



## Architecture and Building

### The Humane Aspect of the Arts.

(Paper read at Toynbee Hall, by C. F. A. Voysey, Architect, 23 York Place, Portman Square, London, W.)

We must remember that it needs many kinds of men to make a world; and it is the variety in thought and feeling, in temperament and outlook, that draws us together. Nevertheless, you must be weary of hearing first one artist and then another expatiate on his particular system for creating art and artists, or the importance of this or that kind of study.

But may we ask, what is it that we value and reverence most? What are the objects of universal sympathy and approval? What are the imperishable verities of human life? Surely they are human thoughts and feelings, the moral sentiments of love, reverence, purity, truth, unselfishness, grace, dignity, refinement, and many more which we all know and, happily, all possess in varying degrees. Fortunately in varying degrees, for we could not commune with one another were we all alike. There could be no argument, and consequently no progress, were we equally endowed.

Surely it is clear enough that Art is the manifestation of human thought and feeling. Hence its infinite complexity, and its constant change and development. The thoughts and feelings of one generation are never quite in tune with the next. Although moral sentiments are everlasting and universal, their order of importance and degree of intensity must vary with each individual. Heredity, environment and training increase the inequality of our thought and feeling; custom, nationality and climate also act in the same way. We are not all susceptible in like degree to outside influences.

Therefore we are in danger if we rely for the manifestation of our own thought and feeling, on the expressions of others, no matter how venerable; we become insincere and careless of the truth.

If we concentrate our thought and attention on any particular school, such as the Impressionists, the pre-Raphaelites, the French, Italian, or Dutch, we are led to attach more importance to the means than to the end. Methods are studied while motives and main principles fade into the shade. Conventions are established and made the lines of least resistance, until they become so polished by thoughtless imitators, that we slide downhill without knowing it.

The mechanical appliances for saving labour and money have absorbed so much attention, that we have starved our spiritual nature. The charms of thought and feeling and ultimate improvement of character, are hidden by the battle-cries

of contending parties. One will say that the Renaissance art is the only true art, Titian the only true painter, and Michael Angelo the only light for sculptors to follow. Just as in theological controversies religion is lost altogether in the babel of creeds. The arts are in a terrible maze and confusion. We ask how shall we make this thing, instead of why. Yet why is the more important. You answer obviously, to feed my starving family. But that we might do better as scavengers. That cannot be the whole reason. And if each man will ask and answer this question truly and thoroughly for himself, he will come to appreciate what is really entitled to the term art, and what is not. He will see that the love of beauty is implanted in the human breast to lead us on in the improvement of personal character. Art being the manifestation of thought and feeling, beauty must depend on the quality of the mind and heart of man.

We need to encourage each other in the belief that the beauty of the thought and feeling we have to manifest in our work is far more important than the system or manner of our expression. Grace and refinement, dignity, strength, repose, directness and truth, are all elements of moral character which can be expressed in our works. Possess those qualities, or have real love for them, and they will surely find expression. You cannot help expressing in your work the thoughts and emotions that are uppermost in your mind.

It is materialistic, theistic, socialistic ideas that make our modern objects so repulsively ugly and void of spiritual grace, reverence, delicacy, fitness and truth. Our modern clock, for instance, looks as if it were made for money, made to look better than it is, to catch the ignorant taste for pretentiousness and sham. It wags its ugly tongue with rude haste and stabs you with a harsh strike. Where are the peaceful, slow tick and deep vibrating tones of the old clocks, and the gentle, loving reminder of the soft, melodious gong?

It is because we no longer think of moral sentiments in connection with every-day objects that we have allowed them to degenerate into hideous offences. Sound, smell and sight, all are enemies to our better nature instead of sympathetic servants in league with mercy and loving-kindness.

Moral force alone makes art fruitful. Therefore all lectures and essays on the various means of expression are of very minor value. Practise, friend, the faculties you have, give rope to your better nature, leave conventions, and all forms of insincerity behind; be content to do the little insignificant daily duty unnoticed and unrewarded except by the thought that it truly expresses those moral qualities which you aspire to. Melody and har-

mony are Divine universal qualities appealing to us all. Should we crowd different materials, colours, forms and textures together in jostling confusions if we were trying to express melody and harmony? Should we try to make anything look better than it really is, if we were endeavouring to be true, or express truthfulness and fidelity? Should we imitate qualities naturally belonging to hand labour by machinery, and make believe the work is wrought with more care and exertion than it is? Deceptions are infinite in kind and degree, and poisonous to the character of a people; till at last they grow indifferent and think it does not matter how much they are deceived as long as they are pleased. Pleasure is then made the standard by which to measure our art and our conduct. Whither will it not lead us?

Simplicity in design is analogous to sincerity in character. The desire to be simple is born of the desire to be true. Complexity and duplicity are first cousins. True richness of design is quite compatible with simplicity, but elaboration and complexity are not. True richness requires that the reality shall be as true as the appearance. Things must be what they seem. And the richness must arise from the nobility and profusion of thought and feeling. True richness depends on quality, colours and textures will often produce not quantity. Accumulation of forms, what the ignorant and superficial will mistake for richness. But careful observation will quickly dispel the delusion, and then will follow our contempt and disgust at the fraud that has been played upon us.

This constant testing, trying and proving of art in the crucible of moral sense will lead to peace between mortals; we shall fight less vehemently one with another for contending methods or styles. Common interests in common qualities will take the place of partisan advocacy of particular processes. We shall rejoice in tracing the thoughts and feelings alive to-day in the manifestations of ancient times. No matter what race or nationality, the same sweet songs are chanted in a thousand languages.

If we are bent on being true men, we shall not remain content to utter foreign languages, copy foreign expressions, and pretend to feelings we know not of. Revolt we must against convention that is merely conformity without sincerity or understanding.

Custom or convention are powerful forces encouraging insincerity. We like to be regarded as learned and correct according to established standards of propriety; and many a man acts conventionally because it costs too much effort and involves too much sacrifice to think out a course for himself.

It is much easier to repeat the symmetrical arrangements in the parts of your