

THE TRUE IDEA OF THE BEAUTIFUL.

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Æsthetik. By Reverend Joseph Jungmann, S. J. Herder, Freiburg.
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TO our knowledge, all who can justly claim the title of æstheticians agree that the object of the fine arts is the *beautiful*. Every true work of art, whether it presents itself to us in solid matter, in color, in sound, or in language, is a representation of the beautiful in external form. The first question of the critic, therefore, must always be: Is the object which pretends to be a work of art really beautiful; and, if so, why is it beautiful? The most fundamental question in æsthetics, then, is: *What is beauty; or, what constitutes an object beautiful?* This question is not new. It is as old as philosophy. It occupied the minds of Aristotle, the prince of Greek philosophers, and of the "divine" Plato; and with it Socrates delighted to puzzle his flippant friends. Taking for our guide the few principles which can be gleaned from St. Thomas as bearing on the subject, and the excellent work of Father Jungmann, referred to at the head of this paper, we shall endeavor, if not to give a fully satisfactory answer, at least to establish some principles, from which a sufficiently probable solution may be obtained for the vexed and vexing question of the definition of beauty.

First, however, we may be allowed to make a passing remark on the learned work before us. Among the numerous monumental works of eminent Catholic writers published in Germany for the last twenty years Father Jungmann's *Æsthetik*, in our opinion, deserves a very high place, as it cultivates a field so far little explored by Catholic writers. And while the eccentric theories of German pseudo-æsthetics are being plagiarized and gradually carried into English and American literature and thought, it would be very desirable that learned Catholics of English tongue, who would have reliable information on the subject, should turn their attention to this truly classical work, in which the wild dreams of extravagant æsthetes are not only solidly refuted, but a sound system of criticism is established on the unshaken principles of true philosophy and the great models of Christian as well as pagan art. The author, who combines an exquisite taste formed by the prolonged observation of the best

works of art at Rome and elsewhere, with the most extensive reading of ancient and modern literature, has been for more than twenty years professor of *Æsthetics* and Sacred Eloquence at the University of Innsbruck, Austria; so that few might be said to have had such an opportunity of gaining a complete knowledge of the subject he treats. We will not, however, make the learned author responsible for all the opinions proposed in this paper, but we wish them to be taken for what they are worth from the evidences on which they are based. We shall even venture to differ from him in details of some importance.

Before attempting to build up a definition of the beautiful we shall make a brief review of those theories which, in our opinion, are utterly untenable. Though the science of *æsthetics* or *criticism* is of comparatively recent date, it has already, like the mother science of philosophy, undergone a complete series of metamorphoses, until at last it is presented to us as a philosophical structure reared upon the very unæsthetic basis of that melody wherewith our saurian grand-dams of old were wont to woo our semi-human grandsires in the primeval forests of the tropics. To such a degree have men "become vain in their thoughts."

The first among modern writers who has given a full treatise on the beautiful was *Edmund Burke*, the great orator and statesman, who in philosophy was a pronounced sensualist. In his juvenile essay on the "Sublime and Beautiful" he develops a theory, incidentally sketched by Addison in the *Spectator*, regarding the beauty of species, and extends it to beauty generally. According to Burke's views "beauty is some quality in bodies acting mechanically on the human mind by the intervention of the senses"; hence a material and sensible quality. "Beauty acts," he says, "by relaxing the solids of the whole body." "A beautiful object presented to the sense, by causing a relaxation of the body, produces the passion of love in the mind." We refrain from quoting the descriptions and illustrations of this process of relaxation, which are plastic almost to obscenity. From all his reflections on the beautiful it is manifest that he considered it as something merely *material*, that acted only *materially* on *material* organs and produced merely sensual effects, the sensual passion of love. The reader is much disappointed when he comes to a section headed, "Of Beauty," in which he expects to find the subject defined, but is only informed that beauty is the exterior quality of the sex which determines sexual love to one in preference to another—a definition which would have amused Socrates no less than that given by his friend, Hippias, when in his perplexity he answered that "a fair maiden was beauty." In fact, every intelligent admirer of the truly great Edmund Burke must sincerely regret that he

ever wrote the treatise on the "Sublime and Beautiful." However, if we may judge from his other works, and particularly from a brilliant and affective tribute which he paid to a fair but unfortunate queen, we may justly conclude that his better feelings corrected in practice those perverse principles which false philosophical theories had taught him. Had he clung in practice to his sensual theory of beauty, he never would have uttered the oft repeated sublime and thrilling complaint that the "days of chivalry are gone."

The English sensualistic theory of Burke was soon after introduced into Germany by *Baumgarten* and built up into a science, by him first called *Æsthetics* (*Æsthetica*). The very name itself (*αισθησιμα, αισθησις, αισθητικος*) signifies sensitive impression, and *Baumgarten* defines "æsthetics, or the theory of the liberal arts: the science of sensitive perception." His disciple, *G. Friederich Meier*, true to his master's teaching, declares that every "perfection perceived by the senses is a beauty, and every sensible imperfection in like manner is an ugliness." And for illustration he adds: "Wine tastes *beautifully* and flowers smell *beautifully*; music sounds *beautifully* and a handsome face looks *beautifully*." In the same sense Burke makes smoothness an essential element of beauty, and informs us that "sweetness is *beauty to the taste*." The German æsthetician *Lemcke*, building on the same principles, goes still farther in the development of this sensualistic theory and identifies the beautiful simply with the sensual, the immoral, in its grossest manifestations. In reference to the degeneracy of paganism he says in his "Popular *Æsthetics*": "The decline of *moral life* began to make itself conspicuous. *Æsthetic life* stifled it by its *sensual* influence (*sinnliches treiben*). Sensuality suffocated morality. All dreamt only of pleasure and *æsthetic* enjoyment." He then goes on to describe the struggle of Christianity against "*æsthetic* enjoyment, the world of the beautiful and sensual pleasure," treating these three antagonists of Christianity as synonymous, and winds up with the complaint that in Christianity the beautiful was disparaged or even transferred to the supernatural and the Deity—a complaint which is both unhistorical and, as we shall have occasion to show, unphilosophical.

This sensualistic theory of the beautiful comes very convenient to modern evolutionism. For, if beauty is and always was a mere object of sense, they are freed from the difficulty of explaining why we have a sense of beauty while our undeveloped ancestors had none. *Æstheticians* of the sensist school, on the other hand, gave a hearty welcome to the theory of the ape as a firm basis for their sensual system. *Berg*, the most recent of German æstheticians, tells us in all seriousness that "the theories of Darwin have

thrown a clear light on the origin of beauty." "Through the results obtained by Darwin," he says, "we have finally arrived at a scientific theory of the beautiful." One flash of this "clear light" may suffice to enlighten the reader of its marvellous character. Berg, speaking of the æsthetic pleasure of music, informs us that the first object of vocal notes was to facilitate the association of the sexes. "Musical notes and melody have been applied by our semi-human ancestors at the time of mating. Now, as this musical courtship had been instinctively practiced for many generations, so the singing and hearing of musical sounds have been subsequently associated with now gentler, now more violent, pleasurable feeling, always arising from the passion of love." "The melody peculiar to some species of female apes has been more recently invented(?) as a means of decoying the male of the species." When we read such sublime nonsense uttered with the greatest composure in the name of science, philosophy and good taste, we feel disposed to exclaim with the prophet: "Woe to you that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to you that are wise in your own eyes and prudent in your own conceits." While such theories find favor with critics we need not wonder that the bulk of our modern so-called polite literature is not only amatory in its character, but sentimental and sensual in the worst sense. So far have we come that the prejudice is almost universal that no literary composition written for entertainment, be it tragedy, comedy, or tale, can put any claim to artistic beauty unless it have an amatory plot.

Thus our English sensism and evolutionism have been exported and distilled in the alembic of German philosophy and are again contrabanded and vended in spicy doses for our æsthetic edification. A reaction, though not a healthy one, against those sensualistic theories has been brought about by the *idealistic and pantheistic* schools. "Schelling," we are told by an admirer, "has taken a new departure in æsthetics. For him it was reserved to give to the science of the beautiful an absolute basis. According to him we are to define beauty: The identity of the infinite and the finite, of the ideal and the real, of necessity and freedom, contemplated in sensible form." He throws a new incubus of impenetrable speculation on the subject, when he tells us that "wherever the individual (the real) is so congruous with the idea that the idea itself enters the real and is contemplated in the concrete, there beauty is to be found." These terms, we are told, contain a truth which deserves to be "treasured up" for the science of æsthetics. They are, doubtless, a valuable keepsake in a philosophical curiosity-shop. They have been "treasured up" by the followers of

Schelling, have obtained currency in text-books, encyclopædias and other ponderous works. They have been admired even by Catholic authors and adopted after being stripped of some of their pantheism. One of the latter formulates (Schelling's idea) thus: "The beautiful is the manifestation of God in His creatures"—the Divine idea "expressed, made visible or audible in a work of art." This proposition enunciates truth, though somewhat vaguely.

Peculiar is the theory of *Schiller*, and it seems to have been a favorite idea of Herder, Lessing, Goethe, and other German poets and æsthetes of that humanistic school. According to Schiller, beauty is the combination of the *ideal* and the *real*, or the harmony between matter and form. Whence, as this harmony is to be found preëminently in man, he concludes: "The beautiful is identical with the *human*." Therefore, *man alone* is truly beautiful; all inferior objects and the pure spirits are beautiful only metaphorically or by the appropriation of human qualities. *The human*, therefore, is not only *a* beautiful (object), but *the* beautiful. The ideal of the beautiful is woman. Thus we see that while the pantheism of Schelling changes the infinite God into finite sensible nature, the idealism of Schiller idolizes finite man and transforms him into the infinite God.

While sensualism, pantheism, and idealism have been thus indulging their morbid and phantastic reveries, there were not wanting Catholic philosophers who, following the principles of Plato, Aristotle and St. Thomas, and the doctrines of the Fathers of the Church, taught and wrote more correctly on the subject of the beautiful. Our great theologians, treating of the attributes of God, did not fail to enter fully into the nature of beauty as far as it was necessary to illustrate the beauty of Him who is the fountain of all beauty.

Cardinal Toledo, in his commentary on the "Summa" of St. Thomas, says: "Beauty, generally speaking, consists in a certain order and interior arrangement of the perfections of an object. Hence an object is called beautiful in reference to the intellect and to our perception; for it is the function of the intellect to delight in order, as it is the function of the will to delight in good."

St. Francis of Sales, in his treatise on the "Love of God," almost adopts the words of the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas: "Though beauty and goodness," he says, "coincide to a certain extent, they are, nevertheless, not quite identical, for the good is that which appeases the appetite and the will, the beautiful that which pleases the understanding and the mind."

Cardinal Pallavicini, in his work entitled "Del Bene," writes: "The beautiful, in my opinion, is nothing else in reality than a special kind of the good, which in virtue of its intrinsic excellence

produces an agreeable apprehension of itself in the eye of the intellect."

Father Rogacci, on the "One Thing Necessary," defines beauty as a quality which renders the object in which it resides agreeable and delightful to the cognoscitive faculties.

Leibniz, who, though a Protestant, was eminently Catholic in his philosophic principles, gives a similar definition. According to him, beauty is the perfection of things which, inasmuch as it is apprehended, affects us with pleasure. This pleasure produced by the perception is its distinctive mark.

Another definition very popular among Catholic writers, attributed by some to Plato, by others to St. Augustine, is "*Splendor veri.*" It appears, however, that this definition is not to be found in the works of either of these authors. And though it were genuine, we think it would not throw much light on the subject in question. Others love to define beauty as "*multiplicity or variety in unity and unity in multiplicity;*" but this definition, too, is vague, and, at most, enunciates some attributes of the beautiful.

The first Catholic writer (abstracting from those Germans who have based their theories on pantheistic and idealistic principles) who has written an exhaustive treatise on the beautiful was *Father Taparelli, S. J.*, one of the shrewdest and profoundest thinkers of modern times, who, in the years 1859 and 1860, contributed a series of masterly articles on the Beautiful to the *Civiltà Cattolica*, which were subsequently published in book form. Proceeding from the definition of St. Thomas, *Pudchra sunt quæ visa placent*, he conceives beauty primarily as the object of the cognoscitive faculties; and the beautiful as that the perception of which generates satisfaction, pleasure, delight in the same faculties. He then goes on to inquire into the causes of this pleasure and comes to the result that it is produced by the *conformity* of the objects with our various cognoscitive faculties, intellectual and sensitive.

He sums up his theory as follows: "Beautiful is that the contemplation of which delights, gives pleasure. Now, human perception is complex and comprises four grades. The first is sensitive perception. The various sensations are then concentrated in the interior sense; thence the imagination receives its representations, and from the imagination reason by its peculiar activity abstracts general ideas. The combination of these four degrees of perception forms the complete cognoscitive faculty of man. This latter complex faculty will consequently obtain complete satisfaction when each of the partial faculties finds its adequate share in the contemplation of the object, and when, moreover, each separate faculty contributes to give the supreme act of the intellect its completion, enabling it to move the will to proper action. Whence it

is manifest that beauty, though its natural end is the repose of the cognoscitive faculties, is destined by the Creator to facilitate right action.

“From these considerations it is not hard to define the proper essence and nature of that beauty in which the cognoscitive faculty may find its satisfaction. We have only to consult reason and experience as to what objects are congenial to each of these faculties, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, how these four grades of perception act in harmony to produce that complete satisfaction in the apprehending subject.

“With regard to the tendency of the perceptive faculties, the *exterior sense* requires beauty of tone (whether in color or sound), clearness of manifestation, variety and order of form in the object as to space and time (symmetry and rhythm). The *interior sense* is the more delighted the more numerous are the sensations which the exterior senses supply from the individual objects. The *imagination* creates new representations by combining and disposing the impressions received according to the wants of the percipient subject, and gives form and life to the complex beautiful object. Finally, *reason* is satisfied when all these mutual relations, taken together, and the order of their mutual relations to each other, present it convenient matter from which to form true, definite, affective, and touching representations.

“Beauty, then, is nothing else than the relation of the object to the sensitive perceptive faculties, and of these faculties again to the intellect. . . . Beauty in nature, as in art, consists always in this: *that the perceptive faculties find satisfaction both by the right relation of the object to them and their relation to one another, with a view to the end of perception, i.e., rational action.*”

The doctrine of Taparelli, which we could not give briefer or clearer than in his own words, has been adopted by most of the subsequent Catholic philosophers. Father Jungmann, however, feels himself obliged to depart from the teaching of the Roman philosopher, inasmuch as the former maintains that the pleasure derived from the contemplation of the beautiful has its seat not in the cognoscitive faculties but in the will, and consists in *perfect love* or, as he prefers to call it, *love properly so-called* (eigentliche Liebe) in contradistinction to love improperly so-called (uneigentliche Liebe) or imperfect love. This is a distinction common in theology between *amor rei propter seipsam* and *amor rei propter aliud*; the love of an object for its own sake and the love of a thing for the sake of something else. Thus we love health for its own sake (love properly so-called), medicine for the sake of health (love improperly so-called). Taking pleasure in this sense of love properly so-called, Father Jungmann defines beauty “*the intrinsic goodness*

of things, inasmuch as it renders them fit to be the object of complacency to the rational mind (Geist)."

Father Taparelli and his adherents, as we have seen, admit that the contemplation of the beautiful is productive of love, and thus "facilitates rational action"; but they deny that this love constitutes the essence of that pleasure produced by the beautiful. This pleasure is perfected in the cognitive faculties; the attraction of the will, or the love which thence arises, is only concomitant or consecutive, the fruit of the intellectual complacency.

This great variety of discordant definitions, even among the profoundest Catholic philosophers, is an evidence of the difficulty of the enterprise. The reason of this difficulty is obvious. First, beauty, like truth and goodness, being a transcendental quality and an analogous notion, does not admit of a *strict* definition *per genus proximum et differentiam specificam*, as philosophers term it; as there is no *genus* in which it can be said to be contained as a *species*. Like truth and goodness, therefore, it can only be described in its relation to the faculties of rational nature. Here again a new difficulty arises. While truth is defined in relation to the perceptive faculties, and goodness in relation to the appetitive, of which faculties they respectively form the proper object, the question is, to which of those faculties shall we refer that attribute or relation which we call beauty? To the rational or to the sensitive faculties? To the perceptive or appetitive? Or to the partial or entire assemblage of the faculties of rational nature? And if the latter obtain, whether coördinately or with a certain subordination of the inferior to the superior? Of what faculty or faculties is beauty the proper object? This question "makes cowards of us all." And yet this is the gist of the cause, in our opinion. He who will answer this question to evidence will, we think, have obtained the necessary results for a satisfactory definition of beauty. We cannot here attempt a final solution of this question, but will give it due consideration in the course of our brief analysis of the idea of beauty.

All are agreed that beauty is that quality of objects which *pleases the contemplator*, or, put more universally, *the apprehending subject*. "The fact that *the beautiful pleases* us," says St. Chrysostom, "has been, ever since the creation of the world, the cause why we distinguish the beautiful from the vulgar or ugly." And St. Augustine says: "Are you not seized with *pleasure* when you behold the universe? *Why?* Because the universe is *beautiful*." The same has been the teaching of the stoic school of philosophy, as well as of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, whose doctrine St. Thomas reproduces in various places, when he declares those things to be

beautiful which please the contemplator (*quæ visa placent*).¹ The same, as we have shown, is the teaching of Toledo, Pallavicini, St. Francis of Sales, Leibniz, Rogacci, and Taparelli, as well as of the sensualists and evolutionists, and it is admitted by modern æstheticians generally, however they may differ among themselves. The effect produced by the contemplation of the beautiful is well illustrated by the conduct of St. Peter, when, after beholding the glory of the Saviour in the transfiguration on Tabor, he in his ecstasy exclaimed: "*It is well to be here* ; here let us build three tents." Now, that quality of objects which produces this pleasure is called beauty.

But may not this quality be something merely apparent, subjective? The variety of contradicting tastes would seem to indicate this. What one calls beautiful another calls ugly ; and what is an object of delight and love to one, is the cause of disgust and abomination to another. As little as the eye creates, extenuates, or modifies the brightness of sun, moon, and stars, so little do subjective views and tastes add to or detract from the beauty of objects. Whether it is realized and appreciated or not, it continues all the same to be a *constant, real, inherent* quality, which will not fail to be rightly perceived and justly appraised as soon as it is brought to bear on sound and well-disposed cognoscitive faculties. The denial of the objective reality of beauty would imply the negation of the objectivity of all perceptive qualities. Beauty, therefore, is *something real*, part and portion of the objects to which it is attributed.

If we further inquire whether this quality which we call beauty is a sensible or an intelligible one, we must come to the conclusion that it is *intelligible only*, i. e., a simple quality that can be apprehended not by sense, but only by reason or intelligence. Sense perceives a material object that is beautiful, but the perception of beauty *as such* is the exclusive function of the intellect. This is the teaching of St. Thomas. In his commentary on the work of Dionysius, "De Divinis Nominibus," discussing the proposition of the Areopagite that beauty is the same as goodness, the Angelic Doctor distinguishes as follows: "Though goodness and beauty are the same in the subject (the same reality), they are, nevertheless, different in their relations; for beauty adds something to goodness, to wit, the relation to a faculty cognoscitive of beauty *as such*." But the perception of a quality *as such*, according to the terminology of St. Thomas, is the peculiar function of the intellect, not of sense. Besides, an essential feature of beauty in external objects, according to Aristotle and St. Thomas, is order and symmetry. Now, according to all sound philosophy and familiar

¹ See *Sum.*, P. 1, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1.

experience, these are qualities that can be perceived only by the understanding or reason. The same conclusion follows from the fact that things spiritual and moral, which transcend all sensitive perception, and are the object only of reason and intelligence, as well as material things, are termed, and, as we shall show, actually are, beautiful. Therefore St. Augustine concludes: "Though many beautiful objects are *visible*, yet that beauty itself whereby they are beautiful is by no means visible." Cicero, the Roman interpreter of Greek philosophy, says: "No other animal (but man) perceives the beauty, grace, and symmetry of sensible objects."

Though beauty as such is an intellectual quality, yet, like truth and goodness, *it is also an attribute proper to sensible objects*. For who has not been struck with the beauty of the starry firmament, or the glory of the sun, when he goes forth at morning as the "bridegroom from his bridal-chamber," or goes down at evening into his golden couch? Who can contemplate the sea, whether it dashes its crested waves on the hollow-sounding beach, or reflects the azure sky from its glassy surface, without being enraptured by its beauty and grandeur? Who is insensible to the beauty of the landscape, varied with the numberless tints and hues of blossom, flower, and foliage, now expanding its rich waving fields to the eye, now furrowed with hill and dale, enlivened with the music of the rippling brook and the sweet carols of a thousand vying songsters? Who can resist the power of music, when it rushes in solemn sweeping accords from the "deep-laboring" organ or the rich human voice, and rolls in mighty volumes along the vaults and aisles of some sacred edifice? Then we forget ourselves, and seem to be rapt into some earthly paradise and say: "It is well to be here."

Yet the beauty of sun, moon, and stars, of heaven and earth, sea and land, with the gracefulness of the human frame, that masterpiece of divine workmanship, the sweet notes of music, and the charming imagery and rhythm of poetry, all the ideal creations of plastic art, are only a dim reflection, a shadow or an echo, of the beauty of the unseen, the spiritual, and supernatural. *The unseen is the proper region of the beautiful*. All the beauty of this visible world, and all those forms which human imagination can create, are, as it were, a handful of pearls taken out of the treasury of the spiritual and supernatural world, and strewn by the Creator's hand into a world of tears. This was the teaching even of pagan philosophy. "He who wishes to proceed rationally," says Plato, "must consider the beauty of the soul more excellent than that of the body." And again, Socrates prays: "O Pan, and all ye other gods of the place, grant that my soul may be beautiful and that my exterior may accord with my soul!" Plotinus, after

summing up the various objects that are considered beautiful in the visible world, adds: "The beauty of the soul, which consists of all manner of virtue, is a more real beauty than that of the objects above mentioned." And Cicero asserts that the wise man is truly beautiful, "for," he says, "the features of the soul are more beautiful than those of the body." "Could we but see the soul of the virtuous man," says Seneca, "how beautiful, how venerable, how resplendent with majesty and gracefulness would she appear to us!" The same is the teaching of the Holy Ghost, when He exclaims: "How beautiful is a chaste generation with glory!" We might quote the grandest passages from the Holy Fathers, who never cease to impress upon the faithful that all true beauty is "from within," has its seat in the soul and not in the exterior form; and exhort them to appreciate, cultivate, enhance this true interior spiritual beauty. "If a man wishes to be beautiful," says St. Clement of Alexandria, "let him adorn the soul, which is the most beautiful of man, and make it wax more beautiful from day to day." This argument the Fathers are wont to urge most frequently and forcibly on the fairer sex. "Not with the tints of delusive art should they embellish their faces," says the same Holy Father. "We will teach them another more rational art of decorating themselves. The highest beauty is the interior, as we have often said, when the Holy Ghost adorns the soul and diffuses His light upon it. Justice, prudence, self-control, love of whatever is good, modesty—the loveliest tint ever beheld—these are true ornaments. In their hearts they should wear their ornaments; by the beauty of the inward man they should commend themselves; for *in the soul alone is the seat of beauty and ugliness*. Therefore the virtuous man alone is truly beautiful and good."

Such is the teaching of philosophy and faith on inward beauty; and, in fact, it requires a considerable amount of degeneracy to make a man insensible of its attractions. The look of innocence, though residing in the most ordinary exterior, without the slightest ornament of art, is more attractive than the most fascinating exterior form; while outward graces, whether natural or affected, shrouding inward corruption, are alike abominable to God and man. Nay, we do not hesitate to say that material objects can be called truly beautiful *only inasmuch as they are capable, through the instrumentality of the senses, to lift up the mind to the contemplation of higher spiritual beauty*, to transport it into the proper region of beauty, the unseen. It is not the exterior delineations, the various hues and shades of color, that the true critic considers in a work of art; it is rather what is implied than what is expressed; the invisible and untouchable, not what can be seen, heard, and grasped; the *idea* rather than the material *form*.

Not all the objects of sense, however, are capable of effecting this intellectual elevation, but only the objects of the more perfect of the senses, which approach nearer to the immaterial—*sight* and *hearing*. Though the objects of smell, taste, and touch are sometimes qualified in language as beautiful, yet this must be pronounced as either an abuse of the term or, at least, an analogical or metaphorical use; for the organic affections produced by such objects of sense are little or nowise subservient to higher ideas, but are merely animal both in nature and tendency. Wherefore St. Thomas rightly considers it unphilosophical to call tastes and smells (to say nothing of the grosser sense of touch) beautiful.¹ Hence, if we speak of a beautiful viand, we must attribute beauty to the skill displayed in dressing it; if of a beautiful perfume, we speak from the analogy of the sensation to that produced by really beautiful objects; while to the object of touch, as such, we never give the predicate of beautiful, no matter how smooth and soft it may be. In this regard Edmund Burke fails not only against sound philosophy, but also against good taste, when he makes smoothness an essential element of beauty, and calls sweetness beauty to the taste.

We do not deny, however, that these inferior, sensible qualities, smoothness, sweetness, etc., in some cases add intensity to the effects of beauty, inasmuch as they give *agreeableness* and sometimes gracefulness to really beautiful objects; but those qualities do not enter the strict notion of beauty, and, if abounding to any great extent, they will only obscure and mar the effects of real beauty by appealing too strongly to sensuality, and thus impeding the free operation of the higher faculties, whose proper function it is to apprehend, and contemplate the beautiful. It is this intensity of sensation, to which nature is viciously inclined, which makes so many mistake the sensually agreeable for the beautiful, and mere animal passion for genuine sentiment and true love. This error has always been and still is the most powerful agent for the perversion of good taste, and the most prolific source of false sentimentality, in the writing and reading world, and, we might say, in the whole domain of art.

Though the proper seat of the beautiful is the unseen and spiritual, yet in our present composite state it is the sensible that makes most impression on us. Our knowledge of things proceeds from the senses. These are the portals through which truth is brought home to the higher faculties. The intellect, though independent of the imagination in its nature and existence, is, in our present state, dependent upon it in its operations. Hence, our minds can

¹ See *Sum.*, P. 1-2 ac., q. 27, a. 1, ad. 3.

rest with ease only upon such truths as have corresponding or kindred representations in the imagination. Therefore there can be no poetry without imagery, and all the arts consist in representing ideas, intellectual or moral, in sensible form. Poetry and art, in general, are only an expediency invented by nature herself to bring truth and goodness home to us in a way suited to our natural imperfection. The pure, separate spirits do not require the medium of exterior form for the contemplation of spiritual objects. They apprehend and contemplate them directly, and yet there is no doubt but they realize and enjoy the beautiful in a much higher degree than we do, with all the parade of imagery and sensible representation. The fact, therefore, that we cannot rest with pleasure on mere speculative or transcendental objects is only incidental to our present composite nature, and *does not argue*, as some think, *that only the sensible is beautiful*. On the contrary, the more truth and goodness recede from the material, the more perfect they are, and, consequently, the more beautiful. The apparent lack of beauty is in our manner of apprehending them. Nay, as we shall see, it is a canon of æsthetics as well as metaphysics, that the more simple, immaterial, spiritual, an object is, other conditions being equal, the more beautiful it must be pronounced. On this principle might be based the scale of beauty as well as that of perfection.

From the considerations thus far made, it may be established that *beauty is a simple, intelligible quality, which, though residing in sensible and intellectual things, has its principal seat in the latter as in its proper subject*. If we now further inquire into the cause of that pleasure which is produced by the contemplation of the beautiful, the only reason which can be assigned for it is *the special conformity* of those objects which are called beautiful *with rational nature*. Wherever the mind is brought to bear on an object that reflects its own perfections in a greater or lesser degree, it will be found to rest upon that object with a complacency proportioned to the degree in which its own perfection is expressed in the object, provided it be presented to it in a manner congenial to its nature.

With regard to sensible objects, it is a common experience that the mind rests with pleasure on such as exhibit life, activity, movement, regularity, order, aptitude, completeness, simplicity, unity with variety combined, symmetry, harmony, durability, strength, firmness, light, brightness, perspicuity, etc. The more these qualities are combined in due order and proportion, and presented in any object, the greater will be the complacency with which the mind will rest in its contemplation. Now, what is the cause of this complacency? We can find no other than the special conformity of such objects with the mind, or with rational nature. The living, simple, spiritual, intellectual, ever-active, imperishable mind sees

in such an object its own image and likeness. And, if ever, surely here the axiom attains: *Simile simili gaudet*.

It would lead us too far if we endeavored to show in detail the special analogy of those objects which are considered beautiful with rational nature. That our views on this point, however, may not seem new, we may be permitted to give some authorities from ancient philosophy in confirmation of our assertion. "The beauty of exterior objects," says Plotinus, "strikes us at first glance. Our minds, as soon as they perceive them, are affected with pleasure. They embrace them as something they recognize. The mind becomes, as it were, one with beauty; but, if it perceives something ugly, it shrinks from it, disowns it, refuses to recognize it; because *an ugly object does not harmonize with it*, is foreign to it. This fact," he continues, "we explain as follows: The mind is, of all things, the most perfect. Now, if it perceives something which is *akin to*, or has even a trace of *kindred* with, itself, it is filled with joy and rapture." Thus, the same philosopher explains the beauty of light, color, brightness, from their likeness to the spiritual mind of man. *Gold* was considered by the ancients as a natural symbol of the spiritual soul and its perfections and moral excellence, on account of its simplicity, purity, and durability. Hence, the Neo-Platonist, Hierocles, says: "Gold is something pure, not mixed with dross, as other bodies. Wherefore we justly attribute to the holy, pure and innocent soul the name of *golden*." In fact, the more the spiritual is exhibited or symbolized in material objects, the more beautiful they are and the greater intellectual enjoyment they afford, a circumstance which can be attributed only to their special conformity with rational nature. We may add that the same doctrine is set forth by St. Thomas.¹

Let us further examine in what this conformity of the beautiful with rational nature consists. There is only a two-fold relation of conformity possible—with the understanding and the will. There is no third imaginable. Now, to which of these two faculties does the beautiful, as such, address itself? Notwithstanding the authority and arguments of the learned author before us, we are still inclined to the opinion that this conformity of the beautiful to rational nature, primarily at least, consists in its relation to the intellect. Our reasons are the following:

First, St. Thomas, as often as he speaks of beauty in its relation to rational nature, clearly intimates that it is the object of the cognitive faculty, not of the appetitive, and thus draws the distinc-

¹ See *Sum.*, P. I a, q. 5, a. 4, ad I.

tion between beauty and goodness, that a thing is called beautiful in order to perception; good, in order to appetite or desire.¹

Secondly, many of those qualities which we call beautiful, though they belong to the objective constitution of beings and form part of their intrinsic goodness, yet, in that precise regard in which they are beautiful, seem to be the objects of the understanding, not of the will. Such, for instance, are order, proportion, rhythm, harmony, variety, etc. We are unable to perceive how the sound of music, or the rhythm of poetry, or the exterior proportions of an edifice, or a certain blending of colors, can be the object of love or desire, except as far as their perception affords *delight to the understanding*.

Thirdly, it is a common experience that very many are charmed by the intuition of beauty, without being to any degree ethically affected. Thus, the voluptuary admires the beauty of virtue and innocence, but is not drawn beyond their fruitless contemplation. The infidel cannot but appreciate the beauty of the Christian Religion and Christ's Church, while he reviles and persecutes both. In fact, it is a characteristic phase of modern infidelity that many who would flatter themselves that they are Christians, are satisfied with the mere æsthetic aspect of Christianity, without embracing the substance; whose Christianity, in other words, is merely intellectual or speculative, not practical; a matter of taste, not an object of the will or desire. Hence, we find infidel poets and artists not rarely seeking their inspirations from Catholic subjects and ideals, while they openly profess their disaffection to the principles and practices which they cannot help admiring from an æsthetic standpoint. Now, if æsthetic pleasure had its seat in the will, and beauty addressed itself mainly to this faculty, such æsthetes, of whom there is a considerable number, who are deliberately disaffected to almost all that essentially constitutes the beautiful, could never be said to realize the pleasures of the beautiful. Their will would be continually at war with itself, "a house divided against itself, a Beelzebub casting out Beelzebub." Such a contradiction exists, indeed, in many, but not to the extent of excluding the essential enjoyment of the beautiful, which would be the case if beauty were the object of the will.

We do not, however, maintain that beauty affects the intellect only. It is, primarily, the object of the understanding; but, *secondarily, the object of the will*. The will is naturally moved to desire or abhorrence, to love or hatred, of every object that is brought home to the intellect, and, as the intellect apprehends a special conformity in every beautiful object, the will cannot but be

¹ See *Sum*, P. 1 a, q. 95, a. 4, ad 1; P. 1-2 ae, q. 27, a. 1, ad 3; P. 2-2 ae, q. 125, a. 2, ad 1; *In lib. Sent.* 1, d 31; q. 2, ad 4; *In Dion.*, cap. 4, lect. 5.

more or less strongly affected, according to the degree of conformity apprehended, and the degree of intensity with which it is apprehended by the understanding. Beauty is, therefore, preëminently a *cause* and a most powerful *motive of love*; and the enjoyment of the beautiful is but very imperfect, if the will cannot adhere to it while the mind contemplates it. It is only when the will, as well as the understanding, finds its rest in the beautiful object, that the measure of æsthetic pleasure is full. Every beautiful object, then, we must conclude, is lovable; but it is not its loveliness that renders it beautiful in the first instance, but its special conformity with the intellect, whereby its loveliness is more forcibly brought home to the will.

If we proceed to inquire into the *ultimate cause* of this special conformity of beautiful objects with rational nature, we must needs come to the Divine Intellect and Essence Itself. Things are conformable to rational nature inasmuch as they are conformable to their prototypes in the Divine Intellect. These divine ideas have different degrees of conformity, according to the various grades of perfection with which they represent the Divine Essence. The more perfectly, therefore, an object represents the divine perfections or shadows forth the image of the Creator, the more conformable it is to rational nature, the most perfect likeness of God's own Essence; and, consequently, the more beautiful it must be said to be. This consideration led Father Patavius, one of the sublimest intellects of his time, to define beauty simply "the conformity of an object with its ideal or prototype." "Beautiful," he says, "is that the perfection of which gives us pleasure because of its close conformity with its ideal or prototype." Though this definition is deficient in precision, it expresses a truth which leads us to the very fountain and ultimate cause of true beauty—the conformity of objects proximately with the divine ideas, and ultimately with the Divine Essence. The Divine Essence is the last and highest norm of beauty as of truth and goodness. It was the image and likeness of His Essence that God saw in His creatures when, contemplating them after the creation, He pronounced them to be good (*καλά*). Hence St. Thomas says: "The beauty of the creature is nothing else than the likeness of divine beauty communicated to things." If we then discover a conformity with our rational nature in beautiful objects, and rest with pleasure in their intuition, it is because they bear the likeness of Him to whose "image and likeness" we have been moulded in creation as the most perfect expression of His Divine Essence.

From this conformity of beautiful objects with the Divine

¹ In *Dion.* cap. 4, lect. 5.

Essence we may determine the *scale of beauty*; the source and fountain of all beauty—substantive beauty without mixture of imperfection—is *God*, the incomprehensible Truth and Goodness. From Him emanates, as from its exemplar and efficient cause, all beauty in the material and spiritual, natural and supernatural order. Must not He Himself, then, possess in an infinite degree that beauty which He has so liberally communicated to His creatures? And as beauty is an unmixed perfection, which implies no imperfection, must not God possess it in its truest sense? As God is infinite truth and goodness, therefore, so He is unspeakable beauty—that only beauty which can fill every understanding, and satiate every will; and that not only for a brief instant, but for all eternity. In Him alone rational nature can find absolute and perpetual rest, never-ending enjoyment and consummate happiness.

“No man is so stupid,” says St. Gregory Nyssen, “as not to perceive as a self-evident truth, that the substantial, primordial, and only true *beauty*, splendor, and goodness is no other than God, the Lord of all things.” We might also largely quote Pagan philosophy in proof of this statement.

Equal to God in beauty as in substance is His *Only begotten Son*, the true “figure of His substance and splendor of His glory,” who, clothed with our humanity, was “fair above the children of men.” “Our Redeemer,” says Clement of Alexandria, “is so beautiful that He alone deserves to be loved by us who can love nothing but true beauty. He is the true beauty, for He is the light.” “The prophet calls the Redeemer glorious in His beauty,” says St. Basil, “considering His Godhead. It is not His external beauty that he celebrates, for we have seen Him, and there was no comeliness or beauty in Him. His exterior was without charms and unnoticeable before the children of men. It was manifestly by the divine love of the invisible glory that the prophet was charmed when he contemplated its splendor, when its rays were shed upon him and its beauty enraptured his soul. Whenever this beauty is revealed to the heart of man, it finds everything that it has hitherto loved ugly and contemptible. For did not the Apostle reckon everything as dirt to gain Christ after he had contemplated Him glorious in His beauty?”

Next to the Son of God in beauty stands that woman whom He had chosen before all ages to be *His mother*. She is the blessed among women, full of grace, the first fruit of creation, the mother of beauteous love, all fair without spot or stain. She who goeth forth like the rising dawn, fair as the moon and beautiful as the sun; the woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; the great ideal to

whom all true artists have looked up for inspiration. Need we wonder that she has been for eighteen hundred years the constant and inexhaustible theme of song and the grandest object of painting, sculpture, and architecture? Where is the true master-poet, painter, or sculptor, who has not plied his genius to glorify her beauty?

Second to Mary, the mother of God, and Queen of Heaven, are those holy *Angels and Spirits* who have been admitted to the presence of God in His heavenly courts, and who are "like to Him because they see Him as He is."

If we turn from the mansions of glory, the heavenly Jerusalem, and descend to our own orb, there we find highest in beauty the *Church of Christ*, His mystical body, the perfect image of the heavenly Jerusalem, that city built on unshaken foundations on the holy mount, His immaculate spouse, whom He has "cleansed to Himself in the laver of water in the word of life, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing, but that she might be holy and without blemish." Here we find all the elements of true beauty, unity, multiplicity, harmony, brightness, purity, spirituality, supernatural and divine life, etc., a heavenly beauty which consists not in, but is only symbolized by, marble structures and golden and silver vessels, and rich apparel, and sweet incense, and gorgeous ceremony.

In the beauty of the visible world, *man*, created to the image and likeness of God, doubtless occupies the first place. In him we distinguish two different species of beauty: the one exterior, common in kind with that of other animals, though of a much higher order; the other internal or spiritual, which, as we have shown, far transcends the former. The exterior beauty of man consists in form, stature, symmetry, complexion, life, activity, gracefulness, etc.; the interior, in his intellectual and moral endowments and accomplishments, especially in the supernatural array of the sanctified and virtuous soul. Both these species of beauty, as the whole composite nature of man, coalesce into one. Ordinarily speaking, the exterior of man, if taken in its entirety, gives a fair picture of the interior, intellectual and moral character. The Holy Ghost Himself gives testimony of this fact. "A glad heart maketh a cheerful countenance." "The heart of the wise man shall instruct his mouth and shall give grace to his lips." "The wisdom of man shineth in his countenance." "The attire of the body and the laughter of the teeth and the gait of the man show what he is." St. Clement of Alexandria on this point says: "Even the beauty of the body is nothing else but virtue, which is visible in the features, and pours out its grace upon them; it is nothing else than the loveliness of innocence, the goodness of the heart, which trans-

figures the face of man. No one doubts that the beauty of animals consists in that perfection which their nature requires. What makes man perfect is justice, wisdom, fortitude, and the fear of God. *Beautiful*, then, is the wise, the just, in short, the good man." These sublime qualities of the soul once manifested, and they cannot remain long concealed, will throw a halo of beauty over the most ordinary form that will far transcend any degree of outward charms; while a fair exterior cannot long cloak the hideousness of a corrupt heart, which, when once revealed, will only be the more disgusting from its contrast with the pleasing exterior form. Nothing creates a more implacable disgust than outward tinsel, especially when it makes pretensions to reality.

From this view of personal beauty it will be evident to the reader how grossly the majority of our novel writers err against good taste when, pandering to passion and vanity, they luxuriate in hair-splitting descriptions of the female form. The truest description of real beauty we have met, we believe, has been that traced by the genial pen of Cardinal Wiseman in his "Fabiola." The subject of the picture is the angelic figure of St. Agnes. "When Lyra turned to leave the room, she was almost startled at seeing, standing in bright relief before the deep crimson door-curtain, a figure which she immediately recognized, but which we must briefly describe. It was that of a lady, or rather a child, not more than twelve or thirteen years old, dressed in pure and spotless white, without a single ornament about her person. In her countenance might be seen united the simplicity of childhood with the intelligence of maturer age. There not merely dwelt in her eyes that dove-like innocence which the sacred poet describes, but often there beamed from them rather an intensity of pure affection, as though they were looking beyond all surrounding objects, and rested upon One, unseen by all else, but to her really present and exquisitely dear. Her forehead was the seat of candor, open and bright with undisguising truthfulness; a kindly smile played about her lips, and the fresh, youthful features varied their sensitive expression with guileless earnestness, passing rapidly from one feeling to the other as her warm and tender heart received it. Those who knew her believed that she never thought of herself, but was divided entirely between kindness to those about her and affection for her unseen love."

Tracing the image of the Creator in nature, we find three degrees of perfection, and consequently three grades of beauty. The highest of these is the animal kingdom, in which life, spontaneous locomotion, and sensation are added to material organism and vegetation. The second is the vegetable world, which is endowed with organic structure and the inferior functions of life, but bereft

of sense. The lowest in the line of beauty, as well as perfection, is brute nature or matter. We do not contend that in nature always the degree of beauty coincides with that of perfection; but that, other conditions being equal, the greater their perfection the greater their beauty, *i.e.*, if they possess in a prominent manner those attributes which render them conformable to rational nature, or more expressly bear the imprint of the likeness of the Creator. Anything that disturbs this conformity, or obscures this imprint, renders them less beautiful, however perfect they may otherwise be. This fact may be illustrated by comparing the horse and the lion with the elephant and the bear. Every one will pronounce the horse more beautiful than the elephant, and the lion more beautiful than the bear, not because one is more perfect than the other (for each is perfect in its own species), but because the one has those qualities which assimilate it to rational nature, the other lacks them. For this very reason many objects are standing symbols of certain mental and moral excellences or defects, according as they show forth a conformity or difformity with perfect rational nature. Thus the dove symbolizes simplicity; the lamb, innocence; the eagle, nobility of soul; the lion, magnanimity; the violet, modesty; the lily, purity; while, on the other hand, the peacock is the representation of vanity, the owl and the ape the symbols of intellectual and moral deformity. This symbolism may also be traced in the material world, as in gold, iron, fire, water, oil, salt; various figures, colors, and sounds. It is well known how extensively the Church in her liturgy makes use of these allegorical significations of objects and actions; and even Christ has availed Himself of this natural symbolism in His teaching and miracles, as well as in the institution of His sacraments. This symbolic meaning of things is by no means arbitrary or conventional, but is altogether based on the conformity or difformity of material or visible things with spiritual or rational nature, which is the foundation on which beauty and ugliness are based.

From what we have so far said the reader will perceive that we do not admit any *real*, but only a *logical distinction*, grounded in subject, however, *between beauty, truth, and goodness*. Beauty is nothing else than truth and goodness so presented to rational nature that it may discover in them a special conformity to itself, and thus rest upon them with a pleasure worthy of, and congenial to, a rational being. Hence truth, metaphysical, logical, and moral (where there is question of a historical fact), as well as goodness, physical and moral, form the necessary substratum of the beautiful; for rational nature, if acting rationally, must necessarily shrink from anything that lacks these fundamental attributes. Whence it follows that whatever is untrue, unreal, inconsistent, unsubstantial;

whatever is immoral in itself, in its adjuncts, or consequences, no matter how gorgeous, imposing, and attractive the garb may be in which it is clothed, cannot be called beautiful. It is only ignorance, prejudice, or passion that can attribute beauty to mere outward show without substance, or with a vicious substance.

If we now finally try to establish a *definition* of the beautiful, or of beauty, on the principles thus far established, we must say that *the beautiful is the true and the good so constituted as to bear a special conformity to rational nature, and thus afford congenial pleasure to the higher rational faculties.* The abstract quality of beauty may accordingly be defined: *The objective truth and goodness (or reality) of things so constituted as to render them in a special manner conformable to rational nature, and thus apt to afford congenial delight to the superior faculties of the rational contemplator.*

The patient reader, who has so far accompanied us in our investigation, may now ask: Is, then, everything beautiful? Shall we call the ape and the toad and the bat and the grasshopper and the rattlesnake and the crocodile, and the many species of noisome vermin that creep and swim on our globe, beautiful? All these have their objective reality, truth and goodness; are conformable as well with their prototypes as with rational nature, and may, consequently, according to our definition, claim to be beautiful. The same difficulty urges itself upon the young novice in metaphysics, when he is first surprised with the proposition: *omne ens est bonum.* The first thing he asks himself in blank amazement will be: "Is, then, Old Nick himself good? Are the mosquitoes *good*?" To this question we answer that everything, inasmuch as it has objective truth and goodness, has some real beauty, if we could only perceive in it all its bearings. Were we not restricted to the use of organic faculties in the perception of material objects, we would, undoubtedly, apprehend some beauty in all God's creatures proportioned to their objective reality, and reap a corresponding pleasure from their contemplation. God, when He created them, "saw that they were good," and was well pleased. Could we but see them in that same divine intellectual light, we would willingly, and without repugnance, indorse the judgment of the All-wise Creator, and say that they are good. The reason why we pronounce some things simply ugly is, that their conformity to our rational nature, though actually existing, is so obscured by seeming or real difformity, that it is feebly, if at all, brought home to our minds. The conformity of beautiful objects with our rational nature must be such that we can easily apprehend it without laboring to abstract it from numerous imperfections or difformities. If the difformity of an object with our rational nature, whether real or apparent, is preponderant or striking, so as to overcast its beauty, we call it

simply ugly, or not beautiful, no matter how much objective perfection it may conceal beneath its repulsive form. Another reason why we call many objects ugly, is the fact of their being disagreeable to sense. But disagreeableness is by no means incompatible with true beauty. The practice of virtue, or death for a noble cause, is naturally disagreeable to sense, though, doubtless, beautiful and sublime.

A further fact that seems to militate against our explanation of the beautiful is the natural aversion of most men to the contemplation of metaphysical or abstract truths. This fact, as we have already hinted, has its cause in our composite nature, and consequent imperfect manner of apprehension through the instrumentality of sense. Hence we contemplate abstract truths of the sublimest character without being in the least æsthetically affected; but let the magic pen of Dante, Shakespeare, or Milton, only touch them and clothe them in the imagery of poetry, and we rest upon them with unspeakable delight. And yet, if we ask ourselves what the poet has added to those truths, which seem to us to be "airy nothings," we find that it is only "a local habitation and a name"—a "habitation" but too narrow to contain their substance, and a "name" that expresses but half their meaning. The poet lends nothing to truth by his imagery, but only subtracts from it through his inability to give it full expression. His sole work is to bring truth home to us in a way that is more congenial to our imperfect nature, by a direct appeal to the senses and the passions. Truth itself eminently contains all the beauty and charms of poetry, as soon as it is brought to bear on a mind which, in its perfection, can dispense with the expedient of imagery. Hence all goodness and perfection are beautiful, and that in the same degree as they approach the infinite goodness and perfection.

As beauty consists in a conformity with rational nature, so *ugliness*, which is the contrary of beauty, consists in a difformity with the same. Ugliness may, therefore, be defined: *The imperfection of an object, so constituted as to exhibit a difformity with rational nature, and thus produce a disagreeable impression on the contemplating mind.* Ugly, then, is everything that is untrue, *i. e.*, inconsistent in its attributes, illogical, discordant with truth in theory or fact; ugly is everything that lacks the moral or physical perfection due to its nature. Besides, all those things that are connected with disagreeable associations, moral or intellectual; all those things that symbolize moral or mental depravity or imperfection, are, for the reasons stated above, termed ugly, though they may be objectively true and perfect in their species.

Akin to the ugly is the *comical or ridiculous*. Wherein this attribute properly consists has puzzled the greatest intellects to

determine. Cicero says that he is not ashamed to confess his ignorance on this point. Aristotle, however, maintains that the ridiculous consists in a certain imperfection or ugliness, but harmless and inoffensive. And, in fact, these elements will be found in everything that is truly comical. In every really laughable object, character or manifestation, an imperfection, incongruity, or oddity, must be forthcoming; but as soon as this defect becomes painful, hurtful, or offensive, in any degree, to the contemplator, the subject in which it resides, or a third party, it thereby ceases to be ridiculous. The comical or ridiculous, therefore, may be defined: *A deformity or inconsistency with right reason, so harmless and inoffensive, however, as not to produce any disagreeable impression on the mind of the contemplator.* The sensation that arises from the contemplation of the ridiculous is generated by its striking contrast with right reason, which shocks us without making us grieve. The nature of that pleasure which results from this sensation seems to be mainly, if not wholly, organic or sensitive; for it is not easy to perceive how the higher faculties could rest with any degree of pleasure on such objects as are strikingly repugnant to them. It is interesting to read St. Thomas on this question. "As bodily labor," he says, "brings on bodily fatigue, so mental labor produces fatigue of the animal faculties (*fatigatio animalis*). Now, as the fatigue of the body is dispelled by bodily repose, so this fatigue of the animal faculties is dispelled by repose of the soul. But the repose of the soul is pleasure. . . . Therefore a remedy must be applied against the fatigue of the animal faculties by means of some pleasure from the cessation of rational exertion." And after illustrating his principle by the trite example of the bow that's always bent, he concludes: "Such words and actions (indifferent, of course, as to morality) in which *only delight (repose) of the animal faculties is sought, are termed ridiculous or jocose.* And, therefore, it is necessary to indulge in them sometimes for the repose of the mind."¹

In these words the Angelic Doctor seems clearly to intimate that the pleasure derived from the ridiculous has its seat in the animal faculties, the nervous system; while the operations of the higher faculties are, as it were, suspended. He also assigns the object and limits of the ridiculous or comic. They serve, and should be indulged in, only as a necessary or expedient relaxation from more serious studies or pursuits. As soon as the comical exceeds those bounds, it ceases to be rational in its tendency, and leads to dissipation and frivolity.

There remains for us to say a few words on the *sublime*, which is wont to be considered in connection with the beautiful. From

¹ *Summa*, 2-2 ac., q. 168, a. 2.

our explanation of the beautiful it will be seen that it does not exclude the sublime, but rather includes it as a special kind. The sublime is the highest species of the beautiful. Those objects or phenomena are considered sublime which manifest in a special manner the greatness, power, infinity of the Creator, and thus fill the contemplating mind with admiration and awe. To this class of things belong, first of all, God Himself and His attributes; in the second place, extraordinary manifestations of moral and supernatural power in His rational creatures; and, lastly, the more powerful and striking phenomena of nature. The impression produced by the sublime is caused by the contrast of our own littleness and weakness with the infinite greatness and power of God, whether manifested directly, by immediate Divine interference, or indirectly, when communicated, and manifested in a higher degree in His creatures. This impression, however, is far from being always the sentiment of fear, as was the opinion of Edmund Burke. It is, as we have said, admiration, arrangement, awe, reverence, and even love, towards the Supreme Goodness, Greatness, and Omnipotence; while fear is always a sentiment that arises from the apprehension of impending evil. A sea storm is no less sublime to him who, from the shore, contemplates the mountains of water breaking upon the cliffs, than it is to him who is tossed upon the heaving bosom of the deep; though the latter is naturally affected with fear, while the former is perfectly secure from danger. All agree that the opening verses of Genesis are sublime; yet one's conscience must be ill at ease to read those words with fear and not with reverential awe of the great Creator of heaven and earth. So also the words of the beginning of the Gospel of St. John are justly considered sublime; but, far from affecting with fear, the sublime effusion of the Evangelist is eminently calculated to inspire the devout reader with confidence, gratitude, and love.

It might be further asked here, *whether evil can be called sublime*. Modern infidel æstheticians answer in the affirmative. Satan in Milton, Prometheus and other Titanic characters are, in their estimation, eminently sublime. Nay, some, as Schiller, go so far as to say that the highest degree of sublimity is despair and its too frequent attendant, suicide; while others, as Vischer and Krug, pronounce rebellion against God—blasphemy—the summit of sublimity. That such theories are propounded in the name of philosophy and good taste, and find credit in educated spheres, is a sad sign of the times. Need we wonder to meet so much morbid weariness of life even in the better circles of society? Need we be astonished to see suicides multiplying from day to day?

“Who then would bear the whips and scorns of time?”

Who should hesitate to sink into the highly æsthetic virtue of despair and then seek relief in the sublime tragedy of suicide? Who would not then become the disciple of the blustering blasphemer, Bob Ingersoll, the sublimest figure of them all?

From our definition of the sublime it may easily be seen that evil, as such, cannot fall within its compass. Evil is not strength, but weakness; creates not admiration and awe, but disgust and horror; it cannot, therefore, be considered beautiful. If a morally evil character have some sublime traits, great strength or mental penetration, these attributes become only the less sublime the more they are bent on evil. Thus they only manifest their weakness, and cease to claim our admiration, though they may awaken our compassion. The impression of the sublime, however, may be produced by such fiendish and blasphemous creations as Milton's Satan, not from any strength or greatness that is manifested in their blasphemy and malice, but by the contrast of their impotent rage and hatred with the infinite power and unchangeable happiness of the Almighty. But in despair and its offspring, suicide, no one who has learned to analyze the motives of the human heart can see anything but blank cowardice or insanity, the cloak in which they are generally shrouded from public infamy.

A well-known species of the sublime is the *tragic*. It consists, on the one hand, in the manifestations of extraordinary moral strength and resignation in bearing the scourges of adverse fate, or, rather, the deserved visitations and chastisements of Divine Providence, in bowing in submission under the all-powerful hand of God; on the other hand, in the justifications of Divine Providence, which avenges wrong with unswerving justice. Every tragic event is an illustration of the truth: Man proposes, God disposes; or, Revenge is Mine, and I will repay—truths which, if forcibly brought home to us, cannot fail to produce the impression of the sublime.

It would be a pleasant task to illustrate the sublime with examples from literature, sacred and profane; but, as we feel that this paper has already grown rather long, we resist the temptation and break off our considerations. Should our treatment of the beautiful seem little in keeping with the subject, we would ask the indulgent reader to remember that we had to deal with first principles of an abstruse nature, rendered doubly obscure by the airy speculations of undisciplined philosophy—principles which do not lie within the flowery field of the beautiful, but which, in our judgment, form the only unerring way to the region of true beauty. What with the wanton aberrations of human genius, the fundamental principles of æsthetics in their present state might be compared to the impenetrable thicket that surrounds Milton's "Paradise."

“ As one continued brake, the undergrowth
Of shrubs and tangled bushes had perplexed
All the path of man and beast that passed that way.”

But if the student has once threaded his way to the Orient gate,

“ Before him with new wonder now he views,
To all delight of human sight exposed
In narrow room, Nature's whole wealth, yea more,
A Heaven on earth.”

