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Vol. I.

Lecture V. Beauty, and other Pleasures of Taste

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LECTURE V.

BEAUTY, AND OTHER PLEASURES OF TASTE.

As Sublimity constitutes a particular character of composition, and forms one of the highest excellencies of eloquence and of poetry, it was proper to treat of it at some length. It will not be necessary to discuss so particularly all the other pleasures that arise from Taste, as some of them have less relation to our main subject. On Beauty only I shall make several observations, both as the subject is curious, and as it tends to improve Taste, and to discover the foundation of several of the graces of description and of poetry *.

LECT
V.

BEAUTY next to Sublimity, affords, beyond doubt, the highest pleasure to the imagination.

* See Hutchinson's Enquiry concerning Beauty and Virtue—Gerard on Taste, chap. iii.—Enquiry into the Origin of the Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.—Elements of Criticism, chap. iii.—Spectator, vol. vi. Essay on the Pleasures of Taste.

LECT. V. The emotion which it raises, is very distinguishable from that of Sublimity. It is of a calmer kind; more gentle and soothing; does not elevate the mind so much, but produces an agreeable serenity. Sublimity raises a feeling, too violent, as I showed, to be lasting; the pleasure arising from Beauty admits of longer continuance. It extends also to a much greater variety of objects than Sublimity; to a variety indeed so great, that the feelings which Beautiful objects produce, differ considerably, not in degree only, but also in kind, from one another. Hence, no word in the language is used in a more vague signification than Beauty. It is applied to almost every external object that pleases the eye, or the ear; to a great number of the graces of writing; to many dispositions of the mind; nay, to several objects of mere abstract science. We talk currently of a beautiful tree or flower; a beautiful poem; a beautiful character; and a beautiful theorem in mathematics.

HENCE we may easily perceive, that, among so great a variety of objects, to find out some one quality in which they all agree, and which is the foundation of that agreeable sensation they all raise, must be a very difficult, if not, more probably, a vain attempt. Objects, denominated Beautiful, are so different, as to please, not in virtue of any one quality common to them all, but by means of several different principles in human nature. The agreeable emotion which they all raise, is somewhat of the same nature;

and therefore, has the common name of Beauty L E C T.
given to it; but it is raised by different causes. V.

HYPOTHESES, however, have been framed by ingenious men, for assigning the fundamental quality of Beauty in all objects. In particular, Uniformity amidst Variety, has been insisted on as this fundamental quality. For the Beauty of many figures, I admit that this accounts in a satisfying manner. But when we endeavour to apply this principle to Beautiful objects of some other kind, as to Colour for instance, or Motion, we shall soon find that it has no place. And even in external figured objects, it does not hold, that their Beauty is in proportion to their mixture of Variety with Uniformity; seeing many please us as highly beautiful, which have almost no variety at all; and others, which are various to a degree of intricacy. Laying systems of this kind, therefore, aside, what I now propose is, to give an enumeration of several of those classes of objects in which Beauty most remarkably appears; and to point out, as far as I can, the separate principles of Beauty in each of them.

COLOUR affords, perhaps, the simplest instance of Beauty, and therefore the fittest to begin with. Here, neither Variety, nor Uniformity, nor any other principle that I know, can be assigned, as the foundation of Beauty. We can refer it to no other cause but the structure of the eye, which determines us to receive certain modifications of the rays of light with more pleasure than others. And we see accordingly,

L E C T. that, as the organ of sensation varies in different
V. persons, they have their different favourite colours. It is probable, that association of ideas has influence, in some cases, on the pleasure which we receive from colours. Green, for instance, may appear more beautiful, by being connected in our ideas with rural prospects and scenes; white, with innocence; blue, with the serenity of the sky. Independent of associations of this kind, all that we can farther observe concerning colours is, that those chosen for Beauty are, generally, delicate, rather than glaring. Such are those paintings with which nature hath ornamented some of her works, and which art strives in vain to imitate; as the feathers of several kinds of birds, the leaves of flowers, and the fine variation of colours exhibited by the sky at the rising and setting of the sun. These present to us the highest instances of the Beauty of colouring; and have accordingly been the favourite subjects of poetical description in all countries.

FROM Colour we proceed to Figure, which opens to us forms of Beauty more complex and diversified. Regularity first occurs to be noticed as a source of Beauty. By a regular figure, is meant, one which we perceive to be formed according to some certain rule, and not left arbitrary, or loose, in the construction of its parts. Thus, a circle, a square, a triangle, or a hexagon, please the eye, by their regularity, as beautiful figures. We must not, however, conclude,

that all figures please in proportion to their regularity ; or that regularity is the sole, or the chief, foundation of Beauty in figure. On the contrary, a certain graceful variety is found to be a much more powerful principle of Beauty ; and is therefore studied a great deal more than regularity, in all works that are designed merely to please the eye. I am, indeed, inclined to think, that regularity appears beautiful to us, chiefly, if not only, on account of its suggesting the ideas of fitness, propriety, and use, which have always a greater connection with orderly and proportioned forms, than with those which appear not constructed according to any certain rule. It is clear, that nature, who is undoubtedly the most graceful artist, hath, in all her ornamental works, pursued variety, with an apparent neglect of regularity. Cabinets, doors, and windows, are made after a regular form, in cubes and parallelograms, with exact proportion of parts ; and by being so formed they please the eye ; for this good reason, that, being works of use, they are, by such figures, the better suited to the ends for which they were designed. But plants, flowers, and leaves are full of variety and diversity. A straight canal is an insipid figure, in comparison of the meanders of rivers. Cones and pyramids are beautiful ; but trees growing in their natural wildness, are infinitely more beautiful than when trimmed into pyramids and cones. The apartments of a house must be regular in their disposition for the conveniency of its inhabitants ; but

LECT. a garden, which is designed merely for Beauty,
V. would be exceedingly disgusting, if it had as much uniformity and order in its parts as a dwelling house.

MR. HOGARTH, in his Analysis of Beauty, has observed, that figures bounded by curve lines are, in general, more beautiful than those bounded by straight lines and angles. He pitches upon two lines, on which, according to him, the Beauty of figure principally depends; and he has illustrated, and supported his doctrine, by a surprising number of instances. The one is the Waving Line, or a curve bending backwards and forwards, somewhat in the form of the letter S. This he calls the Line of Beauty, and shews how often it is found in shells, flowers and such other ornamental works of nature; as it is common also in the figures designed by painters and sculptors, for the purpose of decoration. The other Line, which he calls the Line of Grace, is the former waving curve, twisted round some solid body. The curling worm of a common jack is one of the instances he gives of it. Twisted pillars, and twisted horns, also exhibit it. In all the instances which he mentions, Variety plainly appears to be so material a principle of Beauty, that he seems not to err much when he defines the art of drawing pleasing forms, to be the art of varying well. For the curve line, so much the favourite of painters, derives, according to him, its chief advantage, from its perpetual

petual bending and variation from the stiff regularity of the straight line. LECT.
V.

MOTION furnishes another source of Beauty, distinct from Figure. Motion of itself is pleasing; and bodies in motion are, "cæteris paribus," preferred to those in rest. It is, however, only gentle motion that belongs to the Beautiful; for when it is very swift, or very forcible, such as that of a torrent, it partakes of the Sublime. The motion of a bird gliding through the air, is extremely Beautiful; the swiftness with which lightning darts through the heavens, is magnificent and astonishing. And here, it is proper to observe, that the sensations of Sublime and Beautiful are not always distinguished by very distant boundaries; but are capable, in several instances, of approaching towards each other. Thus, a smooth running stream, is one of the most beautiful objects in nature: as it swells gradually into a great river, the beautiful, by degrees, is lost in the Sublime. A young tree is a beautiful object; a spreading ancient oak, is a venerable and a grand one. The calmness of a fine morning is beautiful; the universal stillness of the evening is highly Sublime. But to return to the Beauty of motion, it will be found, I think, to hold very generally, that motion in a straight line is not so beautiful as in an undulating waving direction; and motion upwards is, commonly too, more agreeable than motion downwards. The easy curling motion of flame and smoke is to be instanced, as an object singularly agreeable:

L E C T. and here Mr. Hogarth's waving line recurs upon
V. us as a principle of Beauty. That artist observes very ingeniously, that all the common and necessary motions for the business of life, are performed by men in straight or plain lines; but that all the graceful and ornamental movements are made in waving lines: an observation not unworthy of being attended to, by all who study the grace of gesture and action.

THOUGH Colour, Figure, and Motion, be separate principles of Beauty; yet in many beautiful objects they all meet, and thereby render the Beauty both greater, and more complex. Thus, in flowers, trees, animals, we are entertained at once with the delicacy of the colour, with the gracefulness of the figure, and sometimes also with the motion of the object. Although each of these produce a separate agreeable sensation, yet they are of such a similar nature, as readily to mix and blend in one general perception of Beauty, which we ascribe to the whole object as its cause: For Beauty is always conceived by us something residing in the object which raises the pleasant sensation; a sort of glory which dwells upon, and invests it. Perhaps the most complete assemblage of beautiful objects that can any where be found, is presented by a rich natural landscape, where there is a sufficient variety of objects: fields in verdure, scattered trees and flowers, running water, and animals grazing. If to these be joined, some of the productions of art, which suit such a scene; as a bridge

with arches over a river, smoke rising from cottages in the midst of trees, and the distant view of a fine building seen by the rising sun; we then enjoy, in the highest perfection, that gay, cheerful, and placid sensation which characterises Beauty. To have an eye and a taste formed for catching the peculiar Beauties of such scenes as these, is a necessary requisite for all who attempt poetical description.

THE Beauty of the human countenance is more complex than any that we have yet considered. It includes the Beauty of colour, arising from the delicate shades of the complexion; and the Beauty of figure, arising from the lines which form the different features of the face. But the chief Beauty of the countenance depends upon a mysterious expression, which it conveys of the qualities of the mind; of good sense, or good humour; of sprightliness, candour, benevolence, sensibility, or other amiable dispositions. How it comes to pass, that a certain conformation of features is connected in our idea with certain moral qualities; whether we are thought by instinct, or by experience, to form this connection, and to read the mind in the countenance; belongs not to us now to enquire, nor is indeed easy to resolve. The fact is certain, and acknowledged, that what gives the human countenance its most distinguishing Beauty, is what is called its expression; or an image, which it is conceived to shew of internal moral dispositions.

LECT.
V.

LECT. V. THIS leads to observe, that there are certain qualities of the mind which, whether expressed in the countenance, or by words, or by actions, always raise in us a feeling similar to that of Beauty. There are two great classes of moral qualities; one is of the high and the great virtues, which require extraordinary efforts, and turn upon dangers and sufferings; as heroism, magnanimity, contempt of pleasures, and contempt of death. These, as I have observed in a former Lecture, excite in the spectator an emotion of Sublimity and Grandeur. The other class is generally of the social virtues, and such as are of a softer and gentler kind; as compassion, mildness, friendship, and generosity. These raise in the beholder a sensation of pleasure, so much akin to that produced by Beautiful external objects, that, though of a more dignified nature, it may, without impropriety, be classed under the same head.

A SPECIES of Beauty, distinct from any I have yet mentioned, arises from design or art; or, in other words, from the perception of means being adapted to an end; or the parts of any thing being well fitted to answer the design of the whole. When, in considering the structure of a tree or a plant, we observe, how all the parts, the roots, the stem, the bark, and the leaves, are suited to the growth and nutriment of the whole: much more when we survey all the parts and members of a living animal; or when we examine any of the curious works of

art; such as a clock, a ship, or any nice machine; the pleasure which we have in the survey, is wholly founded on this sense of Beauty. It is altogether different from the perception of Beauty produced by colour, figure, variety, or any of the causes formerly mentioned. When I look at a watch, for instance, the case of it, if finely engraved, and of curious workmanship, strikes me as beautiful in the former sense; bright colour, exquisite polish, figures finely raised and turned. But when I examine the construction of the spring and the wheels, and praise the Beauty of the internal machinery; my pleasure then arises wholly from the view of that admirable art, with which so many various and complicated parts are made to unite for one purpose.

THIS sense of Beauty, in fitness and design, has an extensive influence over many of our ideas. It is the foundation of the Beauty which we discover in the proportion of doors, windows, arches, pillars, and all the orders of architecture. Let the ornaments of a building be ever so fine and elegant in themselves, yet if they interfere with this sense of fitness and design, they lose their Beauty, and hurt the eye, like disagreeable objects. Twisted columns, for instance, are undoubtedly ornamental; but as they have an appearance of weakness, they always displease when they are made use of to support any part of a building that is massy, and that seemed to require a more substantial prop. We cannot look upon any work whatever with-

L E C T. out being led, by a natural association of ideas,
V. to think of its end and design, and of course to examine the propriety of its parts, in relation to this design and end. When their propriety is clearly discerned, the work seems always to have some Beauty; but when there is a total want of propriety, it never fails of appearing deformed. Our sense of fitness and design, therefore, is so powerful, and holds so high a rank among our perceptions, as to regulate, in a great measure, our other ideas of Beauty: An observation which I the rather make, as it is of the utmost importance, that all who study composition should carefully attend to it. For, in an epic poem, a history, an oration, or any work of genius, we always require, as we do in other works, a fitness, or adjustment of means, to the end which the author is supposed to have in view. Let his description be ever so rich, or his figures ever so elegant, yet, if they are out of place, if they are not proper parts of that whole, if they suit not the main design, they lose all their Beauty; nay, from Beauties they are converted into Deformities. Such power has our sense of fitness and congruity, to produce a total transformation of an object whose appearance otherwise would have been Beautiful.

AFTER having mentioned so many various species of Beauty, it now only remains to take notice of Beauty as it is applied to writing or discourse; a term commonly used in a sense altogether loose and undetermined. For it is

applied to all that pleases, either in style or in sentiment, from whatever principle that pleasure flows; and a Beautiful poem or oration means, in common language, no other than a good one, or one well composed. In this sense, it is plain, the word is altogether indefinite, and points at no particular species or kind of Beauty. There is, however, another sense, somewhat more definite, in which Beauty of writing characterises a particular manner; when it is used to signify a certain grace and amœnity in the turn either of style or sentiment, for which some authors have been peculiarly distinguished. In this sense, it denotes a manner neither remarkably sublime, nor vehemently passionate, nor uncommonly sparkling; but such as raises in the reader an emotion of the gentle placid kind, similar to what is raised by the contemplation of beautiful objects in nature; which neither lifts the mind very high, nor agitates it very much, but diffuses over the imagination an agreeable and pleasing serenity. Mr. Addison is a writer altogether of this character; and is one of the most proper and precise examples that can be given of it. Fenelon, the author of the Adventures of Telemachus, may be given as another example. Virgil too, though very capable of rising on occasions into the Sublime, yet, in his general manner, is distinguished by the character of Beauty and Grace rather than of Sublimity. Among orators, Cicero has more of the Beautiful

LECT. than Demosthenes, whose genius led him wholly
V. towards vehemence and strength.

THUS much it is sufficient to have said upon the subject of Beauty. We have traced it through a variety of forms; as next to Sublimity, it is the most copious source of the Pleasures of Taste; and as the consideration of the different appearances, and principles of Beauty, tends to the improvement of Taste in many subjects.

BUT it is only by appearing under the forms of Sublime or Beautiful, that objects delight the imagination. From several other principles also, they derive their power of giving it pleasure.

NOVELTY, for instance, has been mentioned by Mr. Addison, and by every writer on this subject. An object which has no merit to recommend it, except its being uncommon or new, by means of this quality alone, produces in the mind a vivid and an agreeable emotion. Hence that passion of curiosity, which prevails so generally among mankind. Objects and ideas which have been long familiar, make too faint an impression to give an agreeable exercise to our faculties. New and strange objects rouse the mind from its dormant state, by giving it a quick and pleasing impulse. Hence, in a great measure, the entertainment afforded us by fiction and romance. The emotion raised by Novelty is of a more lively and pungent nature, than that produced by Beauty; but much shorter in its continuance. For if the object have in itself no

charms to hold our attention, the shining gloss thrown upon it by Novelty soon wears off. LECT.
V.

BESIDES Novelty, Imitation is another source of Pleasure to Taste. This gives rise to what Mr. Addison terms, the Secondary Pleasures of Imagination; which form, doubtless, a very extensive class. For all Imitation affords some pleasure; not only the Imitation of beautiful or great objects, by recalling the original ideas of Beauty or Grandeur which such objects themselves exhibited; but even objects which have neither Beauty nor Grandeur, nay, some which are terrible or deformed, please us in a secondary or represented view.

THE Pleasures of Melody and Harmony belong also to Taste. There is no agreeable sensation we receive, either from Beauty or Sublimity, but what is capable of being heightened by the power of musical sound. Hence the delight of poetical numbers; and even of the more concealed and looser measures of prose. Wit, Humour, and Ridicule likewise open a variety of pleasures to Taste, quite distinct from any that we have yet considered.

AT present it is not necessary to pursue any farther the subject of the Pleasures of Taste. I have opened some of the general principles; it is time now to make the application to our chief subject. If the question be put, To what class of those Pleasures of Taste which I have enumerated, that Pleasure is to be referred, which we receive from poetry, eloquence, or

LECT. fine writing? My answer is, Not to any one,
 V. but to them all. This singular advantage, writing and discourse possess, that they encompass so large and rich a field on all sides, and have power to exhibit, in great perfection, not a single set of objects only, but almost the whole of those which give Pleasure to Taste and Imagination; whether that Pleasure arise from Sublimity, from Beauty in its different forms, from Design and Art, from Moral Sentiment, from Novelty, from Harmony, from Wit, Humour and Ridicule. To whichever of these the peculiar bent of a person's Taste lies, from some writer or other, he has it always in his power to receive the gratification of it.

Now this high power which eloquence and poetry possess, of supplying Taste and Imagination with such a wide circle of pleasures, they derive altogether from their having a greater capacity of Imitation and Description than is possessed by any other art. Of all the means which human ingenuity has contrived for recalling the images of real objects, and awakening, by representation, similar emotions to those which are raised by the original, none is so full and extensive as that which is executed by words and writing. Through the assistance of this happy invention, there is nothing, either in the natural or moral world, but what can be represented and set before the mind, in colours very strong and lively. Hence it is usual among critical writers, to speak of Discourse as the

chief of all the imitative or mimetic arts; they compare it with painting and with sculpture, and in many respects prefer it justly before them. LECT. V.

THIS style was first introduced by Aristotle in his Poetics; and since his time, has acquired a general currency among modern authors. But, as it is of consequence to introduce as much precision as possible into critical language, I must observe, that this manner of speaking is not accurate. Neither discourse in general, nor poetry in particular, can be called altogether imitative arts. We must distinguish betwixt Imitation and Description, which are ideas that should not be confounded. Imitation is performed by means of somewhat that has a natural likeness and resemblance to the thing imitated, and of consequence is understood by all; such are statues and pictures. Description, again, is the raising in the mind the conception of an object by means of some arbitrary or instituted symbols, understood only by those who agree in the institution of them; such are words and writing. Words have no natural resemblance to the ideas or objects which they are employed to signify; but a statue or a picture has a natural likeness to the original. And therefore Imitation and Description differ considerably in their nature from each other.

As far, indeed, as a poet or a historian introduces into his work persons actually speaking; and by the words which he puts into their mouths, represents the discourse which they

LECT. might be supposed to hold; so far his art may
 V. more accurately be called Imitative: and this is the case in all dramatic composition. But in Narrative or Descriptive works, it can with no propriety be called so. Who, for instance, would call Virgil's Description of a tempest, in the first *Æneid*, an Imitation of a storm? If we heard of the Imitation of a battle, we might naturally think of some mock fight, or representation of a battle on the stage, but would never apprehend, that it meant one of Homer's Descriptions in the *Iliad*. I admit, at the same time, that Imitation and Description agree in their principal effect, of recalling by external signs, the ideas of things which we do not see. But though in this they coincide, yet it should not be forgotten, that the terms themselves are not synonymous; that they import different means of effecting the same end; and of course make different impressions on the mind*.

* Though, in the execution of particular parts, Poetry is certainly Descriptive rather than Imitative, yet there is a qualified sense in which Poetry, in the general, may be termed an Imitative art. The subject of the poet (as Dr. Gerard has shown in the Appendix to his *Essay on Taste*) is intended to be an Imitation, not of things really existing, but of the course of nature; that is, a feigned representation of such events, or such scenes, as though they never had a being, yet might have existed; and which, therefore, by their probability, bear a resemblance to nature. It was probably, in this sense, that Aristotle termed Poetry a mimetic art. How far either the Imitation or the Description which Poetry employs, is superior to the imitative

WHETHER we consider Poetry in particular, and Discourse in general, as Imitative or Descriptive; it is evident, that their whole power, in recalling the impressions of real objects, is derived from the significancy of words. As their excellency flows altogether from this source, we must, in order to make way for further enquiries, begin at this fountain head. I shall, therefore, in the next Lecture, enter upon the consideration of Language: of the origin, the progress, and construction of which, I purpose to treat at some length.

LECT.
V.

powers of Painting and Music, is well shown by Mr. Harris, in his Treatise on Music, Painting, and Poetry. The chief advantage which Poetry, or Discourse in general enjoys is, that whereas, by the nature of his art, the Painter is confined to the representation of a single moment, writing and discourse can trace a transaction through its whole progress. That moment, indeed, which the painter pitches upon for the subject of his picture, he may be said to exhibit with more advantage than the poet or the orator; inasmuch as he sets before us, in one view, all the minute concurrent circumstances of the event which happen in one individual point of time, as they appear in nature; while Discourse is obliged to exhibit them in succession, and by means of a detail, which is in danger of becoming tedious, in order to be clear; or if not tedious, is in danger of being obscure. But to that point of time which he has chosen, the painter being entirely confined, he cannot exhibit various stages of the same action or event; and he is subject to this farther defect, that he can only exhibit objects as they appear to the eye, and can very imperfectly delineate characters and sentiments, which are the noblest subjects of Imitation or Description. The power of representing these with full advantage, gives a high superiority to Discourse and Writing above all other imitative arts.