ARTICLE III.

ÆSTHETICS AND ETHICS.

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THE sense of beauty, which is the foundation of art, and the sense of right, which is the foundation of conduct, mutually modify and sustain each other. While Æsthetics and Ethics have occasion to prosecute their inquiries independently, and not infrequently fall into conflict, their more natural relation is one of mutual extension and correction as their fields approach or overlap each other. The thing that is beautiful is good, and the thing that is good is beautiful, in a comprehensive view of their dependencies. The two inquiries into the beautiful and the good are often the same in their leading subjects, and in their special forms involve equivalent principles. The painting may deal with man, or with still life, or with landscape, and in all is constantly approaching human wants and sentiments. The artist cannot divorce his products from man, either in their rendering or in their appeal. The perceptive powers, in these two forms of inquiry, and the objects offered to them meet in a common ground of feeling.

If we take music and architecture, which seem in their modes of expression remote from character, we none the less find that the best results in each have been reached in gratification of spiritual impulses, and as an embodiment of sentiments potent in human character. The demands of religious feeling have been laid in full volume on architecture and music, and the two arts have been developed and united in

meeting it. Religion has in many ways promoted art as its own most adequate expression.

A religious view of the world owes much of its fitness and authority to the manner in which it gathers up and combines the beauty of things and the force of events. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! If physical qualities and events were robbed of the appeal which they make to man as an intellectual and spiritual being, they would drop at once into the lap of appetite, lust, and passion. The ethical law we discover in the world, giving form and authority and dignity to conduct, is the basis of theism and the ground of faith. If there is a law of conduct approachable by man, this law expresses the divine idea concerning him, singly and collectively. Religion extends, elucidates, and supports ethical convictions, and brings to them, from an unseen world, a kindred order of motives. Neither art, nor ethics, nor religion is as yet fully developed, but a constant unfolding more and more unites them as the support of our spiritual life.

They agree in being an interpretation of physical things, a rendering of the ideas which the world, as addressed to man, contains. There is a constant discussion, in many directions, as to the reality of the ideas which the world seems to present, as to the manner of their attainment, as to their authority over the symbols which express them. Art, ethics, and religion are all occupied with this inquiry, and each has its realistic and its spiritual side. It will still be long before men will agree on these points, and reach an elevation at which the whole and the parts are merged in each other. The sensuous mind magnifies the symbol, and the spiritual mind speaks slightingly of it. The bird that flies, despises the bird that swims; and the bird that swims, thinks that safety and solidity are on its side. Art and life alike, Æsthetics and Ethics, unite in the

affirmation that things and actions need interpretation; that, till suitable relations and renderings are brought to them, they limp but lamely in the service of the superior life. The validity of art, which gains ground constantly as men advance, comes in to strengthen the validity of character, which, like a tree upon a summit, is fiercely beat upon, is subject to sharp denials and generous affirmations, to rejection as an empty figment, and acceptance as the true center of desire. The two perceptions agree in making the inmost quality and substance of things spiritual. By spiritual we mean intellectual and emotional states which transcend all sensuous experiences, and carry the mind into a realm of reasons,—a realm whose affections and fellowships turn on character. We are at once aware of beauty in its more pronounced forms as lying beyond perception, and addressed to states of mind of very different depth and extension in different persons. Artistic temper and tastes arise from complex states whose delicacy and make-up are the result of special endowment and long training. If we wish to know the ground of these convictions, we find ourselves at once in a region of sentiments which justify themselves only to those of similar endowment. Sympathy is based on an intellectual constitution, which is a law unto itself. This personal quality of feeling is the most striking feature in art; and a like separate satisfaction, in various degrees, belongs to the entire range of æsthetic sentiments. The artistic temper is not sensuous, but, in spite of its constant contact with things, is supersensuous, in search of the impressions it wishes to arouse.

Æsthetics and Ethics agree in this, that both are perpetually dealing with things. It is not abstract but embodied ideas that they have in mind. The beauty lies in the aptness of the embodiment, and the ethical satisfaction in conduct which is

the expression of the integrity of character. The physical in each case finds its apotheosis in the spiritual world, and the spiritual conception is made firm and tangible in a material form. In each case there is room for conflicting affirmations and denials as the parties to the discussion lay hold of different elements. The moralist may insist on conduct, and pay little heed to feeling; or, reversing the process, he may insist on generous sentiments, with minor heed to the actions which flow from them. The true moralist lays hold of the two as the inseparable parts of one living state. To art there belongs a protracted training in its physical symbols, that, by means of them, artistic sentiments may gain the most complete expression. In this pursuit of symbols there is no end to the possible oversight and denial of the ideas which give them value, or to the effrontery with which mere sensuous impressions are lifted to the throne of art thus made vacant. Nowhere do the physical and the spiritual so flow into each other, so demand each other, so approve each other, as in artistic and spiritual achievement. Art and character are true creations, ideas embodied in forms suitable to them.

They agree also in each lacking any absolute form or final goal. All beauty is a preparation for farther beauty, all achievement in righteousness a ground for higher achievement. The subtile quality of truth is present in both. Truth, the concurrence of ideas and form, is constantly taking on fuller and more adequate expression; and the eagerness with which it is sought, and the assurance with which it is entertained, would seem to be always looking forward to some more ultimate and complete success. Yet the process ever renews itself; we step from truth to truth, as if we were at length reaching the goal we had so long struggled for. Shortly a deficiency discloses itself, and we are again in motion for a

more adequate statement. We are like one penetrating an unknown mountain range. Each new ascent reveals other interior ridges and more distant summits. The difficulty with creeds is not so much that they have never been true, as that they have ceased to be true, and still hold us with the same bonds which came to the mind when it first entertained them. Man is anxious for an ultimate, though its acquisition would be the loss of all liberty. Our powers are powers of motion, rather than of rest. Truth lifts the mind to positions from which it can see greater and wider truths. We are to rejoice in an horizon constantly enlarged. Especially is this true in philosophy and religion; in the phenomena of society, which undergo so many forms of change. Growth is change fulfilling itself in farther change, perceptions widening out into more complete perceptions.

This fact should bring us no disturbance, because it is the crowning fact of our spiritual nature. We promise ourselves immortality because there is so much to be learned and gained in it. And yet some of us have already formulated the divine nature, and stand ready to enforce the formula. There is much, even in the physical world, confirming this lesson of deeper knowledge. Mountains of known forms lie before us, and yet how little of our impressions can we put in figures, or in diagrams, or coin in paintings. They are to be seen from different positions, in different hours of the day, in different seasons of the year, in different states of mind. The points from which we see them, the atmosphere through which we see them, the light by which we see them, are all transforming agencies which take away identity from the changeable pictures. Each of these terms is greatly variable in itself, and they unite to give an inexhaustible number of combinations. We see the same mountains every day for a lifetime, and

never fully see them. As our lives grow, they grow with us as part of a vital experience. If this is true of the earth beneath us, how much more is it true of the clouds above us; of the clouds which stand in such changing fellowship with valley, ridge, and peak! If this is true of things, how much more is it true of ideas, imagery of the mind, that keeps company with things, and casts on them new lights, new revelations!

This perpetual transcendency, this growth of clouds within themselves, taking on new quality, drinking up new depths of color,—this changeableness alike of the material and the immaterial world,—belongs equally to art and to ethics. The moment the artistic impulse grows weary, it fails in its work. What has been done is always chiefly valuable in its indication of what can be done. So also the ethical man, in a worthy construction of character, finds a growing spiritual world open to him. No conception is so complex, so rich in possibilities, that it cannot be approached along the path of light that reveals it. This path is forever present to the constructive mind. That the life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment; that we live not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, are the familiar solecisms of every spiritual man, indeed are the solecisms of all life, pushing forward by stages and processes whose fitness and unfitness are disclosed only in the results.

The injunction, "Be ye perfect as I am perfect," remains applicable along the entire path of obscure development, as if we were every instant about to be ushered into the full light. It is a command of direction rather than of fulfillment, one to which we remain subject in unending lines of obedience. The artistic life and the ethical life are always creating, like a bird

in flight, a new equilibrium between that which has been and that which is to be attained.

It follows from this, as a farther agreement between the two forms of action, that the artist must put his art above all other forms of acquisition, and that he who accepts the ethical law must grant it its supremacy. The world has again and again presented, has again and again rewarded with its commendation, this consecration to a supreme law of effort. Every artist, whether of things or of actions, is on the same plane moving toward the same ideal—an ideal ever enlarging, ever unattainable; growing in authority as it seems farther off. Thus life becomes more and more spiritual, extending and enforcing its own claims upon itself.

It is in a world whose finest products, whose rational activities, are grouping themselves in characters which take on an exalted excellence, that religion gets foothold, and we come to believe in a Supreme Spiritual Presence. The feelings which spring up with this faith are sustained by the beautiful and the good, ever more open to its observation. No dealings with physical things is unimportant, because forms, principles, and inspirations of beauty are involved in them. No actions between man and man are insignificant, because the framework of conduct takes shape by means of them. Our religion arises from a growing sense of reality, vitality, in supersensuous conceptions, and their possible extension into supreme laws. There is in them a guidance and redemption which are capable of making the world the Kingdom of Heaven. Our religious sentiments need the correction of artistic and ethical feeling, and so ripened impart, in turn, an adequacy to character which gives it the promise of eternal life. Religious faith thus becomes a center of conflict and expansion in artistic and ethical ideas, and, in the measure of its purity and

power, will open to them the widest fields of action. If a sense of the spiritual world grows dim and inoperative, it will be because the comprehensive impulses of art, the exacting claims of character, are losing hold, and we are settling down into a sensuous world which simply yields food, clothing, and shelter. It is not in what we are wont to regard as religion, that the largest ideas lay hold of the mind and rule it. In the pursuit of truth, of beauty, and of honor in action, there are furtive powers that come forth from their hiding-places and enthrone themselves above all sensuous conceptions, and stretch quite beyond the estimates of interest. Faithfulness to an idea, far from being an illusory impulse, is sure to be present in that conduct and those characters which men most honor.

While the two tempers the artistic and the ethical mutually sustain each other, they also readily fall into temporary and disturbing conflict. The mind predisposed to art is not necessarily possessed in a like degree of ethical insight. Art may set up for itself standards of action diverse from those which prevail in society, and, by virtue of the discrepancy, working more or less mischief. Thus nude art, which may be true to the sense of beauty, may offend that of morals. This false ethical affinity discloses itself in the decoration sought for in drinking-saloons. So also the artist may, under the plea of realism, excuse a coarseness of language and a grossness of imagery, which offend moral sensibilities. The immediate impression and the ultimate good are not harmonized. Art, strongly affected by some phases or concomitants of beauty, may refuse to submit them to the rules of conduct and character. Men's perceptions are not held in any nice poise of equilibrium. This lack of harmony may not be visible to many persons. Artists may covet a freedom of

feeling and force of impulse which are not reconcilable with ethical law, aiming at a complete combination of all interests in human welfare. Wild growth may be beautiful in its freedom, and yet the methods of cultivation may put constraint upon it.

When a discrepancy of this kind is seen, it becomes painful to one who desires complete subordination of parts to the ruling ethical idea. The vigorous growth of a single member may easily be a trespass on the symmetry and proportion of the entire product. It is this fact which gives rise to our love of types and systems; we cling to a form we have once recognized.

Any conflict is more observable and more offensive in what pertains to man than elsewhere. It is the emphatic demand of the ethical feeling that those personal and social sentiments are to be respected on which the general constructive movement is hinging. Anarchy and contradiction here at once overbear all secondary gains. We refuse to judge the parts by themselves when they are waiting to be combined in a wider whole. The last impression, the last aim, is the ruling one.

Not only is the artistic ideal liable to be intoxicated by a liberty not yet brought under the supreme law of the world, and so not ready for its own independent expression, but the ethical sense may be barren and inadequate. We are as yet so little versed in the large conditions of spiritual life that we conceive it, and offer it, in a very mutilated form. The artistic sense is thrown into a position of antagonism by the unlovely phases of character presented to it under the authority of ethical sentiment and religious faith. All training has laid upon art the task of making our conceptions of life wider, more complete, more enjoyable, more lovable. A discrepancy is always appearing between the things we commend and the

things we admire, and can be overcome only by an experience and cultivation that enter more sympathetically into all forms of development, both individual and collective. It is not the least portion of the service of art to push the mind constantly into a truer perception of the objects about it. Partial opinions necessarily lead to conflict.

The form of art which at the present time is most general and most influential is the novel. In it the artistic and the ethical temper have constant occasion to be blended together in a product enjoyable and stimulating. Yet, the great variety and concrete character of the pictures the novel presents, give constant occasion for conflict between a spirited rendering of the facts and the harmony by which they are to pass into a well-composed phase of human history. Though poetry deals even more directly with spiritual emotions, it does so usually in an abstract form, with a less definite movement of sensuous facts. Poetry is sure to rise into a spiritual region, but the ascent is that of the aeronaut, rather than that of the patient plodder who climbs the long and dangerous path to some conspicuous summit.

The novel, measured by the number of persons influenced, is the most important branch of literature. Its chief mischief lies in occupying the attention, to the exclusion of other forms of activity, and in calling out feelings which receive no adequate support in daily action. It does good in the restful pleasure it affords, in the literary taste it may gratify, and, at times, in a stimulating interpretation of life.

The novel is not as closely bound to realism as are most forms of art. The story is acceptable if the events are lively and romantic, even though they go very much afield under any standard of experience. Indeed, much of the pleasure afforded may be due to this divergence, if a general similitude is pre-

served. A novel is artistic in the degree in which personal quality is present as an efficient cause in the issues of pain and pleasure. The moral of a good novel is deeply, at times obscurely, contained in the progress of events, and establishes its ethical ideas in the interplay of men's feelings toward each other and toward the world. It rests on the naturalism of the spiritual world. It is an adequate record of how the world, in giving rise to spiritual states, deals with men. The lesson is not attached to the story, but is its very substance,—that which primarily occupies the mind in its construction and its perusal. The good novel enlarges one's acquaintances, and gives a better apprehension of the principles which control spiritual events.

The novel has come to find its center of revolution in the earliest development of love between the sexes. While this form is justified by the universal interest which attaches to this phase of affection, and by the large circle of events which readily unite with it, the novel has a wider range than this custom recognizes. Love, as a special passion, by no means covers life. Other impulses have their own interest, and deserve a corresponding record. Biography would be comparatively barren which gave to love the position assigned it in fiction.

The point we wish to criticise in its ethical bearing is the character assigned to love itself. An excessive and fanciful force is given to it, which tends strongly to push aside the ordinary and well-balanced motives of action. It is unfortunate that we have but one word to cover such widely diverse feelings as those which unite men and women in love, unite men in love to their fellow-men, and in love to God. Love, in its wider application, is supremely a rational feeling. It stands for a constant recognition, on our part, of the wel-

fare of all; and a ready response to a similar sentiment when expressed to us. It is an emotion grounded in the widest intellectual development. It calls for insight, and enlarges it; and finds justification in a growing knowledge of the relations of men to each other. Wisdom and good-will are closely akin. Love springs up under the widening light of wisdom; and there is no more exacting school of wisdom than that of assigning love its tasks, than giving it fitting expression and effective form. Any haste or carelessness destroys love, and makes it seem to be the opposite of what it really is. Indeed, much that goes by the name of love, and is thought by those who entertain it to be love, is only one phase of that exacting temper by which we override the wishes of others with our own wishes.

We use the word in the religious world with a most inadequate and shabby notion of its true meaning. When we speak, in the two great commands, of the love of God and the love of man, the word has not color enough to attract the eye. It sinks down into that dull grey of general kindliness which is an obscure background to our ruling passions. We thus come under the phraseology of faith, and make of it a disguise of the facts of life.

Love is slowly apprehended and slowly widened under narrow, chiefly family, relations. We learn its possible extension; we see it to be the spiritually constructive principle in the world. It thus becomes to us the divine plan of the world; and there sets in that reflex wave by which we love God with all the heart, and the soul, and the mind. Love thus passes beyond an instinctive movement, and takes possession of the whole range of intelligence. We see where love is, whence love springs, and are absorbed in the divine love as the true law of the world. God is love. If we love not our

brother whom we have seen, how shall we love God whom we have not seen. We come into contact with the divine love in the love of man, and the two grow up together into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Novelists often regard love in its pronounced form between the sexes as an instantaneous, blind impulse, admitting of little guidance or control. This conception would seem to be at once untrue and demoralizing. If there is such a passion as this, it is a most irrational and dangerous one. If it may yield favorable, it may also yield most disastrous, results. While it may not be the duty of the novelist minutely to separate the rational and irrational phases of love, any more than it is his duty to place before the reader ethical reflections, it is his office to treat correctly the occasions and the causes of this masterful affection. This, in many cases, he fails to do, and allows his characters to be led about by the blind gropings of an irrational semi-physical impulse. The greatest offense of religion has been the easy way with which it has thrust aside reason in favor of some superstitious feeling. It is difficult for Ethics to retain its own calm, clear intelligence, with Art on the one side, and Religion on the other, giving way to feelings which justify themselves to no sober view of life. The exacting appetites which burrow so deeply in household love are quite sufficient without adding thereto a blind passion that accepts no guidance.

> "I tell you, I stride up and down
> This garret, crowned with love's best crown,
> And feasted with Love's perfect feast,
> To think I kill for her, at least,
> Body and soul and peace and fame,
> Alike youth's end and manhood's aim,
> —So is my spirit, as flesh with sin,
> Filled full, eaten out and in
> With the face of her, the eyes of her,
> The lips, the little chin, the stir

> Of shadow round her mouth; and she
> —I'll tell you—calmly would decree
> That I should roast at a slow fire,
> If that would compass her desire
> And make her one whom they invite
> To the famous ball to-morrow night."[1]

It is sufficient that man is liable to become a brute; we need not needlessly make him an idiot also.

We suppose that the excess and confusion in the notion of love arise from the immense range of the word, and the great contrast between its lower and higher meanings. It stretches from a physical impulse, often brutal and cruel, into a pure, generous, and rational sentiment, whose habitual purpose it is to fertilize good-will with wisdom, thereby making it fruitful of all pleasure. The astonishing thing is how an origin so low and sensuous can issue in emotions so self-contained, spiritual, and exalting. We see the image of it in vegetable life. The radicle and the plumule, starting from the same point, push, the one toward darkness, the other toward light: the one draws nourishment from the soil, the other feeds on the volatile air. The vigor of the plant, no matter how beautiful and fragrant in foliage and flower, has a circulation which extends from the remotest root fiber to the tallest spray.

Love in its highest forms gathers in so many impulses, is fed from so many sources, that it is not altogether strange that its earlier instinctive quality gives the impression of blind, inevitable force. Yet the opposite feeling should be the dominant one, that a higher reason is forever finding its way in it, making it the self-conscious law of a holier life. The physical elements, as in roiled water, sink to the bottom, and the springs of being, receptive of light, sparkle with it to their utmost depths. This assumption of conflicting elements into

[1] "Time's Revenge," Robert Browning.

a beneficent experience is given by Stevenson in his "Story of a Lie."

"All comprehension is creation; the woman I love is somewhat of my handiwork; and the great lover, like the great painter, is he that can so embellish his subject as to make her more than human, whilst yet, by a cunning art, he has so based his apotheosis on the nature of the case that the woman can go on being a true woman, and give her character free play, and show littleness or cherish spite, or be greedy of common pleasures, and he continue to worship without a thought of incongruity. To love a character is the only heroic way of understanding it. When we love, by some noble method of our own, or by some nobility of mien or nature in the other, we apprehend the loved one by what is noblest in ourselves."

This rush of allied spirits onward, while it is not coldly critical, is not stupidly concessive, but the growth of strength out of strength in one concurrent intellectual and spiritual movement.

It may seem a sacrilegious thing to commit the strongest. yet the most sensitive, tie between human spirits to the free handling of the novelist, who may have no such delicacy of touch, no such approach to the centers of life, as will enable him to perform his task without vulgarity, without rudeness, without excess, with none of that rough contact from which living fiber at once shrinks. Yet this handling, even when badly done, is not more sacrilegious than life itself. All have to do with love, either to exalt it or to debase it. All make some essay, even though it be a heartless one, in this sensuous, supersensuous experience. The astonishing thing is that, amid all the mischief and misery wrought, so much true affection, so much enlargement of life, are secured; so many germs of sentiment are hidden in soil which seems to contain little or nothing of worth. Strangest of all, there is ever a growing apprehension of the true quality of love, till the invincible, imperishable history of affection becomes the dearest record of existence. The isolation of each spirit seems absolute; it is

under lock and key. There is a seclusion which at times smothers, rather than subserves, the true uses of the heart. Life steals into life only by love. Affection prepares the way for that giving and receiving by which the spirit becomes the largest partaker in the good of the world, finds, relishes, and possesses that good.

The artistic and the ethical temper have occasion nowhere to seek a truer understanding of their common problem than in human affection, omnipresent with its exploring tendrils, laying hold of the nearest objects only that it may thereby grow into heaven.

One who thinks of the human household as a "pitiful piece of domesticity" can no more be left to find his way among human wants, human refinements, human hopes, than the wild boar of the woods can be left to root among the bulbs of the garden. At rare intervals we meet with a novelist like Macdonald, so enveloped with transcendent spiritual conceptions as to hardly leave room enough for the fortuitous, imperious passions of men,—the tangled and thorny undergrowth of the forest. But this fault is a pardonable one, compared with that of the novelist who cuts away the majestic growths of virtue, and leaves all low things to run over the soil and contend with each other for its possession. The highest issues of life are within the purview of the novelist; and this fact makes his failures the more regrettable. His office is to trace character and conduct as, under the inevitable relations of the present to the future, of men to each other, they ripen out in the physical, social, and spiritual consequences which disclose the irresistible laws of spiritual being. But to trace connections is something of the same gigantic task it is to create them. It is not easy to guide one's own impulses; in part, because it is not easy to understand them. We are ever ready to evade the

issue, and bring good out of evil in some easy, inconsequential way. Most of the mistakes of religion arise from an arbitrary connection of consequences with actions with which they are not associated. We invoke the will of God where we have no warrant in human life for the results we wish to obtain by means of it. We decline faithfully to study the spiritual world of which we are a part. The task of the novelist is at once easier and harder than self-guidance. He is not so deeply entangled in the meshes of feeling as he who is under the strain of experience, and he can, therefore, trace more quietly the consequences which flow from given spiritual states. His task is more difficult, because, after all, it is in experience alone that feelings and convictions, both in tug and in restraint, adequately associate themselves with actions, and mark each event as forceful in its own degree. The novelist must understand that generation is regeneration, which are ever going forward in the minds of men as the material and the intellectual results of conduct, declare themselves, and the two worlds, physical and spiritual, are slowly built together into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Insight into the office of the true novelist is what the moralist most needs in limbering up his rigid rules, and making them the instruments of varied and supple life. The two great commandments are as dry and barren as seeds long stored, till a loving experience under them softens them down into the uses of life. On the other hand, there is nothing the novelist more needs, amid the heated activity of thought, feeling, action, than an abiding sense of those aëriferous results of conduct in which passion ceases to be a scorching lava stream and becomes a friable and fruitful soil, congenial to all strong and noble growth.

While we may tremble to see the novelist setting in motion

forces so much too strong for him, we may yet rejoice that he brings to the common consciousness such great questions, and compels us all to seek such extended and adequate answers. Both experience and imagination, fact and fiction, have led us into disastrous results; yet the problem of life is not thereby effaced, nor rendered insoluble. The bad response is never permanent, and new inquiry assails the mind till the better solution is attained. The Spring contends with the Winter, the Summer with the Spring, with many advances and retreats, yet the march of the seasons fails not, and the seeds of the soil abide their time.

The beauty of the world is eternal, and has a majestic sweep quite beyond men's meddling. The earth, the water, the air, each with its own panorama, adjust a stage on which men are actors, yet the action, the things said and done, the interpretation of the world to itself, lie with men, busy with their own undertakings. The fields and homes, the highways and cities on which the rich sunlight falls, over which the clouds gather in diligent service, remain the significant outcome and spiritual force of the world. Art is of no great moment till it interprets to us the spiritual vitality of the world; and does not reach the good action till its products in character gain reality among the things, less and large, by which the temporal and the eternal flow into each other. Certainly among the agencies which unite these two, making them forever inseparable parts of our intelligence, none is more potent than love, which, pursuing its blind way as sexual impulses in the long procession of lives, at length enters the spiritual consciousness as pure affection, and by art and ethics and religion brings into increasingly perfect form the physical and intellectual products by which the history of man is built up and borne forward.