

CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

WASSILY KANDINSKY*

Mosaic in S. Vitale, Ravenna

Victor and Heinrich Dunwegge: "The Crucifixion" (in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich)

Albrecht Durer: "The Descent from the Cross" (in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich)

Raphael: "The Canigiani Holy Family" (in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich)

Paul Cezanne: "Bathing Women" (by permission of Messrs. Bernheim-Jeune, Paris)

Kandinsky: Impression No. 4, "Moscow" (1911)

"Improvisation No. 29 (1912)

"Composition No. 2 (1910)

"Kleine Freuden" (1913)

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is no common thing to find an artist who, even if he be willing to try, is capable of expressing his aims and ideals with any clearness and moderation. Some people will say that any such capacity is a flaw in the perfect artist, who should find his expression in line and colour, and leave the multitude to grope its way unaided towards comprehension. This attitude is a relic of the days when "l'art pour l'art" was the latest battle cry; when eccentricity of manner and irregularity of life were more important than any talent to the would-be artist; when every one except oneself was bourgeois.

The last few years have in some measure removed this absurdity, by destroying the old convention that it was middle-class to be sane, and that between the artist and the outer-world yawned a gulf which few could cross. Modern artists are beginning to realize their social duties. They are the spiritual teachers of the world, and for their teaching to have weight, it must be

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comprehensible. Any attempt, therefore, to bring artist and public into sympathy, to enable the latter to understand the ideals of the former, should be thoroughly welcome; and such an attempt is this book of Kandinsky's.

The author is one of the leaders of the new art movement in Munich. The group of which he is a member includes painters, poets, musicians, dramatists, critics, all working to the same end—the expression of the SOUL of nature and humanity, or, as Kandinsky terms it, the INNERER KLANG.

Perhaps the fault of this book of theory—or rather the characteristic most likely to give cause for attack—is the tendency to verbosity. Philosophy, especially in the hands of a writer of German, presents inexhaustible opportunities for vague and grandiloquent language. Partly for this reason, partly from incompetence, I have not primarily attempted to deal with the philosophical basis of Kandinsky's art. Some, probably, will find in this aspect of the book its chief interest, but better service will be done to the author's ideas by leaving them to the reader's judgement than by even the most expert criticism.

The power of a book to excite argument is often the best proof of its value, and my own experience has always been that those new

ideas are at once most challenging and most stimulating which come direct from their author, with no intermediate discussion. The task undertaken in this Introduction is a humbler but perhaps a more necessary one. England, throughout her history, has shown scant respect for sudden spasms of theory. Whether in politics, religion, or art, she demands an historical foundation for every belief, and when such a foundation is not forthcoming she may smile indulgently, but serious interest is immediately withdrawn. I am keenly anxious that Kandinsky's art should not suffer this fate. My personal belief in his sincerity and the future of his ideas will go for very little, but if it can be shown that he is a reasonable development of what we regard as serious art, that he is no adventurer striving for a momentary notoriety by the strangeness of his beliefs, then there is a chance that some people at least will give his art fair consideration, and that, of these people, a few will come to love it as, in my opinion, it deserves.

Post-Impressionism, that vague and much-abused term, is now almost a household word. That the name of the movement is better known than the names of its chief leaders is a sad misfortune, largely caused by the over-rapidity of its introduction into England. Within the space of two short years a mass of artists from Manet to the most recent of Cubists were thrust on a public, who had hardly realized Impressionism. The inevitable result has

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been complete mental chaos. The tradition of which true Post-Impressionism is the modern expression has been kept alive down the ages of European art by scattered and, until lately, neglected painters. But not since the time of the so-called Byzantines, not since the period of which Giotto and his School were the final splendid blossoming, has the "Symbolist" ideal in art held general sway over the "Naturalist." The Primitive Italians, like their predecessors the Primitive Greeks, and, in turn, their predecessors the Egyptians, sought to express the inner feeling rather than the outer reality.

This ideal tended to be lost to sight in the naturalistic revival of the Renaissance, which derived its inspiration solely from those periods of Greek and Roman art which were pre-occupied with the expression of external reality. Although the all-embracing genius of Michelangelo kept the "Symbolist" tradition alive, it is the work of El Greco that merits the complete title of "Symbolist." From El Greco springs Goya and the Spanish influence on Daumier and Manet. When it is remembered that, in the meantime, Rembrandt and his contemporaries, notably Brouwer, left their mark on French art in the work of Delacroix, Decamps and Courbet, the way will be seen clearly open to Cezanne and Gauguin.

The phrase "symbolist tradition" is not used to express any conscious affinity between the various generations of artists. As Kandinsky says: "the relationships in art are not necessarily ones of outward form, but are founded on inner sympathy of meaning." Sometimes, perhaps frequently, a similarity of outward form will appear. But in tracing spiritual relationship only inner meaning must be taken into account.

There are, of course, many people who deny that Primitive Art had an inner meaning or, rather, that what is called "archaic

expression" was dictated by anything but ignorance of representative methods and defective materials. Such people are numbered among the bitterest opponents of Post-Impressionism, and indeed it is difficult to see how they could be otherwise.

"Painting," they say, "which seeks to learn from an age when art was, however sincere, incompetent and uneducated, deliberately rejects the knowledge and skill of centuries." It will be no easy matter to conquer this assumption that Primitive art is merely untrained Naturalism, but until it is conquered there seems little hope for a sympathetic understanding of the symbolist ideal.

The task is all the more difficult because of the analogy drawn by friends of the new movement between the neo-primitive vision and that of a child. That the analogy contains a grain of truth does not make it the less mischievous. Freshness of vision the

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child has, and freshness of vision is an important element in the new movement. But beyond this a parallel is non-existent, must be non-existent in any art other than pure artificiality. It is one thing to ape ineptitude in technique and another to acquire simplicity of vision. Simplicity—or rather discrimination of vision—is the trademark of the true Post-Impressionist. He OBSERVES and then SELECTS what is essential. The result is a logical and very sophisticated synthesis. Such a synthesis will find expression in simple and even harsh technique. But the process can only come AFTER the naturalist process and not before it. The child has a direct vision, because his mind is unencumbered by association and because his power of concentration is unimpaired by a multiplicity of interests. His method of drawing is immature; its variations from the ordinary result from lack of capacity.

Two examples will make my meaning clearer. The child draws a landscape. His picture contains one or two objects only from the number before his eyes. These are the objects which strike him as important. So far, good. But there is no relation between them; they stand isolated on his paper, mere lumpish shapes. The Post-Impressionist, however, selects his objects with a view to expressing by their means the whole feeling of the landscape. His choice falls on elements which sum up the whole, not those which first attract immediate attention.

Again, let us take the case of the definitely religious picture.

[Footnote: Religion, in the sense of awe, is present in all true art. But here I use the term in the narrower sense to mean pictures of which the subject is connected with Christian or other worship.]

It is not often that children draw religious scenes. More often battles and pageants attract them. But since the revival of the religious picture is so noticeable a factor in the new movement, since the Byzantines painted almost entirely religious subjects, and finally, since a book of such drawings by a child of twelve has recently been published, I prefer to take them as my example. Daphne Alien's religious drawings have the graceful charm of childhood, but they are mere childish echoes of conventional prettiness. Her talent, when mature, will turn to the charming rather than to the vigorous. There could be no greater contrast between such drawing and that of—say—Cimabue. Cimabue's

Madonnas are not pretty women, but huge, solemn symbols. Their heads droop stiffly; their tenderness is universal. In Gauguin's "Agony in the Garden" the figure of Christ is haggard with pain and grief. These artists have filled their pictures with a bitter experience which no child can possibly possess. I repeat, therefore, that the analogy between Post-Impressionism and child-

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art is a false analogy, and that for a trained man or woman to paint as a child paints is an impossibility. [Footnote: I am well aware that this statement is at variance with Kandinsky, who has contributed a long article—"Uber die Formfrage"—to Der Blaue Reiter, in which he argues the parallel between Post-Impressionism and child vision, as exemplified in the work of Henri Rousseau. Certainly Rousseau's vision is childlike. He has had no artistic training and pretends to none. But I consider that his art suffers so greatly from his lack of training, that beyond a sentimental interest it has little to recommend it.] All this does not presume to say that the "symbolist" school of art is necessarily nobler than the "naturalist." I am making no comparison, only a distinction. When the difference in aim is fully realized, the Primitives can no longer be condemned as incompetent, nor the moderns as lunatics, for such a condemnation is made from a wrong point of view. Judgement must be passed, not on the failure to achieve "naturalism" but on the failure to express the inner meaning.

The brief historical survey attempted above ended with the names of Cezanne and Gauguin, and for the purposes of this

Introduction, for the purpose, that is to say, of tracing the

genealogy of the Cubists and of Kandinsky, these two names may be taken to represent the modern expression of the "symbolist" tradition.

The difference between them is subtle but goes very deep. For both the ultimate and internal significance of what they painted counted for more than the significance which is momentary and external. Cezanne saw in a tree, a heap of apples, a human face, a group of bathing men or women, something more abiding than either photography or impressionist painting could present. He painted the "treeness" of the tree, as a modern critic has admirably expressed it. But in everything he did he showed the architectural mind of the true Frenchman. His landscape studies were based on a profound sense of the structure of rocks and hills, and being structural, his art depends essentially on reality. Though he did not scruple, and rightly, to sacrifice accuracy of form to the inner need, the material of which his art was composed was drawn from the huge stores of actual nature. Gauguin has greater solemnity and fire than Cezanne. His pictures

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are tragic or passionate poems. He also sacrifices conventional form to inner expression, but his art tends ever towards the spiritual, towards that profounder emphasis which cannot be expressed in natural objects nor in words. True his abandonment of representative methods did not lead him to an abandonment of natural terms of expression—that is to say human figures, trees and animals do appear in his pictures. But that he was much

nearer a complete rejection of representation than was Cezanne is shown by the course followed by their respective disciples.

The generation immediately subsequent to Cezanne, Herbin, Vlaminck, Friesz, Marquet, etc., do little more than exaggerate Cezanne's technique, until there appear the first signs of Cubism. These are seen very clearly in Herbin. Objects begin to be treated in flat planes. A round vase is represented by a series of planes set one into the other, which at a distance blend into a curve. This is the first stage.

The real plunge into Cubism was taken by Picasso, who, nurtured on Cezanne, carried to its perfectly logical conclusion the master's structural treatment of nature. Representation disappears. Starting from a single natural object, Picasso and the Cubists produce lines and project angles till their canvases are covered with intricate and often very beautiful series of balanced lines and curves. They persist, however, in giving them picture titles which recall the natural object from which their minds first took flight.

With Gauguin the case is different. The generation of his disciples which followed him—I put it thus to distinguish them from his actual pupils at Pont Aven, Serusier and the rest—carried the tendency further. One hesitates to mention Derain, for his beginnings, full of vitality and promise, have given place to a dreary compromise with Cubism, without visible future, and above all without humour. But there is no better example of the development of synthetic symbolism than his first book of woodcuts.

[FOOTNOTE: L'Enchanteur pourrissant, par Guillaume Apollinaire, avec illustrations gravees sur bois par Andre Derain. Paris, Kahnweiler, 1910.]

Here is work which keeps the merest semblance of conventional form, which gives its effect by startling masses of black and white, by sudden curves, but more frequently by sudden angles.

[FOOTNOTE: The renaissance of the angle in art is an interesting feature of the new movement. Not since Egyptian times has it been used with such noble effect. There is a painting of Gauguin's at Hagen, of a row of Tahitian women seated on a bench, that

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consists entirely of a telling design in Egyptian angles. Cubism is the result of this discovery of the angle, blended with the influence of Cezanne.]

In the process of the gradual abandonment of natural form the "angle" school is paralleled by the "curve" school, which also descends wholly from Gauguin. The best known representative is Maurice Denis. But he has become a slave to sentimentality, and has been left behind. Matisse is the most prominent French artist who has followed Gauguin with curves. In Germany a group of young men, who form the Neue Kunstlervereinigung in Munich, work almost entirely in sweeping curves, and have reduced natural objects purely to flowing, decorative units.

But while they have followed Gauguin's lead in abandoning representation both of these two groups of advance are lacking in spiritual meaning. Their aim becomes more and more decorative, with an undercurrent of suggestion of simplified form. Anyone who has studied Gauguin will be aware of the intense spiritual value of his work. The man is a preacher and a psychologist, universal

by his very unorthodoxy, fundamental because he goes deeper than civilization. In his disciples this great element is wanting.

Kandinsky has supplied the need. He is not only on the track of an art more purely spiritual than was conceived even by Gauguin, but he has achieved the final abandonment of all representative intention. In this way he combines in himself the spiritual and technical tendencies of one great branch of Post-Impressionism. The question most generally asked about Kandinsky's art is: "What is he trying to do?" It is to be hoped that this book will do something towards answering the question. But it will not do everything. This—partly because it is impossible to put into words the whole of Kandinsky's ideal, partly because in his anxiety to state his case, to court criticism, the author has been tempted to formulate more than is wise. His analysis of colours and their effects on the spectator is not the real basis of his art, because, if it were, one could, with the help of a scientific manual, describe one's emotions before his pictures with perfect accuracy. And this is impossible.

Kandinsky is painting music. That is to say, he has broken down the barrier between music and painting, and has isolated the pure emotion which, for want of a better name, we call the artistic emotion. Anyone who has listened to good music with any enjoyment will admit to an unmistakable but quite indefinable thrill. He will not be able, with sincerity, to say that such a passage gave him such visual impressions, or such a harmony roused in him such emotions. The effect of music is too subtle for words. And the same with this painting of Kandinsky's. Speaking for myself, to stand in front of some of his drawings or pictures gives a keener

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and more spiritual pleasure than any other kind of painting. But I could not express in the least what gives the pleasure.

Presumably the lines and colours have the same effect as harmony and rhythm in music have on the truly musical. That psychology comes in no one can deny. Many people—perhaps at present the very large majority of people—have their colour-music sense dormant. It has never been exercised. In the same way many people are unmusical—either wholly, by nature, or partly, for lack of experience. Even when Kandinsky's idea is universally understood there may be many who are not moved by his melody. For my part, something within me answered to Kandinsky's art the first time I met with it. There was no question of looking for representation; a harmony had been set up, and that was enough.

Of course colour-music is no new idea. That is to say attempts have been made to play compositions in colour, by flashes and harmonies. [Footnote: Cf. "Colour Music," by A. Wallace Rimington. Hutchinson. 6s. net.] Also music has been interpreted in colour. But I do not know of any previous attempt to paint, without any reference to music, compositions which shall have on the spectator an effect wholly divorced from representative association. Kandinsky refers to attempts to paint in colour-counterpoint. But that is a different matter, in that it is the borrowing from one art by another of purely technical methods, without a previous impulse from spiritual sympathy.

One is faced then with the conflicting claims of Picasso and Kandinsky to the position of true leader of non-representative

art. Picasso's admirers hail him, just as this Introduction hails Kandinsky, as a visual musician. The methods and ideas of each rival are so different that the title cannot be accorded to both. In his book, Kandinsky states his opinion of Cubism and its fatal weakness, and history goes to support his contention. The origin of Cubism in Cezanne, in a structural art that owes its very existence to matter, makes its claim to pure emotionalism seem untenable. Emotions are not composed of strata and conflicting pressures. Once abandon reality and the geometrical vision becomes abstract mathematics. It seems to me that Picasso shares a Futurist error when he endeavours to harmonize one item of reality—a number, a button, a few capital letters—with a surrounding aura of angular projections. There must be a conflict of impressions, which differ essentially in quality. One trend of modern music is towards realism of sound. Children cry, dogs bark, plates are broken. Picasso approaches the same goal from the opposite direction. It is as though he were trying to work from realism to music. The waste of time is, to my mind, equally complete in both cases. The power of music to give expression without the help of representation is its noblest possession. No painting has ever had such a precious power. Kandinsky is striving to give it that power, and prove what is at least the

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logical analogy between colour and sound, between line and rhythm of beat. Picasso makes little use of colour, and confines himself only to one series of line effects—those caused by conflicting angles. So his aim is smaller and more limited than Kandinsky's even if it is as reasonable. But because it has not wholly abandoned realism but uses for the painting of feeling a structural vision dependent for its value on the association of reality, because in so doing it tries to make the best of two worlds, there seems little hope for it of redemption in either. As has been said above, Picasso and Kandinsky make an interesting parallel, in that they have developed the art respectively of Cezanne and Gauguin, in a similar direction. On the decision of Picasso's failure or success rests the distinction between Cezanne and Gauguin, the realist and the symbolist, the painter of externals and the painter of religious feeling. Unless a spiritual value is accorded to Cezanne's work, unless he is believed to be a religious painter (and religious painters need not paint Madonnas), unless in fact he is paralleled closely with Gauguin, his follower Picasso cannot claim to stand, with Kandinsky, as a prophet of an art of spiritual harmony. If Kandinsky ever attains his ideal—for he is the first to admit that he has not yet reached his goal—if he ever succeeds in finding a common language of colour and line which shall stand alone as the language of sound and beat stands alone, without recourse to natural form or representation, he will on all hands be hailed as a great innovator, as a champion of the freedom of art. Until such time, it is the duty of those to whom his work has spoken, to bear their testimony. Otherwise he may be condemned as one who has invented a shorthand of his own, and who paints pictures which cannot be understood by those who have not the key of the cipher. In the meantime also it is important that his position should be recognized as a legitimate, almost inevitable outcome of Post-Impressionist tendencies. Such is the

recognition this Introduction strives to secure.

MICHAEL T. H. SADLER

REFERENCE

Those interested in the ideas and work of Kandinsky and his fellow artists would do well to consult:

DER BLAUE REITER, vol. i. Piper Verlag, Munich, 10 mk. This sumptuous volume contains articles by Kandinsky, Franz Marc, Arnold Schonberg, etc., together with some musical texts and numerous reproductions—some in colour—of the work of the primitive mosaicists, glass-painters, and sculptors, as well as of more modern artists from Greco to Kandinsky, Marc, and their

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friends. The choice of illustrations gives an admirable idea of the continuity and steady growth of the new painting, sculpture, and music.

KLANGE. By Wassily Kandinsky. Piper Verlag, Munich, 30 mk. A most beautifully produced book of prose-poems, with a large number of illustrations, many in colour. This is Kandinsky's most recent work.

Also the back and current numbers of Der Sturm, a weekly paper published in Berlin in the defence of the new art. Illustrations by Marc, Pechstein, le Fauconnier, Delaunay, Kandinsky, etc. Also poems and critical articles. Price per weekly number 25 pf. Der Sturm has in preparation an album of reproductions of pictures and drawings by Kandinsky.

For Cubism cf. Gleizes et Metzinger, "du Cubisme," and Guillaume Apollinaire, "Les Peintres Cubistes." Collection Les Arts. Paris, Figuiere, per vol. 3 fr. 50 c.

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF ELISABETH TICHEJEFF

PART 1: ABOUT GENERAL AESTHETIC

I. INTRODUCTION

Every work of art is the child of its age and, in many cases, the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own which can never be repeated. Efforts to revive the art-principles of the past will at best produce an art that is still-born. It is impossible for us to live and feel, as did the ancient Greeks. In the same way those who strive to follow the Greek methods in sculpture achieve only a similarity of form, the work remaining soulless for all time. Such imitation is mere aping. Externally the monkey completely resembles a human being; he will sit holding a book in front of his nose, and turn over the pages with a thoughtful aspect, but his actions have for him no real meaning.

There is, however, in art another kind of external similarity which is founded on a fundamental truth. When there is a similarity of inner tendency in the whole moral and spiritual atmosphere, a similarity of ideals, at first closely pursued but later lost to sight, a similarity in the inner feeling of any one period to that of another, the logical result will be a revival of the external forms which served to express those inner

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feelings in an earlier age. An example of this today is our sympathy, our spiritual relationship, with the Primitives. Like ourselves, these artists sought to express in their work only internal truths, renouncing in consequence all consideration of

external form.

This all-important spark of inner life today is at present only a spark. Our minds, which are even now only just awakening after years of materialism, are infected with the despair of unbelief, of lack of purpose and ideal. The nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, useless game, is not yet past; it holds the awakening soul still in its grip. Only a feeble light glimmers like a tiny star in a vast gulf of darkness. This feeble light is but a presentiment, and the soul, when it sees it, trembles in doubt whether the light is not a dream, and the gulf of darkness reality. This doubt, and the still harsh tyranny of the materialistic philosophy, divide our soul sharply from that of the Primitives. Our soul rings cracked when we seek to play upon it, as does a costly vase, long buried in the earth, which is found to have a flaw when it is dug up once more. For this reason, the Primitive phase, through which we are now passing, with its temporary similarity of form, can only be of short duration.

These two possible resemblances between the art forms of today and those of the past will be at once recognized as diametrically opposed to one another. The first, being purely external, has no future. The second, being internal, contains the seed of the future within itself. After the period of materialist effort, which held the soul in check until it was shaken off as evil, the soul is emerging, purged by trials and sufferings. Shapeless emotions such as fear, joy, grief, etc., which belonged to this time of effort, will no longer greatly attract the artist. He will endeavour to awake subtler emotions, as yet unnamed. Living himself a complicated and comparatively subtle life, his work will give to those observers capable of feeling them lofty emotions beyond the reach of words.

The observer of today, however, is seldom capable of feeling such emotions. He seeks in a work of art a mere imitation of nature which can serve some definite purpose (for example a portrait in the ordinary sense) or a presentment of nature according to a certain convention ("impressionist" painting), or some inner feeling expressed in terms of natural form (as we say—a picture with *Stimmung*) [footnote: *Stimmung* is almost untranslatable. It is almost "sentiment" in the best sense, and almost "feeling."

Many of Corot's twilight landscapes are full of a beautiful "Stimmung." Kandinsky uses the word later on to mean the "essential spirit" of nature.—M. T. H. S.] All those varieties of picture, when they are really art, fulfil their purpose and feed

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the spirit. Though this applies to the first case, it applies more strongly to the third, where the spectator does feel a corresponding thrill in himself. Such harmony or even contrast of emotion cannot be superficial or worthless; indeed the *Stimmung* of a picture can deepen and purify that of the spectator. Such works of art at least preserve the soul from coarseness; they "key it up," so to speak, to a certain height, as a tuning-key the strings of a musical instrument. But purification, and extension in duration and size of this sympathy of soul, remain one-sided, and the possibilities of the influence of art are not exerted to their utmost.

Imagine a building divided into many rooms. The building may be

large or small. Every wall of every room is covered with pictures of various sizes; perhaps they number many thousands. They represent in colour bits of nature—animals in sunlight or shadow, drinking, standing in water, lying on the grass; near to, a Crucifixion by a painter who does not believe in Christ; flowers; human figures sitting, standing, walking; often they are naked; many naked women, seen foreshortened from behind; apples and silver dishes; portrait of Councillor So and So; sunset; lady in red; flying duck; portrait of Lady X; flying geese; lady in white; calves in shadow flecked with brilliant yellow sunlight; portrait of Prince Y; lady in green. All this is carefully printed in a book—name of artist—name of picture. People with these books in their hands go from wall to wall, turning over pages, reading the names. Then they go away, neither richer nor poorer than when they came, and are absorbed at once in their business, which has nothing to do with art. Why did they come? In each picture is a whole lifetime imprisoned, a whole lifetime of fears, doubts, hopes, and joys.

Whither is this lifetime tending? What is the message of the competent artist? "To send light into the darkness of men's hearts—such is the duty of the artist," said Schumann. "An artist is a man who can draw and paint everything," said Tolstoi. Of these two definitions of the artist's activity we must choose the second, if we think of the exhibition just described. On one canvas is a huddle of objects painted with varying degrees of skill, virtuosity and vigour, harshly or smoothly. To harmonize the whole is the task of art. With cold eyes and indifferent mind the spectators regard the work. Connoisseurs admire the "skill" (as one admires a tightrope walker), enjoy the "quality of painting" (as one enjoys a pasty). But hungry souls go hungry away.

The vulgar herd stroll through the rooms and pronounce the pictures "nice" or "splendid." Those who could speak have said nothing, those who could hear have heard nothing. This condition

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of art is called "art for art's sake." This neglect of inner meanings, which is the life of colours, this vain squandering of artistic power is called "art for art's sake."

The artist seeks for material reward for his dexterity, his power of vision and experience. His purpose becomes the satisfaction of vanity and greed. In place of the steady co-operation of artists is a scramble for good things. There are complaints of excessive competition, of over-production. Hatred, partisanship, cliques, jealousy, intrigues are the natural consequences of this aimless, materialist art.

[Footnote: The few solitary exceptions do not destroy the truth of this sad and ominous picture, and even these exceptions are chiefly believers in the doctrine of art for art's sake. They serve, therefore, a higher ideal, but one which is ultimately a useless waste of their strength. External beauty is one element of a spiritual atmosphere. But beyond this positive fact (that what is beautiful is good) it has the weakness of a talent not used to the full. (The word talent is employed in the biblical sense.)]

The onlooker turns away from the artist who has higher ideals and who cannot see his life purpose in an art without aims.

Sympathy is the education of the spectator from the point of view of the artist. It has been said above that art is the child of its age. Such an art can only create an artistic feeling which is already clearly felt. This art, which has no power for the future, which is only a child of the age and cannot become a mother of the future, is a barren art. She is transitory and to all intent dies the moment the atmosphere alters which nourished her.

The other art, that which is capable of educating further, springs equally from contemporary feeling, but is at the same time not only echo and mirror of it, but also has a deep and powerful prophetic strength.

The spiritual life, to which art belongs and of which she is one of the mightiest elements, is a complicated but definite and easily definable movement forwards and upwards. This movement is the movement of experience. It may take different forms, but it holds at bottom to the same inner thought and purpose.

Veiled in obscurity are the causes of this need to move ever upwards and forwards, by sweat of the brow, through sufferings and fears. When one stage has been accomplished, and many evil stones cleared from the road, some unseen and wicked hand scatters new obstacles in the way, so that the path often seems

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blocked and totally obliterated. But there never fails to come to the rescue some human being, like ourselves in everything except that he has in him a secret power of vision.

He sees and points the way. The power to do this he would sometimes fain lay aside, for it is a bitter cross to bear. But he cannot do so. Scorned and hated, he drags after him over the stones the heavy chariot of a divided humanity, ever forwards and upwards.

Often, many years after his body has vanished from the earth, men try by every means to recreate this body in marble, iron, bronze, or stone, on an enormous scale. As if there were any intrinsic value in the bodily existence of such divine martyrs and servants of humanity, who despised the flesh and lived only for the spirit! But at least such setting up of marble is a proof that a great number of men have reached the point where once the being they would now honour, stood alone.

II. THE MOVEMENT OF THE TRIANGLE

The life of the spirit may be fairly represented in diagram as a large acute-angled triangle divided horizontally into unequal parts with the narrowest segment uppermost. The lower the segment the greater it is in breadth, depth, and area.

The whole triangle is moving slowly, almost invisibly forwards and upwards. Where the apex was today the second segment is tomorrow; what today can be understood only by the apex and to the rest of the triangle is an incomprehensible gibberish, forms tomorrow the true thought and feeling of the second segment.

At the apex of the top segment stands often one man, and only one. His joyful vision cloaks a vast sorrow. Even those who are nearest to him in sympathy do not understand him. Angrily they abuse him as charlatan or madman. So in his lifetime stood Beethoven, solitary and insulted.

[footnote: Weber, composer of *Der Freischütz*, said of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony: "The extravagances of genius have reached the

limit; Beethoven is now ripe for an asylum." Of the opening phrase, on a reiterated "e," the Abbe Stadler said to his neighbour, when first he heard it: "Always that miserable 'e'; he seems to be deaf to it himself, the idiot!"]

How many years will it be before a greater segment of the triangle reaches the spot where he once stood alone? Despite memorials and statues, are they really many who have risen to his level? [Footnote 2: Are not many monuments in themselves answers to that question?]

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In every segment of the triangle are artists. Each one of them who can see beyond the limits of his segment is a prophet to those about him, and helps the advance of the obstinate whole. But those who are blind, or those who retard the movement of the triangle for baser reasons, are fully understood by their fellows and acclaimed for their genius. The greater the segment (which is the same as saying the lower it lies in the triangle) so the greater the number who understand the words of the artist. Every segment hungers consciously or, much more often, unconsciously for their corresponding spiritual food. This food is offered by the artists, and for this food the segment immediately below will tomorrow be stretching out eager hands.

This simile of the triangle cannot be said to express every aspect of the spiritual life. For instance, there is never an absolute shadow-side to the picture, never a piece of unrelieved gloom. Even too often it happens that one level of spiritual food suffices for the nourishment of those who are already in a higher segment. But for them this food is poison; in small quantities it depresses their souls gradually into a lower segment; in large quantities it hurls them suddenly into the depths ever lower and lower. Sienkiewicz, in one of his novels, compares the spiritual life to swimming; for the man who does not strive tirelessly, who does not fight continually against sinking, will mentally and morally go under. In this strait a man's talent (again in the biblical sense) becomes a curse—and not only the talent of the artist, but also of those who eat this poisoned food. The artist uses his strength to flatter his lower needs; in an ostensibly artistic form he presents what is impure, draws the weaker elements to him, mixes them with evil, betrays men and helps them to betray themselves, while they convince themselves and others that they are spiritually thirsty, and that from this pure spring they may quench their thirst. Such art does not help the forward movement, but hinders it, dragging back those who are striving to press onward, and spreading pestilence abroad.

Such periods, during which art has no noble champion, during which the true spiritual food is wanting, are periods of retrogression in the spiritual world. Ceaselessly souls fall from the higher to the lower segments of the triangle, and the whole seems motionless, or even to move down and backwards. Men attribute to these blind and dumb periods a special value, for they judge them by outward results, thinking only of material well-being. They hail some technical advance, which can help nothing but the body, as a great achievement. Real spiritual gains are at best under-valued, at worst entirely ignored. The solitary visionaries are despised or regarded as abnormal and eccentric. Those who are not wrapped in lethargy and who feel

vague longings for spiritual life and knowledge and progress, cry in harsh chorus, without any to comfort them. The night of the spirit falls more and more darkly. Deeper becomes the misery of these blind and terrified guides, and their followers, tormented and unnerved by fear and doubt, prefer to this gradual darkening the final sudden leap into the blackness.

At such a time art ministers to lower needs, and is used for material ends. She seeks her substance in hard realities because she knows of nothing nobler. Objects, the reproduction of which is considered her sole aim, remain monotonously the same. The question "what?" disappears from art; only the question "how?" remains. By what method are these material objects to be reproduced? The word becomes a creed. Art has lost her soul.

In the search for method the artist goes still further. Art becomes so specialized as to be comprehensible only to artists, and they complain bitterly of public indifference to their work.

For since the artist in such times has no need to say much, but only to be notorious for some small originality and consequently lauded by a small group of patrons and connoisseurs (which incidentally is also a very profitable business for him), there arise a crowd of gifted and skilful painters, so easy does the conquest of art appear. In each artistic circle are thousands of such artists, of whom the majority seek only for some new technical manner, and who produce millions of works of art without enthusiasm, with cold hearts and souls asleep.

Competition arises. The wild battle for success becomes more and more material. Small groups who have fought their way to the top of the chaotic world of art and picture-making entrench themselves in the territory they have won. The public, left far behind, looks on bewildered, loses interest and turns away.

But despite all this confusion, this chaos, this wild hunt for notoriety, the spiritual triangle, slowly but surely, with irresistible strength, moves onwards and upwards.

The invisible Moses descends from the mountain and sees the dance round the golden calf. But he brings with him fresh stores of wisdom to man.

First by the artist is heard his voice, the voice that is inaudible to the crowd. Almost unknowingly the artist follows the call. Already in that very question "how?" lies a hidden seed of renaissance. For when this "how?" remains without any fruitful answer, there is always a possibility that the same "something" (which we call personality today) may be able to see in the objects about it not only what is purely material but also something less solid; something less "bodily" than was seen in the period of realism, when the universal aim was to reproduce

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anything "as it really is" and without fantastic imagination.

[Footnote: Frequent use is made here of the terms "material" and "non-material," and of the intermediate phrases "more" or "less material." Is everything material? or is EVERYTHING spiritual? Can the distinctions we make between matter and spirit be nothing but relative modifications of one or the other? Thought which, although a product of the spirit, can be defined with positive science, is matter, but of fine and not coarse substance. Is whatever cannot be touched with the hand, spiritual? The

discussion lies beyond the scope of this little book; all that matters here is that the boundaries drawn should not be too definite.]

If the emotional power of the artist can overwhelm the "how?" and can give free scope to his finer feelings, then art is on the crest of the road by which she will not fail later on to find the "what" she has lost, the "what" which will show the way to the spiritual food of the newly awakened spiritual life. This "what?" will no longer be the material, objective "what" of the former period, but the internal truth of art, the soul without which the body (i.e. the "how") can never be healthy, whether in an individual or in a whole people.

THIS "WHAT" IS THE INTERNAL TRUTH WHICH ONLY ART CAN DIVINE,

WHICH ONLY ART CAN EXPRESS BY THOSE MEANS OF EXPRESSION WHICH ARE HERS ALONE.

III. SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION

The spiritual triangle moves slowly onwards and upwards. Today one of the largest of the lower segments has reached the point of using the first battle cry of the materialist creed. The dwellers in this segment group themselves round various banners in religion. They call themselves Jews, Catholics, Protestants, etc. But they are really atheists, and this a few either of the boldest or the narrowest openly avow. "Heaven is empty," "God is dead." In politics these people are democrats and republicans. The fear, horror and hatred which yesterday they felt for these political creeds they now direct against anarchism, of which they know nothing but its much dreaded name.

In economics these people are Socialists. They make sharp the sword of justice with which to slay the hydra of capitalism and to hew off the head of evil.

Because the inhabitants of this great segment of the triangle have never solved any problem independently, but are dragged as

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it were in a cart by those the noblest of their fellowmen who have sacrificed themselves, they know nothing of the vital impulse of life which they regard always vaguely from a great distance. They rate this impulse lightly, putting their trust in purposeless theory and in the working of some logical method. The men of the segment next below are dragged slowly higher, blindly, by those just described. But they cling to their old position, full of dread of the unknown and of betrayal. The higher segments are not only blind atheists but can justify their godlessness with strange words; for example, those of Virchow—so unworthy of a learned man—"I have dissected many corpses, but never yet discovered a soul in any of them."

In politics they are generally republican, with a knowledge of different parliamentary procedures; they read the political leading articles in the newspapers. In economics they are socialists of various grades, and can support their "principles" with numerous quotations, passing from Schweitzer's EMMA via Lasalle's IRON LAW OF WAGES, to Marx's CAPITAL, and still further.

In these loftier segments other categories of ideas, absent in these just described, begin gradually to appear—science and art,

to which last belong also literature and music.

In science these men are positivists, only recognizing those things that can be weighed and measured. Anything beyond that they consider as rather discreditable nonsense, that same nonsense about which they held yesterday the theories that today are proven.

In art they are naturalists, which means that they recognize and value the personality, individuality and temperament of the artist up to a certain definite point. This point has been fixed by others, and in it they believe unflinchingly.

But despite their patent and well-ordered security, despite their infallible principles, there lurks in these higher segments a hidden fear, a nervous trembling, a sense of insecurity. And this is due to their upbringing. They know that the sages, statesmen and artists whom today they revere, were yesterday spurned as swindlers and charlatans. And the higher the segment in the triangle, the better defined is this fear, this modern sense of insecurity. Here and there are people with eyes which can see, minds which can correlate. They say to themselves: "If the science of the day before yesterday is rejected by the people of yesterday, and that of yesterday by us of today, is it not possible that what we call science now will be rejected by the men of tomorrow?" And the bravest of them answer, "It is

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possible."

Then people appear who can distinguish those problems that the science of today has not yet explained. And they ask themselves: "Will science, if it continues on the road it has followed for so long, ever attain to the solution of these problems? And if it does so attain, will men be able to rely on its solution?" In these segments are also professional men of learning who can remember the time when facts now recognized by the Academies as firmly established, were scorned by those same Academies. There are also philosophers of aesthetic who write profound books about an art which was yesterday condemned as nonsense. In writing these books they remove the barriers over which art has most recently stepped and set up new ones which are to remain for ever in the places they have chosen. They do not notice that they are busy erecting barriers, not in front of art, but behind it. And if they do notice this, on the morrow they merely write fresh books and hastily set their barriers a little further on. This performance will go on unaltered until it is realized that the most extreme principle of aesthetic can never be of value to the future, but only to the past. No such theory of principle can be laid down for those things which lie beyond, in the realm of the immaterial. That which has no material existence cannot be subjected to a material classification. That which belongs to the spirit of the future can only be realized in feeling, and to this feeling the talent of the artist is the only road. Theory is the lamp which sheds light on the petrified ideas of yesterday and of the more distant past. [Footnote: Cf. Chapter VII.] And as we rise higher in the triangle we find that the uneasiness increases, as a city built on the most correct architectural plan may be shaken suddenly by the uncontrollable force of nature. Humanity is living in such a spiritual city, subject to these sudden disturbances for which neither architects nor

mathematicians have made allowance. In one place lies a great wall crumbled to pieces like a card house, in another are the ruins of a huge tower which once stretched to heaven, built on many presumably immortal spiritual pillars. The abandoned churchyard quakes and forgotten graves open and from them rise forgotten ghosts. Spots appear on the sun and the sun grows dark, and what theory can fight with darkness? And in this city live also men deafened by false wisdom who hear no crash, and blinded by false wisdom, so that they say "our sun will shine more brightly than ever and soon the last spots will disappear." But sometime even these men will hear and see.

But when we get still higher there is no longer this bewilderment. There work is going on which boldly attacks those pillars which men have set up. There we find other professional men of learning who test matter again and again, who tremble before no problem, and who finally cast doubt on that very matter

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which was yesterday the foundation of everything, so that the whole universe is shaken. Every day another scientific theory finds bold discoverers who overstep the boundaries of prophecy and, forgetful of themselves, join the other soldiers in the conquest of some new summit and in the hopeless attack on some stubborn fortress. But "there is no fortress that man cannot overcome."

On the one hand, FACTS are being established which the science of yesterday dubbed swindles. Even newspapers, which are for the most part the most obsequious servants of worldly success and of the mob, and which trim their sails to every wind, find themselves compelled to modify their ironical judgements on the "marvels" of science and even to abandon them altogether. Various learned men, among them ultra-materialists, dedicate their strength to the scientific research of doubtful problems, which can no longer be lied about or passed over in silence. [FOOTNOTE: Zoller, Wagner, Butleroff (St. Petersburg), Crookes (London), etc.; later on, C. H. Richet, C. Flammarion. The Parisian paper *Le Matin*, published about two years ago the discoveries of the two last named under the title "Je le constate, mais je ne l'explique pas." Finally there are C. Lombroso, the inventor of the anthropological method of diagnosing crime, and Eusapio Palladino.]

On the other hand, the number is increasing of those men who put no trust in the methods of materialistic science when it deals with those questions which have to do with "non-matter," or matter which is not accessible to our minds. Just as art is looking for help from the primitives, so these men are turning to half-forgotten times in order to get help from their half-forgotten methods. However, these very methods are still alive and in use among nations whom we, from the height of our knowledge, have been accustomed to regard with pity and scorn. To such nations belong the Indians, who from time to time confront those learned in our civilization with problems which we have either passed by unnoticed or brushed aside with superficial words and explanations. [FOOTNOTE: Frequently in such cases use is made of the word hypnotism; that same hypnotism which, in its earlier form of mesmerism, was disdainfully put aside by various learned bodies.] Mme. Blavatsky was the first person, after a

life of many years in India, to see a connection between these "savages" and our "civilization." From that moment there began a tremendous spiritual movement which today includes a large number of people and has even assumed a material form in the THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY. This society consists of groups who seek to approach the problem of the spirit by way of the INNER knowledge. The theory of Theosophy which serves as the basis to this movement was set out by Blavatsky in the form of a catechism in which the pupil receives definite answers to his questions from 20

the theosophical point of view. [FOOTNOTE: E. P. Blavatsky, *The Key of Theosophy*, London, 1889.] Theosophy, according to Blavatsky, is synonymous with ETERNAL TRUTH. "The new torchbearer of truth will find the minds of men prepared for his message, a language ready for him in which to clothe the new truths he brings, an organization awaiting his arrival, which will remove the merely mechanical, material obstacles and difficulties from his path." And then Blavatsky continues: "The earth will be a heaven in the twenty-first century in comparison with what it is now," and with these words ends her book.

When religion, science and morality are shaken, the two last by the strong hand of Nietzsche, and when the outer supports threaten to fall, man turns his gaze from externals in on to himself. Literature, music and art are the first and most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt. They reflect the dark picture of the present time and show the importance of what at first was only a little point of light noticed by few and for the great majority non-existent. Perhaps they even grow dark in their turn, but on the other hand they turn away from the soulless life of the present towards those substances and ideas which give free scope to the non-material strivings of the soul.

A poet of this kind in the realm of literature is Maeterlinck. He takes us into a world which, rightly or wrongly, we term supernatural. *La Princesse Maleine*, *Les Sept Princesses*, *Les Aveugles*, etc., are not people of past times as are the heroes in Shakespeare. They are merely souls lost in the clouds, threatened by them with death, eternally menaced by some invisible and sombre power.

Spiritual darkness, the insecurity of ignorance and fear pervade the world in which they move. Maeterlinck is perhaps one of the first prophets, one of the first artistic reformers and seers to herald the end of the decadence just described. The gloom of the spiritual atmosphere, the terrible, but all-guiding hand, the sense of utter fear, the feeling of having strayed from the path, the confusion among the guides, all these are clearly felt in his works. [Footnote: To the front rank of such seers of the decadence belongs also Alfred Kubin. With irresistible force both Kubin's drawings and also his novel "Die Andere Seite" seem to engulf us in the terrible atmosphere of empty desolation.]

This atmosphere Maeterlinck creates principally by purely artistic means. His material machinery (gloomy mountains, moonlight, marshes, wind, the cries of owls, etc.) plays really a symbolic role and helps to give the inner note. [Footnote: When one of Maeterlinck's plays was produced in St. Petersburg under his own guidance, he himself at one of the rehearsals had a tower

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