed, some of them seem to be almost creatures of pure instinct, devoid of conscious culture, and wholly unfamiliar with the methods of dialectics and with that spirit of lucid and resolute reasoning which characterizes the young Athenian boys whom Plato introduces in his dialogues.

Now, in spite of the efforts of some of the more skeptical and clear-sighted literary men, who would fain have kept the conversation in the paths of social gossip and verbal sleight-of-hand, knowing that language has been given to man in order that he may conceal his thoughts, and that where two or three are gathered together in argument there is the beginning of the ascertainment



PROLOGUE

of interminable confusion; nevertheless, the theme of our talk would again and again be the fine arts and subjects therewith connected. One evening in particular remains graven in my memory on account of the singularly disheartening spectacle which the discussion presented after three hours of ardent and misguided dialectics. We began by exchanging views and souvenirs about various methods of artistic education and by naïvely marveling at the universality of the great Italian geniuses of the fifteenth century, who were at the same time goldsmiths, architects, sculptors, painters, engineers, and even ambassadors or assassins, and who were as ready to decorate a marriage-chest or to design a salt-cellar as to paint a fresco or model a statue. Thereupon some one suggested that the distinction now drawn between the fine and the useful arts was to be regretted.

"When did the distinction begin to be made?" asked one.

To the astonishment of most of us, our hostess, who is well read in such matters, maintained that the term Fine Art originated in France; that it came first into use there about the middle of the eighteenth century; and that according to the best French authority, Littré, the Fine Arts are painting, sculpture, music, architecture, poetry, and eloquence, with dancing as a subsidiary art.

In vain some protested vaguely, one interrupting the other, and all speaking with precipitation and giving utterance to imperfectly formulated ideas, as our modern habit is. "Surely Horace is the author of the distinction," it was urged, "or at any rate he implied it in his familiar parallel between poetry and painting." "And the Greeks?" suggested another, interrogatively; and,