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THE BEAUTIFUL IN THE DIVINE ORDER

THE subject to be discussed may seem far distant from the problems of the hour, yet I should be disappointed if it were regarded simply as providing material for the "escape mechanism" of which we hear so much. My intention is a serious one, nothing less than to explore and determine some of the boundaries of this land of Havilah where there is gold, wealth for our poverty and sustenance for our scarcity.

Three questions are involved. What is the Reality of the Beautiful? How far does it lead us to God? How much does it tell us of God? And, lastly, what influence does it have, or should it have, on the regulation of our life? If the terms be not too grandiose, our task is to consider the ontological, the theistic and the ethical implications of the Beautiful.

Many have shared with me the feeling that these very questions have been visiting them and even haunting them, not just in the present days, for it has been commonly observed that a period of strife, international or economic, has frequently coincided with a gorgeous summer. In Lanarkshire the miners used to speak of "strike-weather", not intending to ascribe prophetic powers to their leaders in the choice of a time or season for a "strike" or "lock-out", but to express their appreciation of a certain sympathy or kindliness in the face of Nature at such times. People remarked in 1940, for example, that after the severe winter and spring came a time of such loveliness, so profuse, luxuriant, and effortless, that the most heedless were roused to note the presence of forces in our midst independent of the clash of human elements. Both the rebuke and the inspiration of the shining panorama of Nature have been deeply felt. If our strife has not been hushed to hear the angels sing, at least we have paused in gratefulness to hear the music of the birds. If we have failed to observe the Master's commands and to experience the comfort of His blessing, at least now and again our eyes have turned to the lilies of the field in wonder and longing.

For myself, too, there has lodged with me for many years,

a welcome guest, a passage from the Journal of David Livingstone, revealing words which disclose the secret of the man's character, his inner sensitiveness and the reverent open-heartedness of his interests. It runs thus:

> "Missionaries ought to cultivate a taste for the beautiful. We are necessarily compelled to contemplate much moral impurity and degradation. We are often doomed to disappointment. We are apt to become either callous or melancholy, or if preserved from these the constant strain on the susceptibilities is likely to injure the bodily health. On this account it seems necessary to cultivate that faculty for the gratification of which God has made such universal provision. See the green earth and blue sky, the lofty mountain and the verdant valley, the glorious orbs of day and night, and the starry canopy with all their celestial colouring. The varied forms of animated life present to him whose heart is at peace with God through the blood of His Son an indescribable charm. There appears on the quiet repose of earth's scenery the benignant smile of a Father's love. . . . We must feel there is a Governor among the nations Who will bring all His plans with respect to our human family to a glorious consummation. He who stays his mind on his ever-present, ever-energetic God will not fret himself because of evil-doers. 'He that believeth shall not make haste'" (Oct. 13, 1853).

Scripture offers its own witness to the power of the sublime and the beautiful. The Creation story makes plain the ascendancy of light and order over the formless and unillumined, a story the more appealing and impressive because all natural forces are subservient to the Creator. Wind, fire, storm, and tempest, the raging of the proud sea become the instruments of the Divine Will, their glare and fury transformed into the symbols of the Divine majesty.

To trace the religious development of Israel is the task of the scholars, but he who runs may read in the smoking mountain of Sinai, the thick and terrifying darkness, lessons needful to subdue the hard proud heart of man and to change his rebellious spirit into reverence and awe. A gentler note is sounded elsewhere, comforting as well as rebuking, words such as those of Isaiah xl, which continue throughout the ages to impress and uplift the troubled and wayward spirit of man: "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth."

The New Testament concentrates more on the domestic and personal in the religious problem. Its horizons are narrower though its dimensions are greater. When the disciples draw the Master's attention to the glories of the Temple sculpture,

He replies that one stone shall not be left upon another, not because He did not love the Temple, for He found instruction there in the early days and later named it " a house of prayer ". It is doubtful indeed if we are entitled to speak of Christ's love of mountains and lakes as if He experienced anything of the aesthetic contemplation of the poet or artist in the presence of these gentle and majestic influences. However much we may admire the literary form of the Beatitudes or the simple effectiveness of the Parables, we cannot imagine Him seeking the *mot juste* or forming and reforming the rhythm of the sentences. We have happily left behind us Renan's conception of the " peasant of Galilee " and we need not replace it by some more sophisticated portrait. His agony was not that of artistic creation or perception; it was occupied with much profounder issues, no less than the religious problem, God and the soul of man, the broken unity and its reintegration. Other things were taken up into the solution of this tragic conflict.

Certainly He bade the anxious consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, while the sunlight and the rain carried to Him, and through Him to others, the assurance of a divine Providence. Kierkegaard, the forerunner of the dialectic theology, has a booklet on this passage in Matthew with a rather novel interpretation which we may pause to note. " The Gospel for the Anxious ", he calls it, for it is not of any concern for the healthy or the strong or the happy. Everyone oppressed by care is tempted in his depression not to wish to hear human consolations of comfort and hope. How can the happy understand him, does not the strong man through his very sympathy exalt himself above him, will not the anxious thereby have his anxiety increased? If this be the case, then the best that remains is that he should look round for other teachers whose words do not imply a misunderstanding, whose encouragement does not contain a secret reproach, whose look does not condemn, whose comfort does not inflame but soothes. To such teachers " the Gospel of Care " now refers the heavyladen—to the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.

" With these inexpensive teachers who are paid neither with gold or humiliation there is no misunderstanding possible, they are silent—out of respect for the heavyladen. For all misunderstanding comes from speech or more properly from the comparison which lies in speech. . . . Silence on the contrary reverences the burden and the burdened. . . . Even the silent friends of Job cast glances at him, and so again started comparisons. Only an innocent

child—or the lilies and the birds take us beyond the irritating realm of comparisons. There is strong persuasiveness only if the troubled one pays heed to the lilies and the birds, forgets himself in them and their life, in this preoccupation with them learns something unnoticed concerning himself. Only God is present, the man himself—and the lilies. He learns to content himself with being a human creature, no more, no less."

But to continue, Paul's large and spacious mind has suggestions of an ampler background than some have been willing to grant him. "Whatsoever things are lovely" (Phil. iv. 8) may rightly be the object of our thought and purpose. He confesses he is debtor both to the Greek and to the Barbarian (Rom. i. 14). The things that are made carry with them marks of the invisible (Rom. i. 20). Yet obviously Paul was preoccupied with the religious, the Christian and the human problem of reconciliation. Indeed it is permissible to say that he deliberately turned his back on those elements of life we call "aesthetic", for he found them associated with much that defeated his aim by distracting his hearers or even corrupting their souls. But enough has been said to indicate the N.T. outlook.

I

Now it has been presumed so far that the Beautiful is a real part of life, not just a subjective impression in certain specially endowed minds, not a picture created by man and hung on the walls of our earthly habitations that may be changed at his will or suffered to disappear when he quits the scene, but something built into the fabric of the universe and the pride as well as the possession of the Eternal.

This assumption, however, requires some examination. What has been taken for granted by common sense has always been a target for the assaults of criticism. Even proverbial philosophy vies with its classical neighbours in disseminating doubt, for the one saying, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder", ventures further than the other, "Beauty is only skin-deep". Subjectivity is hard to escape. Climate, heredity, above all "association" are claimed as sufficient explanations of the Beautiful. After a visit to Wordsworth in the Lake District Lamb wrote to a friend, "I never want to see a mountain again". And the nearness of an enemy aeroplane destroys all poetic raptures over a still night and a clear moon.

Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* is sincerely anxious to find a place for the Beautiful in his scheme of life alongside the True and the Right, yet in his careful manner he says " he will speak of the Beautiful *as if* beauty were a character of the object, although it is only aesthetical and involves merely a representation of the object to the subject ": at the most it has a title to universal subjectivity (Bernard's translation, p. 56). Hume on the other hand makes concessions that go deeper than his sceptical theory would seem to contenance, " Though it be certain that Beauty and Deformity, more than bitter and sweet, are not qualities in objects but belong entirely to sentiment, it must be allowed that there are certain qualities in objects which are fitted by Nature to produce those particular feelings " (*Essays: On the Standard of Taste*).

At the other extreme the Platonic philosophy finds in temporal beauty only forms and shadows of the perfect archetype. Both religious and idealistic feeling have been attracted by this doctrine, though shying a little at the more general application of a theory which declares that what is embodied in any actual bed is the perfect idea of a bed. Some modern artists, however, I note, claim to give wholehearted allegiance to Plato in so far that their picture may represent neither more nor less than " the idea of a tree qua tree " or " tree-ness " (MacColl, *What is Art?*).

The scientists, of course, have had their say and point out the influence of beauty in Natural Selection. If their conclusions be true, the reality of the Beautiful might well be a substantial element in the processes of life. Their enquiries, however, seem to be confined to the animal creation, and for myself, scientist as I am not, the analogy between a dog's or a cat's idea of beauty and that of a human being is both difficult and doubtful. They have their secrets as we have ours. A borderland of mystery as well as of understanding seems to exist. No Cortes or Columbus has yet defined these boundaries.

Man indeed has been given not only an organ of appreciation for the Beautiful but a faculty for the production of it; even in the most primitive communities there have been found evidences of the artistic impulse, decoration added to spear or knife, sketches on the rocky wall of the cave. Some would trace the artistic activity to the Play-impulse. Schiller in oft-quoted words from his *Letters on Aesthetical Education*, declares, " Man

only plays when in the full meaning of the term he is Man, and he is only completely Man when he plays ". (Surely words more appropriately spoken by an athletic Englishman than by a serious Teuton!) Again he writes, " What is Man before Beauty draws out in him the capacity for free enjoyment, and the serene Form tames the wildness of life? . . . he sees in her glorious fulness nothing but his prey, in her might and sublimity nothing but his foe ".

Herbert Spencer in his plodding way analyses the physiological processes involved in the "play-impulse": he explains how unused organs grow restive and fidget for activity: games gratify in a partial way the predatory instincts: " better nutrition, gained by superiority, occasionally yields a surplus of energy." Thus in the more evolved creatures there often recurs an energy somewhat in excess of immediate needs, and so Minerva is born. Such a theory, however, if applied to poets and artists, would require some modification. The principle recognised in such cases appears to be that their activity results from a diminished nutrition. Society starves them that they may sing or paint: when they are well-fed and clothed, they are stifled and become silent. The only energy that comfort does not impair seems to be the energy to make money and increase wealth.

Others have felt that something more than a super-diet of all the vitamins is required for the production of art. To leisure and surplus energy there must be added the spirit of freedom, and freedom disciplined and dragooned by the principles of order, measure, harmony and rhythm. A reviewer says that Mr. Graves lets us into the secret of his verse when he writes:

> " Devilishly disturbed
> By this unready pen;
> For every word I write
> I scratch out nine or ten.
> And each surviving word
> Resentfully I make
> Sweat for those nine or ten
> I cancelled for its sake."

" There speaks the craftsman ", is the comment.

As we utter these words, " freedom ", " measure ", " harmony ", it is easy to hear echoes of the great philosophers, to realise how the Beautiful may be linked up with and indeed incorporate the doctrine of " the Mean ", μηδὲν ἄγαν, in the

Greek teachers and the idea of Reason in the German Idealists. With Schleiermacher, it is true, "Feeling" rather than "Reason" appears at first as the link between Art and Religion, but the "feeling of absolute dependence", which is for him the characteristic mark of faith, in the end runs out to a sense of unity with the infinite self-consciousness, the joy of participating in the harmony of the All. Though disguised in a Pietist's gown and with his eyes lifted up a little higher than is usual with most Rationalists, the rejuvenator of theology in Germany still burns incense at the altar of "Reason".

II

After some fashion or other, then, the reality of the Beautiful has been assumed in these differing theories, so that along the spider's thread of aesthetic idealism we pass to the great, even central, problem of the theological implications of the Beautiful in the Divine Order. The existence of Beauty being assured and corresponding to a power in man to enjoy and express it, what light does this throw on the existence and nature of the Divine Being?

One conclusion is plain. That harmony should actually be experienced in some parts at least of this confused and distressful world has convinced great companies of thoughtful men that over all is a supreme Wisdom and Power. Plato's doctrine of Ideas is well known, with its corollary of our Reminiscence from a pre-natal state of the dazzling vision of the Good and the Beautiful. "Coming to earth we find Beauty shining in clearness through the doorways of the senses. This is the privilege of Beauty, that she is the loveliest and also the most palpable to sight" (*Phaedrus*, 250). Though few can attain the vision of Absolute Beauty, to do so would be to attain Knowledge as against mere Opinion. In the *Symposium* there is described a ladder by which the soul may rise from recognition of beautiful forms to the one and same beauty in all expressions of it.

> "And next he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of things outward, laws, institutions, sciences. At length the vision will be revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of Beauty everywhere, a thing of wondrous beauty which is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning, but beauty absolute, separate, simple and everlasting, which, without diminution and without increase, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. . . . If man has eyes to see the true beauty, he becomes the friend of God and immortal."

Hegel, in his turn, with many suggestive descriptions, marshalls the progress of the Idea of Beauty in the succession of the symbolic, the classical and the romantic schools. As a writer has put it, " Beauty is thus the Absolute passing out of latency into self-manifestation and self-realisation; and in this process the lustre of the Idea breaking through the barriers of the material illumines it. This is Beauty ".

Such idyllic rhapsodies, be they ever so sweet, no longer charm or dominate the present age. A new dialectic has arisen on the principle of disharmony, conflict, paradox. The Romantic is a ghost to be chased back to the lumber-room whence he came. In the crisis of the hours through which we have been living, and are still living, rose-tinted spectacles do not readily adapt themselves to gas-masks. Here is a modern instance of " Either—Or " in conflict with " Both—And ".

More congenial to our modern temper is the cautious but sturdy teaching of Kant in his *Critique of Judgment.* First of all he continues his suspicious attitude to the senses and to happiness as well as pleasure. Happiness is not the end of man. " A pure judgment of taste has for its determining ground neither charm nor emotion, in a word no sensation as to the material of the aesthetic judgment " (p. 76). " What is essential to Beauty is the Form; colours belong to the charm that may be added " (p. 75): the pleasant is a judgment based on private feeling and therefore lacking the element of universality. But of more importance is the way in which Kant, recognising clearly the conflict and strangeness of life, " terror with beauty mingling ", yet maintains his hold upon the moral significance of beauty and its value for belief in God.

> " Happiness cannot be man's final aim: for it is denied to him by the restlessness of his nature. . . . On the other side too there is something wanting. Nature has not taken him for her special darling and favoured him with benefits above all animals. Rather, in her destructive operations—plague, hunger, perils of waters, frost, assaults of other animals great and small, etc.—in these things has she spared him as little as any other animal. Further, the inconsistency of his own natural dispositions drives him into self-devised torments, and also reduces others of his own race to misery, by the oppression of lordship, the barbarism of war, and so forth: he himself, as far as in him lies, works for the destruction of his own race: so that, even with the most beneficent external nature, its purpose would not be attained in an earthly system, because our nature is not susceptible of it " (p. 353).

Against such gloomy facts Kant sets the undoubted existence of organised forms of life, suggestive of a wider Order.

Without equating the Good and the Beautiful, he recognised their close affinity through the idea of system and purpose. Nature plays her part. The mind cannot ponder upon the beauty of Nature without finding itself at the same time interested therein. But this interest has a moral relevance (p. 179). " The Beautiful is the symbol of the morally good and only in this respect does it give pleasure with a claim for the agreement of everyone else " (p. 250).

In this third *Critique* we breathe an ampler air than in the two preceding. As is well-known, Kant rejected the three popular arguments for the existence of God, the ontological, the cosmological, and the physico-theological, involving as they do elements beyond the realm of experience. God, Immortality, Freedom were left, however, as regulative though not constitutive Ideas, a shadowy legacy perhaps, but later developed in fulfilment of his claim to be " striking a blow at the root of Materialism, Fatalism, Free-thinking, Fanaticism and Superstition " (Intro., *Critique of Pure Reason*).

The moral argument for the existence of God, as Kant presents it, suffers from the defect of being of the nature of a " Postulate " in order that the Good Will may be assured of authority *and* permanence *as well as* reward. Other criticisms have been made of the contorted and clanking machinery of his theory but these are secondary compared with the fundamental objection to a Postulate-Deity. Even Anthropomorphism built on the best moral intentions savours too much of wishful thinking, and, what is even more serious, of subordinating the glory of the Creator to the needs of the Creature. Yet Kant is haunted by the idea of a systematic unity behind the phenomena of life, disclosing itself in the natural purposiveness of the organised forms of Nature and even more in the moral nature of man whereby he is set forth to himself and others as a final purpose of Creation. " The beautiful arts and sciences which by their universally communicable pleasure and by the polish and refinement of Society make man more civilised, if not morally better, prepare us for a Lordship in which Reason alone shall have authority " (p. 358). The faculty of Judgment by which we appreciate the Form in things implies both a principle of harmony in Nature and a spirit of freedom in man. To discover the source of this harmony and this freedom means that we travel beyond Nature and Man to the Author and Giver of Life.

No one would say that we have thus attained to the Christian idea of God, but, in a favourite phrase of the philosopher, the contemplation of Beauty gives us at least "a clue": we may go farther and say it offers a foretaste of the Gospel itself. The marks of the Evangel *are* here. Neither created by man, nor earned by him, the Beautiful is bestowed beyond his needs or desert. It may be the possession of all and is meant so to be, for it cannot be owned as an individual property. At the root of our true appreciation of the Beautiful lies the disinterested desire that it should be universal. In this humble magnanimity rests its alliance with Grace: for, as Matthew Henry says, "True grace hates monopolies and loves not to eat its morsel alone". Jesus goes farther and higher. When He bade His disciples love their enemies and spoke of the Father in heaven who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and unjust, He drew attention to the independence of God, not to His fatherly indulgence or superior indifference. Here is one of the "decrees" of God, not mentioned by the theologians: the Beautiful shares with Love this independence of human folly and strife as it shares also a free and unchecked bounty: both draw out the weary and sinful hearts of men to Him who is the altogether Lovely.

But why then are there cannibals amid scenery so wonderful and fair as in the South Seas? How does man remain vile when every prospect pleases? Can *any saving power* be found in the aesthetic experience? Has it anything to say of sin other than that it reveals itself as excess or defect, ugliness, deformity, a breach of the laws of harmony, a discord in celestial music? Mankind has ever felt that sin is much more than the witting or unwitting aberrations of an untuneful choirboy. Rebellion, resentment, the stain of an offence that soaks into the fibres of personal life, a blow at the Divine authority and love, these represent the sinner's attitude and experience, something beyond the comprehension of the Man of Feeling. Art has nothing so profound or so effective to offer as the words, "Simply to thy Cross I cling". Kant indeed speaks of "gratitude to and veneration for an unknown Cause", and these qualities should have and have had, along with humility and reverence, a place among the brighter colours of joy and hope on the palette of the artist, but they are often blurred with impersonal tones that dissolve the picture till it becomes a mystic's dream.

Yet this too must be said. If there be anything of grace in the Beautiful, it saves us from meanness and materialism; if Religion be deliverance from fear, then, as Kant points out (p. 104), the concept of the Sublime, though not so important or so rich in its consequences as the concept of the Beautiful, plays a worthy part; " in general it displays nothing purposive in nature itself, but only in that possible use of our intuitions of it by which there is produced in us a feeling of purposiveness quite independent of nature ".

Kant's own illustrations are from what he calls the " dynamically sublime "—

> " bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks: clouds piled up in the sky moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals: volcanoes in all their violence of destruction: hurricanes with their track of devastation: the boundless ocean in state of tumult: the lofty waterfall of a mighty river and such like: these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, *provided only that we are in security*; and we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height, and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature ".

The source of this courage derives, according to our author, from our rational faculty which recognises in its capacity of judgment and personal dignity a force beyond the immensity of nature to destroy. But it is only fair to say that his deeper thought reaches down to a faith in an Eternal Purpose sympathetic to the man in danger of being overwhelmed. Not the poet only hears the voice across the storm but the Divine message to the prophet said, " Son of Man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee ". Unless such Theism as that of Kant be cast aside as ineffective and dangerous as well as insufficient, the Divine Order breaks forth more winning and gracious, in storm as in sunshine, through its manifestation in the Sublime and Beautiful.

III

I have left but little space to comment upon *the ethical implications* of our subject. It is from this side that the sharpest attacks are made. Rising out of freedom but ever tending to licence, having its material more in the sensuous than the spiritual, the art-impulse or the cult of the Beautiful is the prodigal son of the human family, the undisciplined rebel in the

Divine Order. We condemn the aesthete by his very name; without the virility of manhood or the cleansing power of faith he is the alternate object of censure and compassion. How real are the dangers of life to this particular type the sins of Hellenic society make clear. The doctrine of "the Mean" as the standard of virtue encourages a compromising spirit, while the appeal to Taste as the arbiter of Morality weakens and destroys the rule of the unconditional Imperative.

But for the Christian the Right is also the Good, enjoyment is added to or discovered in obedience, the spontaneous impulse of love goes far beyond the limits of a Code, originality and variety are welcomed as first principles, and the glories of this world acquire a new tenderness and fascination as they cleanse the Imagination and steady the Emotions. The world is still God's and will be to the end, despite what Man can do.

Both in Education and in the Church more of the Beautiful might be introduced to advantage. Consider, for example, the havoc that is wrought in the countryside by the thoughtless and selfish ravages of children and older people too. Art-teaching is given in the schools, I understand, even Gymnastics and Music, but somehow they have not yet come to the Platonic standard where they serve as propaedeutic to the larger harmonies and values of life.

Ought we to have more of beauty in our churches? Might we not have the walls decorated with religious pictures by some great artist? Can we ever expect people to respond to the opening of our churches when we do not provide for their meditation more than a hard pew and four bare walls? Perhaps we are rightly afraid that to introduce Art would be to transform a church into a museum or a picture-gallery where people would come not to pray but to pry. I leave the matter open. But Plato is right. Education for young and old comes by seeing as well as hearing.

More important than such details are the consequences which may, indeed must, ensue if we reverse the words in our title and read not "the Beautiful in the Divine Order" but "the Divine Order as the source of the Beautiful". I hope it will be judged no mere postscript but the enunciation of a guiding thought to add that Faith in God brings to man its own ecstasies and insight. Through reverence and gratefulness the believer enters upon a world of new dimensions, is possessed

of a vision the poet might envy, a sense of harmonies beyond the ken of the musician. A creative power enters into the nature of the common man, making him distinctive in character. The austerities of life are smoothed out. Strength is joined to benignity. Even in the humdrum of day by day existence he realises, to use another's phrase, " he is no longer an artisan but an artist ". With a simplicity free from moralising or temptation he can enjoy all things lovely and of good report. Yet when he pauses to reflect, he understands the rhapsody of Saul Kane in Masefield's *The Everlasting Mercy:*

> " O glory of the lighted mind.
> How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.
> The station brook, to my new eyes,
> Was babbling out of Paradise;
> The waters rushing from the rain
> Were singing Christ has risen again.
> I thought all earthly creatures knelt
> From rapture of the joy I felt. . . .
> O glory of the lighted soul."

A. W. McClymont.

Edinburgh.