

**BLAIR'S LECTURES ON
RHETORIC AND BELLES-
LETTRES, REDUCED TO
QUESTION AND ANSWER**

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Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres, Reduced to Question and Answer by John Marsh

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JOHN MARSH

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ON
RHETORIC
AND
BELLES-LETTERS,

REDUCED TO
QUESTION AND ANSWER.

BY REV. JOHN MARSH.

SECOND EDITION.

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1822.

KC 10652



District of Connecticut, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the sixth (L. S.) day of June, in the forty-fourth year of the Independence of the United States of America, SAMUEL G. GOODRICH, of the said district, hath deposited in this Office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following, to wit:

*"Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres,
"reduced to Question and Answer. By Rev. John
"Marsh."*

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CHAS. A. INGERSOLL,
Clerk of the District of Connecticut.

A true copy of record, examined and sealed by me.

CHAS. A. INGERSOLL,
Clerk of the District of Connecticut.

BLAIR'S LECTURES

ON

RHETORIC AND BELLES-LETTRES.

TASTE.

Q. WHAT is Taste?

A. The power of receiving pleasure or pain from the beauties or deformities of nature and of art.

Q. Is it an internal sense, or an exercise of reason?

A. It is an internal sense; but reason assists Taste in many of its operations, and serves to enlarge its power.

Q. Is it common to all men?

A. It is, in some degree.

Q. How are the rudiments of Taste discoverable in children?

A. In their fondness for regular bodies, and in their admiration of pictures and statues.

Q. How, in savages of the wilderness?

A. In their ornaments of dress, their war and their death songs, their harangues, and their orators.

Q. Do all men possess the faculty of Taste, in the same degree ?

A. No. In some men only faint glimmerings of it are visible ; beauties of the coarsest kind only are discerned and relished by them : while, in others, taste rises to an acute discernment, and a lively enjoyment of beauties the most refined.

Q. To what is this inequality to be attributed ?

A. In part, to a difference in their natural constitution ; but chiefly, to culture and education.

Q. How does it appear that Taste is an improveable faculty ?

A. From the immense superiority of civilized over barbarous nations, in refinement of Taste ; and of those who have studied the liberal arts, over the rude and untaught, in the same nation.

Q. How does Taste receive its improvement ?

A. By frequent exercise ; and the application of good sense and reason, to the objects of Taste.

Q. What influence has the heart over a just Taste ?

A. Great. A corrupt heart can never relish the moral beauties, which are the highest, of eloquence and poetry.

Q. What are the characters of good Taste ?

A. Delicacy and correctness.

Q. What does Delicacy of Taste respect ?

A. The perfection of that natural sensibility on which Taste is founded.

Q. What does Correctness of Taste respect ?

A. The improvement which that faculty receives, through its connexion with the understanding.

Q. In what is the power of each chiefly seen ?

A. In discerning the true merit of a work ; and in rejecting false pretensions to merit. Delicacy, leans more to feeling ; Correctness, more to judgment. The former, is chiefly the gift of nature ; the latter, the product of culture and art.

Q. What critical writers have afforded a high example of Delicate Taste ?

A. Longinus, among the Ancients ; and Addison, among the Moderns.

Q. Who have possessed most correctness ?

A. Aristotle and Dean Swift.

Q. Have mankind uniformly approved of the same things ?

A. No. In architecture, the Grecian models long prevailed ; then the Gothic ; afterwards, the Grecian revived. In eloquence and poetry, the Asiatics were fond of gaudy ornament ; while the Greeks admired only chaste and simple beauties. Writings, admired two or three centuries ago, have now fallen into disrepute and oblivion.

Q. What conclusion should we naturally draw from this fact ?

A. That Taste, in its operations, is fluctuating and capricious ; and has no standard.

Q. Is this actually the case ?

A. No. For there is a standard of good Taste, by appealing to which, we may distinguish between a good and a bad Taste.

Q. Upon what is Taste built ?

A. Upon sentiments and perceptions which belong to our nature.

Q. What occasions a corrupt Taste ?

A. The perversion of these sentiments and perceptions by ignorance and prejudice.

Q. What is the standard of good Taste ?

A. These sentiments and perceptions uncorrupted.

Q. Where are these to be found ?

A. They cannot fail to be developed in the course of time, and to gain ascendancy over any corrupted modes of Taste which may be introduced. Ignorance and prejudice may rule for a season, but must ultimately yield to knowledge and truth.

Q. What two works have been approved throughout ages, and become standards of poetical composition ?

A. The *Iliad* of Homer, and the *Aeneid* of Virgil.

**CRITICISM—GENIUS—PLEASURES OF
TASTE—SUBLIMITY IN OBJECTS.**

Q. What is Criticism ?

A. The application of taste and good sense to the fine arts.

Q. What is the design of Criticism ?

A. To distinguish what is beautiful and faulty in every performance.

Q. On what is it founded ?

A. On experience ; on the observation of such beauties as have been found to please mankind most generally.

Q. What is its importance ?

A. Great ; for no genius is perfect, and every writer and artist may receive assistance from critical observations upon the beauties and faults of those who have gone before them.

Q. Are not Critics great abridgers of the native liberty of genius ?

A. No. For every good writer will be pleased to have his work examined by the principles of sound understanding and true taste.

Q. Have not some works been admired which have transgressed the rules of Critics ?

A. Yes. Such are the plays of Shakespeare ; which, considered as dramatic poems, are very irregular ; but they possess beauties so great as to overpower all censure.

Q. What is Genius ?