

**ELEMENTS OF DESIGN. IN
SIX PARTS.
FOR THE USE OF
PARENTS AND TEACHERS**

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Elements of Design. In Six Parts. For the Use of Parents and Teachers by W. Rimmer

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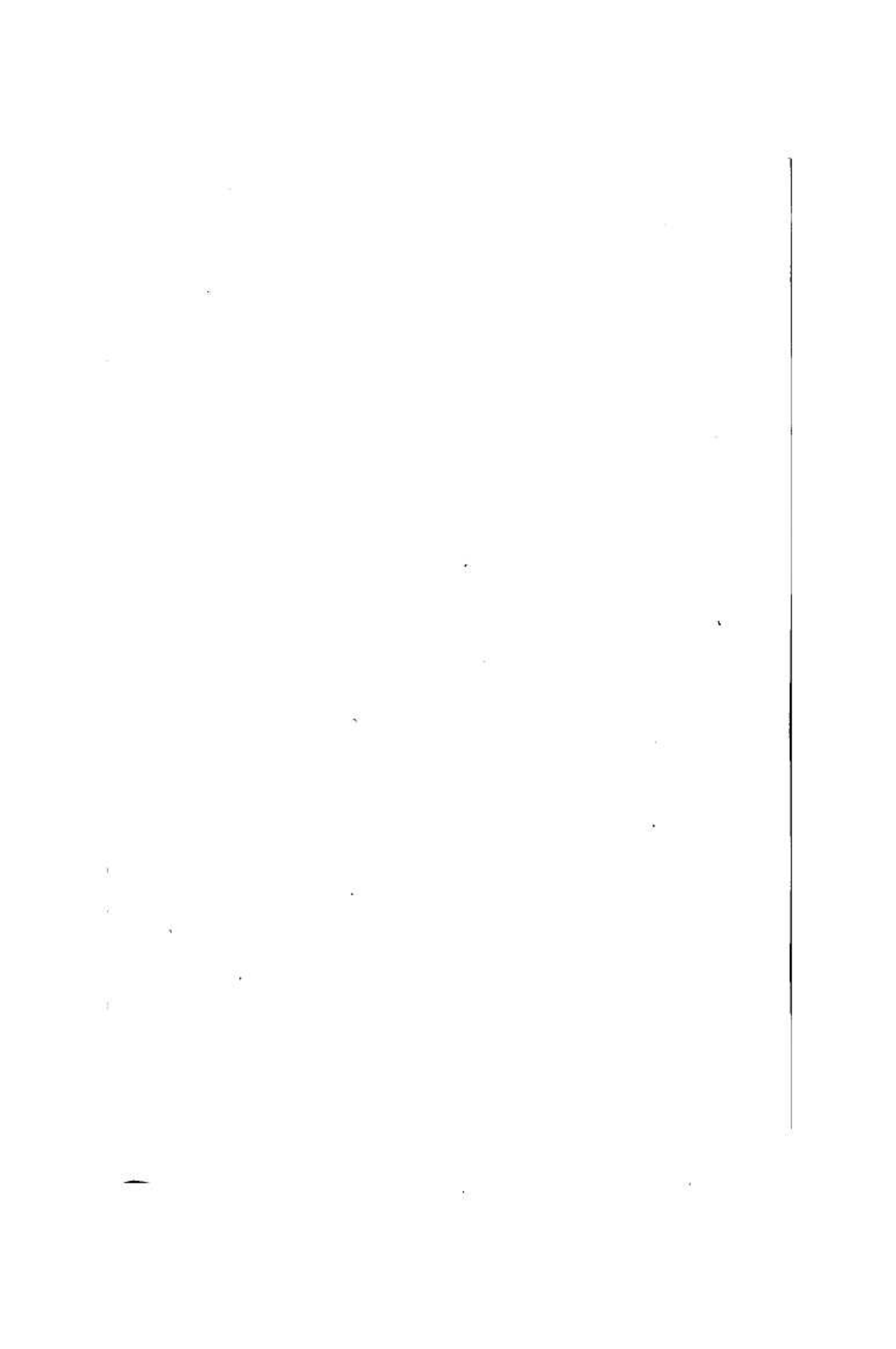
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

BY J. E. CABOT.

[These prefatory remarks were written down at Dr. Rimmer's request, and are now printed by his wish, as indicating in a general way his intention in the treatise of which this volume is a part.]

THE object of the following pages is to exemplify in its rudiments a method of teaching to draw, which is founded on the idea that Drawing does not signify merely an imitation of forms, but that it aims mainly to reproduce expression,—the effect that immediately results from the sight of the object, and seems to belong to it primarily, irrespective of use, association, or other secondary or imparted value. Of course, the first requisite is an ability to *feel* expression,—a sense for the dumb language of lines and surfaces. The eye is not of itself enough for seeing, any more than the hand is enough for drawing.

All art, from the most rudimentary attempts, presupposes this higher sense to be to some extent awakened; and it is to the interest thus created that it appeals. But the sense may exist, and may be sufficiently developed to be recognized as the source of an occasional satisfaction more or less vivid, and yet remain vague and dim, like the vision of those animals whose eyes are covered by a membrane that permits

only the general sensation of light, and perhaps of the direction whence it comes, but no distinct seeing. This is the common case. In the absence of special gifts, and of training, direct or indirect, the sense of natural beauty in most persons remains dormant, and recovers its normal action only momentarily, by accident, or when some extraordinary appeal is made to it: so that what should be a daily refreshment, as much a part of every man's life as his meals or his rest, is regarded as an exotic luxury, a superfluous garnish, not as any substantial reality.

But Sight is the noblest of the senses. Any thing that helps to perfect it really enlarges the world for us; for what passes unnoticed, might, as far as we are concerned, as well not exist. It is the cheapest and most wholesome of pleasures, subject to no drawback or impediment, out of reach of no position or condition of life; nor need the amount of training, which is of the most general importance, be difficult of attainment to any one in this community. Every boy and girl of healthy taste likes to learn to draw; and the time and means necessary could be found for all, were elementary instruction steadily directed to what is essential, and freed from unnecessary complication with what is at best extraneous. The trouble is, that Drawing, with pupils and with teachers, too often means picture-making, — the production by any means, the speedier the better, of something that shall be thought pretty to look at; a notion tolerably sure to extinguish any ordinary amount of ability. The short-cut to picture-making is copying; that is, the substitution of another person's conception and rendering of expression and effect, at the fourth or the hundredth remove, for one's own: and the result is necessarily a vapid mannerism in those who are content passively to accept what is put before them, and weariness and disgust to the stronger natures who are vaguely conscious of a capacity for something more, or, at

least, are restless under a course of purposeless trifling. Ability to draw, is ability, first of all, to see what is to be drawn: not by any means all the lines that exist, even in the simplest subject, but only those that tell the story; that fix the form for what it is, and separate it from what it is not. The acquisition of this ability is not furthered, but impeded, by foregoing all occasion for its exercise, and accepting the result at second-hand.

As the art of Drawing is primarily the art of seeing, the main point is rightly-directed attention, — an attention that knows not merely what to see, but what to overlook and omit. The skilful eye is careful of hair's breadths, and careless of inches: follows at one time with breathless intentness the minutest curve of line or surface; at another condenses, omits, or even contradicts. It may do always whatever it has reason to do.

This is one of the lessons of Greek art. The Greek sculpture cannot be defended for accuracy; but the very inaccuracies more strongly emphasize the broad, unerring perception of vital truth.

Thus a systematic instruction in the elements of Drawing, so far from being useful only or especially to the artist, is even more important to those to whom it is only a part of general culture. Not that study is less important to the artist, but that his nature brings with it a predetermination which prevents him from wasting his forces upon what has no existence to art. To others, this bias must be supplied by a careful training of the attention to perceive the *meaning* of forms in nature, and to perceive nothing else; to omit every line in which no meaning is seen. There can be no harm to any one in this; for, whether there be any meaning *there* or not, unless it is instinctively felt, any attempt to render the form will only falsify it. There is no danger that mannerism will be the result; for mannerism comes from thoughtless repetition. It must be always safe, at least, to be silent.