

LECTURE ON ART



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ART

BY

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THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The text contained in this volume is from Thomas Cole's undated manuscript, which is held by the New York State Library in Albany. The manuscript includes two rough drafts and a later revision; the text of this book is based mainly on the revised version. Historical and biographical evidence suggests that Cole first composed the text circa 1845. He titled the work *Lecture on Art*; however, so far, no evidence has surfaced that indicates he ever delivered it as a lecture, although notations in the original manuscript marking breath pauses suggest he may have read it to an audience. The editors have omitted these notations along with several crossed out portions of the text. Punctuation has been altered for clarity.

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The Thomas Cole National Historic Site preserves and interprets the home and studios of Thomas Cole, founder of the Hudson River School of painting. Its publications and educational programs engage broad audiences in learning about the influence of Thomas Cole on America's cultural landscape.

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Frontispiece:
JAMES SMILLIE after THOMAS COLE
The Voyage of Life: Youth, 1850
Engraving in black on wove paper, 20 x 26½ inches
Thomas Cole National Historic Site, TC.1988.3.B

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LECTURE ON ART

IN PROPOSING ART as the subject of my Lecture it may be imagined that I have done so inconsiderately; but I would not have it thought that so great a theme is assumed in the expectation of discoursing upon it in a full and satisfactory manner in the brief moments permitted us.

Art is so various in its aspect and so multiform in its expression that to treat satisfactorily, even of one of its branches, would be the works of many hours, and I trust you will indulge me if I attempt a less Herculean labor. In the remarks I propose to make I have no intention of dwelling on any particular Art in detail, but in a desultory manner to call your attention to the “Arts of Design” as they are commonly called, and more especially to that of painting—to treat of such Art in its influences, objects and requirements, and while placing it before you in the aspects it has assumed in ages past, to lead to the consideration of American Art and to suggest what appears to be incumbent on us as a community if we desire to sow seed in the fields of the Beautiful which for ourselves and the coming generations shall grow and ripen into abundant harvests. Pregnant with life, the air we breathe surrounds the natural world and softens into harmony its

rugged forms. So Art—the Atmosphere which encircles the sphere of our humanity—kindles the dead soul and raises it above the dullness of mere animal existence to intellectual acquirement.

*For through the morning-gate of beauty goes
The pathway to the land of knowledge!*¹

Art is man's imitation of the great Creative Power. The World, the Universe were around him with all their mystery and glory, the work of the great Artist. Touched by the beauty which everlastingly flowed from their contemplation, man felt an instinct and a power grow within him and was impelled to imitate. His first attempts were rude and simple, the mere resemblances of common objects; but through long experience and desire he learned to seize on Beauty—the great ideal world was evolved and he rejoiced with twofold joy. Having so great a prototype, Art has been called divine and its power to affect and modify the passions, sentiments, and institutions of men has been acknowledged in all ages.

Painting and Sculpture (of which I shall speak more particularly) possess a power, not common to the other Arts; they speak a universal language. Through them the Ancient converses with the Modern. Phidias now speaks in languages now perfectly intelligible and the Etrurian, whose bones have been dust three thousand years and

whose written language is now a mystery, holds converse with us through the works of Art his genius fashioned.

The veriest savage on the face of the earth has some knowledge or practice of Art. It is, indeed, the great humanizing principle; and Science herself could have boasted no triumph, but thick darkness would have brooded over the great deep of the human intellect had not God's providence dawned upon it. The Poet says in speaking of Science,

*O fall not back from that high faith serene,
To serve the handmaids and forsake the Queen.
In diligent wit [sic] thy master is the bee;
In craft mechanical the worm that creeps
Through earth its dexterous way, may tutor thee;
In knowledge, couldst thou fathom all its deeps,
All to the seraph is already known;
But thine, O Man is Art—thine only and alone!*²

Sculpture and painting, if not the first Arts which man ever exercised, are undoubtedly those by which the others were seized in their swift flight and bound in enduring symbols to be transmitted through the long centuries to man. The primal rudiment of all literature, the Alphabet owes its origin to one of the Arts as may be seen in the Hebrew letters, each of which was the representation of some object, or animal, whose spoken name commenced

with it. Indeed it is impossible that any significant sound could originally have been represented without a form significant of some natural object. And thus it may be said that all literature originated in the Arts of Design.

In taking a wide view of the history of Art we may safely indulge in the cheering thought that her riches will be ever accumulating as she moves along. Nation after Nation, Age after Age will pour its tribute into her lap as she sits on Earth imperishable as Time himself. And although much of her treasure through the wreck of Nations and the violence of man has been scattered and lost, yet man repents himself and digging among the ruins discovers many of her lost jewels, rejoices in the mutilated statue and the moldering picture. And we inherit a priceless possession, in laws and works, from those who labored in the precincts of the Parthenon and the Halls of the Vatican.

It may be said that as Grecian Art subdued to softer moods the stern Roman, so it has conquered us; it pervades and modifies our modern thought and tastes in a manner deeper and more universal than many of us have ever suspected. Its influence will continue as long as man can enjoy the beautiful, and the principles which that wonderful people educes, through subtle analogy and keen observation, are those which will govern true Art in all time, for they flow from the everlasting fountain of Nature. In the Ancient Greek the Artistic mind was

more completely developed than the world has elsewhere known; with singular felicity he discovered the springs of the Beautiful and established what is the essential in Art.

It were unnecessary for me to dwell on the influence which Art exercised over the civil polity, morals and religion of various of the Nations of Antiquity—it is sufficient to say that Art is now the sole bond which unites us to them as to elder brothers. The violence of man, the corroding tooth of time, convulsions natural and political have been unable to sever the chain that binds us, and as the coming ages unfold, link after link will be added and man will never cease to recognize in Art a Symbol of our common humanity. What do we know or care for the barbarous Scythian of Old? For him we have neither reverence, gratitude nor admiration; but for those Nations who have bequeathed to us the legacy of Art we owe and should acknowledge a vast debt of gratitude and love.

How affecting is the story of the Athenian captives whom the poetry of Euripides rescued from slavery and death. After the destruction of the great Athenian expedition against Syracuse, the captives were treated with unrelenting cruelty, save a number of them who reciting the verses of Euripides in their harmonious dialect melted the hearts of their cruel conquerors to release them from captivity and death.

On arriving at Athens the grateful band proceeded immediately to the house of the Poet and offered their

thanks to him whose genius had broken their bonds and restored them to their native land. If the Plastic Arts can afford no such incident as this, it is rather because they seldom record their own triumphs. Yet in all great ages Painting and Sculpture have been considered among the greatest incentives to Patriotism, Virtue and Religion.

The Greek gloried in Art; he honored his Artists by the highest Olympic Prizes. "A Picture was worth a City."³ How burned the Bosom of the Athenian Mariner as on returning from some distant voyage he rounded the promontory of Sounion and there rose to his view the Spear and Helmet of the Phidian Minerva which crowned the Acropolis. And with what dignity was he moved as he trod beneath the pictured shadows of the Propylea, or gazed upon the sculptured wonders of the Parthenon.

Painting and Sculpture have ministered to Religion both in the Pagan and the Christian World. In the first they well nigh raised idolatry above its loathsomeness. Olympic Jupiter would almost have made a Christian bow. Apollo in his form of swiftness and majesty would have astonished him and the serene dignity of Minerva have sealed his lips in respectful silence.

In the latter it has winged the pious thought, deepened the springs of devotion, has taught through Saints and Martyrs and by embodying through the power of Genius the facts and incidents of Holy Writ, has raised the common mind to loftier and nobler conceptions than

unaided it were possible for it to achieve.

There was a time, and in some countries it yet exists, where multitudes unable to read have been taught by pictures the great incidents in the life of Christ and his Apostles. These times are in great measure past, but not so the necessity for the aids of Art. The Artist of true genius can present the glorious events, I have mentioned, in nobler forms and hues than the mass of mankind can conceive and his burning thoughts can be made the common property and heritage of his fellow men.

Evil times have fallen upon Art. Confounded with evil things she has been struck down by men forgetful that Art is the servant, not the master, serving with good or evil as may be demanded of her. Feeble and sickly she has lingered on until our day and it is only of late that Protestant Nations have discovered that society is a great loser by degrading the services of such a handmaid. Men are beginning to ask (as Music and Poetry are the accepted handmaids of religion) why painting and statuary may not serve at her shrines. They ask and receive no answer, save such as may be given for the abandonment of every Art with which God has blessed us. Painting and Sculpture until within a few centuries, in all ages, in all civilized countries, have been hand in hand with Music and Poetry, and why these silent and thoughtful sisters, so capable of fixing the wandering thought, of making permanent impressions, of expressing the pure—the rapt—

the holy, and of reproducing, in a manner approaching reality the sacred scenes of Holy Writ, should be excommunicated and driven from our shrines like guilty culprits, is a question which is difficult satisfactorily to answer.

Painting and Sculpture are the vehicles of sentiment, passion or information; they are no more profane, holy or virtuous than eloquence, than poetry; like these they may minister to each and every feeling of man. They have power, but that power is subservient to the will of society, though at the same time they serve to impel with mighty force the human mind in whatever direction it may start. That these Arts will ever attain their lofty and rightful station, again to be admitted to equal fellowship with the other Fine Arts, can scarcely be a matter of doubt and ere long we may hope to see their glorious company rejoicing in renovated strength and beauty. Of what weighty importance is it then that we direct Art into pure and healthful channels and not permit her copious streams to nurture rank and poisonous weeds, but to lead them to the production of beauty, glory and virtue.

A great German writer has said that "Art is an eternal well of pure knowledge to youth; a strengthener of feelings and good principles even to the superficial observer; for the effect of whatever is truly excellent is not confined to the initiated alone."⁴ This of course applies to Art in her legitimate channels; for alas Art has been too frequently prostrated to the basest purposes.

The language of Plastic Art is Imitation and through Imitation we may become wise and cognizant of true beauty; but by Imitation is not to be understood the vulgar notion, that copying whatever nature presents to the eye in her everyday garb, in facsimile resemblances, is the perfection of Artistic power. True Imitation selects from the great world around us the characteristic, the sublime and the beautiful; in its alembic separates the true from the accidental. In the lower ranges of Art, it is true, verisimilitude of imitation forms a very important source of pleasure; but in loftier Art Imitation is the means through which the essential truths of Nature are conveyed.

Thus Art becomes the exponent of Nature's highest qualities; she seizes the transitory forms of beauty, (for truth and beauty—in their highest sense identical—are but the passing visitants of this world) and embodies them in permanent forms for our contemplation. She places the beautiful and the sublime, in Man and the World, before us free from the impediments and accidents which too frequently disturb, and oftentimes, in consequence of our sympathy with our fellow man, as the creator of the works before us, presents with more force than nature herself the beautiful and the true.

Through Art we obtain higher glimpses of Nature. She withdraws the veil which hides from the vulgar eye the glorious infinitude of beauty which God has spread around us. Through Nature we contemplate Art and Art

discovers the beautiful in Nature. They are mutual exponents and the true student of Art must be a student of Nature, for in her are to be found all the types of Beauty.

Under this twofold study Man's eye enlarges its powers of perception, incipient faculties are developed and beauty is recognized where all before was dull and formless. Presented in Art, the World blooms again in something of its pristine glory. Man "fearfully and wonderfully made"⁵ walks majestic as the first Adam and Woman moves as Eve in loveliness and grace. Through Art ideal beauty takes possession of the mind, hallows and elevates it above the sordid and the vulgar and though it may not sanctify the heart, it renders it susceptible to religious impressions.

Perhaps I have dwelt rather long on this portion of my subject, for there may be those who will be reluctant to concede what I assert of the healthful influences of Art. Yet none will turn away and deny that she has power to afford us pleasure in our moments of recreation; and even in this low point of view, Art is deserving of our attention, for that which supplies one innocent recreative pleasure may kill a vicious habit.

The commercial value of the Fine Arts is one which in our community can scarcely avoid being recognized. The Nations of Europe are now widely awake to its immense importance. In England, France and Germany Schools of "Industrial Art" as it is called, are established under

the patronage of Government. In these Schools, Design and Color, as applicable to manufactures, are taught and any one who has observed the vast improvement that has taken place within a few years in the beauty of Furniture, Vases, Chandeliers, Earthenware and in the patterns of draperies of all kinds cannot but be astonished; and all this is owing to the establishment of Institutions where Art is taught on true principles. And let it not be thought that the skill which applies to Industrial Art is aside from the higher branches, the cultivation of which I most seem to advocate. The encouragement of the highest exalts the lowest. When the sun shines on the mountain top the valley is illuminated. The porcelain vase may exhibit exquisite design and the patterns on silks and calicoes charming composition of forms and color. The advantage to the Nations that excel in Industrial Art is incalculable—their people are employed and wealth flows in from every less favored country.

Conscious that we all feel a deep interest in the subject, I am desirous to make a few remarks on the State of the Arts among ourselves; and if I do not entertain you by flattering eulogies and boastful disquisitions on what we have accomplished, it will be because truth and a sober, common-sense view of what the condition of Art really is will be far more conducive to success in our endeavors to raise her to the noble station we should wish her to take than all the vainglorious laudations and com-

parisons in the World. To come to some estimate of what the Fine Arts have accomplished among us, let us take a view of the Works of Art which have been produced and exist in this Country. When the stranger asks us to point out our great Works, where shall we direct him? Where is our Transfiguration, our School of Athens, our Communion of St. Jerome or works which may be named with the great Italian hosts of the productions of some of the Modern Schools of Europe? It may be said that this is expecting too much; as respects multitude of works this is true, but not as regards importance. We are too young and too poor for the patronage of the Fine Arts to any extent is a common remark, but it is not a true one. We are old enough to build magnificent Steam-Boats and decorate them with a perishable splendor that vies in costliness with the superb palaces of Europe. We have luxurious and expensive furniture, and that perishable, in more profusion than any nation living or that ever existed. We can shower gold on the Cantatrice, the Danseuse, and the Violinist, and yet we say we are too young and too poor to give an ample encouragement to Painting and Sculpture. Young enough we may be for a proper appreciation of Art, but old enough certainly to provide for it. We have wealth enough. Greece in all her Glory had scarcely a tithe of our Wealth. Old Europe whom we sometimes affect to despise so much is leaving us in the rear; and not so much because she has got the start of us, or had a foundation

to build upon which we did not possess; for, at the commencement of the present century the Arts were nearly prostrate in England, Germany and France; but because the Arts, which we look upon as mere pleasurable toys, are considered by their Governments as important to the well-being and the wealth of Nations.

It is said with great truth that our Artists have displayed extraordinary talent; far be it from me to depreciate the merit of my fellow Artists. I charge them with no deficiency, but rather wonder that under the circumstances they have accomplished so much. Some of them have produced works which are an honor to their Country. It is not genius they lack, it is opportunity; and if great works have not been produced it is the fault of the Community. In portraiture, in Landscape, in familiar subjects they may not be placed behind the Artists of other lands and in History they have shown a capacity for high excellence. But it is here the American Artist may complain, he commences his career with the intention of producing works that will be honorable to himself and to his Country, he perhaps goes abroad and drinks deep of the Fountains of Ancient Art—studies, labors and returns; but the visions of his Youth fade away as he finds that the taste and demand is for portraiture (or rather face-painting) and the lower grades of Landscape and History. No longer impelled by high aspirations he too often abandons the desire for excellence and pursues

the path which leads to money-getting, or is compelled to satisfy the necessities of life by the sacrifice of all lofty desires in his profession. I wish not to draw too unfavorable a picture of the Fine Arts among us. Our Exhibitions testify to the amount of talent in our Artists and also to the taste and liberality of many of our fellow Citizens; but at the same time it may readily be perceived that Art is cramped and burthened by narrow tastes and limited opportunities, by the demand for the small, the pretty and the common-place. How few works can be detected in our Galleries of Modern pictures of an elevated character and those few have in general been executed by Artists who are lingering in Rome, Florence or Germany. Blessed places to them! Where they find deep sympathy for Art and are stimulated to exertion by the presence of Great Works.

In these strictures on Art as it exists among us let it not for a moment be supposed that I think this community dead to the charms of lofty Art, or deaf to her claims; so far from that my observation has led me to the belief that there is no people living naturally more alive to the beautiful both in Nature and Art and none where the desire for excellence so universally prevails. This feeling for the beautiful and excellent exhibits itself in every hand and in it the observant may perceive the germ of all that is great in Art. Do you ask why this good seed does not grow and fructify? It does grow though slenderly as yet

and feeble, for though the air is good the ground is stony. Art wants a broader field, a richer soil.

It may be said that the Capitol at Washington has already been adorned by art, it is true, but it is not my intention here to speak of the manner or choice of its adornments; only, so far to say that as a whole it is an unlucky example.

In the decoration of Public edifices I would advocate no hasty movement, for to do it successfully requires taste and much discretion. Few of our Artists are quite prepared to undertake works of this kind. We can expect no miracle. The minute style which is required in Cabinet Pictures must be abandoned for the broader and simpler execution demanded by the mural, or the great historical oil picture.

Our Artists should be trained as the English Artists are now being trained for the decoration of their magnificent public buildings. There must be competition in the higher walks of Art, prizes and remuneration to those who excel.

I am conscious that there may be those to whom these remarks appear to be the product of a visionary mind and that I have overlooked obstacles and underrated the progress which Art is now making among us, and that the benefits likely to spring from public patronage is imaginary. I can only say that I believe want of information and a due consideration of the subject to be the occasion of such

opinions. If objections are made on the ground that Art needs no such aid as I desire and that taste is spreading with sufficient rapidity—and although the works in demand are on a small scale and ordinary and familiar subjects—yet in these there is sufficient field for all that Art can accomplish. Or there are those who hold that with our political institutions we cannot expect Art to take a high stand. To such persons I would offer a few more remarks. But before I do I will acknowledge the efforts that have been already made and now are making to disseminate knowledge of Art among the people. The Academy of New York and similar institutions in different parts of the country—the Art Unions and lastly the Permanent Galleries which have been opened in New York and one or two other Cities and among them your own in which I have great interest and people.⁶ All of these established for the most noble purposes, are I trust destined to flourish long and produce all the benefits their founders anticipate. The patronage and influence of Private individuals among us has often been most liberal and the example of the few will be followed by the many. But more than this, creditable as it is, must be done if we expect Art to take her highest flight in this country. My opinion that in order that Art shall be developed in her grandest forms, she must be exercised on a large scale and in Mural decorations, is in great measure founded on the history of Art and on the universal desire of man to perpetuate his

thoughts, history and feelings. This innate longing after immortality is the day-spring of his Genius, the instigator of the noblest exertions of the laborer man.

He would have his thoughts and deeds live through the long centuries and he erects monuments which, if not to endure through all time, shall be of such lasting fabric as will seem to ensure their existence until they shall be lost in the mysterious folds of far distant ages. His genius grows with the magnitude of his work, he will have an after life in this world shining in forms and colors; or dwelling in marble vesture—his labor is a passion and its beauty will be commensurate with the amplitude of the work, its sublimity with its enduring nature. It has been said that magnitude is of no importance in pictures, that a picture may be as impressive which is only as big as “one’s thumb nail” as if it were fifty feet square. Preposterous! As though one were to compare a Bird Organ with one of those noble instruments which make tremulous Cathedral Aisles. Space is as necessary for effect in Painting as volume of sound in Music. The Anthem will not fill the ears and hearts of a great multitude if performed on the Violin; nor can they gather vast thoughts from the picture whose scale is diminutive. And again small works of Art are ephemeral in their nature, from the fact of their minuteness, as well as from the perishable nature of the materials in which they are generally executed. They are easily destroyed by accidents and

greatly exposed to them in consequence of being moveable.

Few I believe will differ from me in the opinion that the permanency of an Artist's work will strongly influence him in its execution and that grandeur of field will have the tendency to produce greatness of thought and artistic energy.

I would not have it inferred from the foregoing remarks that I undervalue the importance of the Art which should adorn our private dwellings. Nor Galleries of Pictures and Statues—nor Libraries of Prints and Works which treat on Art; on the contrary I hail with pleasure every encouragement for the practice, enjoyment and extension of it through such means. But my earnest desire is to see it presented in such a form that none shall be deprived of its pleasures and benefits. That Art shall be exposed—free as air—to every Citizen, high or low, rich or poor. Will it not readily be perceived that Public Art could be made the means of lifting the mind of the plain laborer and mechanic above its dull common course. Pleasures, Amusements, men must have—and by presenting it in a form that shall be recreative—thousands would be drawn, in their leisure hours, away from low pleasures and pursuits that are too often mingled with vice and degradation.

Among the hindrances to Art in this Country is the wretched criticism press, if Criticism that may be called, which is generally the capricious expression of ignorance and conceit. To criticize with truth requires that the Critic

be conversant both with Nature and Art; with neither of which can most of our Newspaper Critics claim more than a passing acquaintance. They have eyes and think they can see and to see is to know. Artists spring into notice at their beck and are again engulfed in some yawning paragraph. Some grow into public notice in a single night to “rot like fungi on the field of taste.”⁷ The Young Artist is always in demand; in this there is generosity and good feeling. But the youngest unfortunately always seems to be the best. This is to be accounted for by supposing that the works of the tyro are on a level with the understanding of the Critic; but let the Artist advance a little in his profession and the penny-a-liner is left behind trammelled in the business of Police Reports and strange accidents. Another impediment exists in the fact that the American does not seem to have time for Art; he is embarked on the great stream of business, in which there are few eddies and places of anchorage. Accustomed to do all things in haste his habits are averse to quiet study and contemplation, he greets Art with a patronizing glance, is glad to “see it doing so well,” pronounces upon it off hand. He does not know that Taste in Art is a coy Rachel and must be won by long servitude.

Painting and Statuary are particularly exposed to flippant Criticism. The Standard of Nature is set up by these Natural Critics, and by their notions of Nature a Work of Art is praised or condemned. They forget that

the true in its highest sense is the criterion and not the natural; the natural may be disgusting, but the true in Art is always beautiful, the beautiful everlastingly true.

Dilettantism is also rife among us—a smattering in Art. Perhaps Architecture is its peculiar Victim at this time, but painting is also a sufferer. It is difficult to say whether the extension of dilettantism is an evil or not, for the present it too often causes parental walls to be disfigured. It raises a host of small Critics who praise by rule and condemn by precedent; and many who now dabble in paint, had they avoided it, might have learned to enjoy Art with true relish and just discrimination. If the time which is spent in many of our schools in producing what are called oil pictures was devoted to the study of the principles of beauty, seeing that few may excel in practice, true taste would certainly be the gainer. On the other hand it is possible that dilettantism may in some measure prepare the way for the Steps of Taste.

I have no desire to discourage those who have a true feeling for Art in the pursuit of it. To draw with facility and taste is a valuable and ought to be a common acquirement—indeed Drawing ought to be taught in all our Common Schools. It is not merely an agreeable accomplishment, but is positively useful; it gives precision to the eye and strengthens its perceptive powers.

But as all cannot be Artists let those whose inclination leads them to the admiration of the beautiful be

lovers of Art and by studying Nature and the works of Genius—by esthetic culture take her to their arms with an abiding love. Thus they will open to themselves fountains of unalloyed pleasure. Art will be advanced through their knowledge and the Walls of our dwellings will rejoice in the absence of those pitiful productions which so frequently disfigure them.

With respect to the effect of our political Institutions on the Fine Arts—perhaps we can scarcely venture a positive opinion and although the Monarchical States of Europe seem at present to be making more rapid strides than ourselves, it were unwise to conclude that there is anything inimical in our more democratic form of Government to the attainment of high excellence in the Fine Arts.

The truth is our system has not yet elaborated its results—its elements are not yet resolved into positive form. If I may so say the Crystallization is going on, the Crystal is not Complete and we know not yet how many sides or what angles it will present when finished.

But let us hope that though Art may be slow to grow among us and, like our Spring, tardy; yet also like our Summer, it will at length burst upon us with great effulgence. It is a false though common notion that the Fine Arts have only flourished under monarchical or Despotical Institutions or have been warmed into life by the Smile of Princes. A slight study of the History of Art will quickly

dispel such opinions. Pericles who lived through the Culmination of his Country's glory and under whose rule the most magnificent works of Art that Athens or the World had ever seen, were produced, found Art full grown. Her lustihood was the growth of several centuries of Freedom and on the field of Marathon her slippery footsteps became firm and she advanced with rapid strides until his day.

Formed to his hand policy, as well as taste, was the motives of his patronage. What could his power have done had not a Phidias, a Panaenus, an Ictinus and a Micon grown up by his side. He was the last of a mighty line of Statesmen and Warriors—they of Artists. The fame of Pericles is borne to us up on the wings of their Genius.

And so in later times was Art nurtured in the Arms of Freedom. In Italian Republics she grew to gigantic Stature. A Cimabue, a Giotto, a Donatello preceded a Michel Angelo and a Raphael and the Magnificent Lorenzo di Medici like Pericles moved amidst a Constellation of Contemporary Artists, and like as of him policy as well as taste demanded patronage. Have we not good reason to rejoice in the thought that Free Institutions furnish a generous soil for the growth of the Fine Arts and let it kindle within us that desire which shall be the earnest of accomplishment.

But not by the mere imitation of what has been be-

fore done, nor the subservient copying of Art in her Ancient forms can a great Era of Art be attained by us, but by working under the great principles which governed Greek and Italian Art, and as new requirements, new moral and religious aspects in Society present themselves, apply those principles.⁸ The Orb of Art as it revolves will take new phases and reflect forms before unknown. For as Nature and Society are ever changing in mutation, so Art, changing but never lost, may shine in this land in exceeding beauty. And what shall prevent? The Ages past have bequeathed to us their inestimable treasures and deep esthetic lessons. Knowledge flows in; Science facilitates and makes us acquainted with the material of Art and it requires no prophetic Spirit to predict a day of Art brighter than man has ever yet seen. Let us endeavor then to lift up the prostrate standard of Art and make a stand against this headlong Utilitarianism which prevails. Let us try to convince our fellow Citizens that the pursuit of the beautiful is as essential to our well being as that of Gain. Gold can purchase food, raiment, property, but Taste is that Gentle and refined Spirit which bestows on life its serene pleasures and most exquisite delights. Without Art Man would scarce be human; with it he rises above the brute and takes a diviner nature.

*Scorn not to prize and praise the fostering hand
That found thee weeping, orphaned and alone*

*Lone on the verge of life's most barren strand.*⁹

I have now in a hasty manner presented various topics relating to Art. I have not tarried long with any though tempted strongly on my way; but have touched here and there on the shores of that beautiful world, not as one who would describe the wonders he finds therein, but as a surveyor who would mark the rocks, headlands and shoals that environ it.

It would have been an agreeable task had your patience permitted to have attempted a picture of an ideal, though not impossible world wherein the love of Beauty should pervade Mankind. Where Science which now rules and tyrannizes over the human mind would take her place as servant to the necessities and desires of Man and go hand in hand, with her more gentle sister Art, to serve at that shrine whose incense should forever rise to him who is “Rich in love, full of Wisdom and perfect in the plentitude of Beauty.”¹⁰

Where the hills should be crowned with structures more magnificent than ever graced the steepes of the Acropolis Agrigentum, or the Seven Hills of Rome—whose marble pediments should live with Sculpture and whose halls pictured in various harmony emblazon the deeds of the mighty past and the prophetic visions of the Future. Philosophy and Morals breathe in majestic forms—and Religion teaching through glowing symbols

her wondrous History and Truths, entrance the wandering thought.

There by the magic power of Genius should be portrayed the glorious congregation of Mountains, woods, streams, sky and rolling clouds in their essential beauty. There Art should gladden the heart of man and teach him that the beauty she displays is a type of coming and enduring glory. And to the vulgar eye make known that there is beauty in the rolling clouds and placid shingle beach.

*In feathery snows whistling winds and dun electric
skies;*

*There is beauty in the rounded woods dank with heavy
foliage,*

*In laughing fields, and dinted hills, the valley and its
lake.*

*There is beauty in gullies, beauty on the cliffs, beauty
in sun and shade,*

*In rocks and rivers, seas and plains,—the earth is
drowned in beauty.*¹¹

NOTES

- 1 Friedrich von Schiller, *The Artists*, 1789
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Reference unknown
- 4 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Propyläen* II, ii, 1799
- 5 Psalm 139:14
- 6 Reference unknown
- 7 Martin Archer Shee, *Rhymes on Art*, 1805
- 8 This sentence is from an earlier draft; the page where it would appear is missing from Cole's revision.
- 9 Friedrich von Schiller, *The Artists*, 1789
- 10 Martin Farquhar Tupper, *Proverbial Philosophy*, 1837
- 11 Ibid.