phyſical. writings of Dr Reid poſſeſs in an eminent degree the ſame beauty ; and no man of true taſte can read them without admiring the elegant ſimplicity of the compoſition as much as the ſtrength of the reasoning, and feeling from the whole a pleaſure which the poetical ſtyle of Shafteſbury cannot communicate.

If this be a juſt account of the pleaſures of taſte, that fa­culty cannot be properly conſidered as a mere internal ſenſe, ſince to its enjoyments a well-ſtored fancy is nccessary in ſome caſes, and the reaſoning power in all ; and the poet and the painter who wiſh to excel in their respective profeſſions, muſt not content themſelves, the one with filling the ear of the reader with mellifluous sounds, and the other with dazzling or deceiving the eye of the ſpectator by the brilliancy of his colours, but both muſt ſtrive for fame by captivating the imagination ; whilſt the architect, who aſpires to a ſimilar celebrity, muſt make the purpose oſ his or­naments obvious to every perſon capable of judging. The landſcapes of Claude Lorrain, the muſic of Handel, the poetry of Milton, excite feeble emotions in our minds, when our attention is confined to the qualities they preſent to our ſenſes, or when it is to ſuch qualities of their compoſi­tion that we turn our regard. It is then only we feel the ſublimity or beauty of their productions, when our imagi­nations are kindled by their power, when we loſe ourſelves amid the number of images that paſs before our minds, and when we waken at laſt from this play of fancy as from the charm of a romantic dream.

It is well obſerved by Sir Joſhua Reynolds@@\*, that taſte is ſometimes praiſed in ſuch terms by orators and poets, who call it *inſpiration,* and *a gift from heaven,* that though a ſtudent by ſuch praiſe may have his attention rouſed, and a desire excited of obtaining this gift, he is more likely to be deterred than encouraged in the purſuit of his object. “ He examines his own mind, and perceives *there* nothing of that divine inſpiration with which he is told ſo many others have been favoured. He never travelled to heaven to gather new ideas ; and he finds himſelf poſſeſſed of no other qualifica­tions than what mere common obſervation and a plain underſtanding are able to confer. Thus he becomes gloomy amidſt the ſplendour of figurative declamation, and thinks it hopeleſs to purſue an object which he ſuppoſes out of the reach of human induſtry. But on this, as on many other occaſions, we ought to diſtinguiſh how much is to be given to enthuſiaſm, and how much to common ſenſe; taking care not to loſe in terms of vague admiration that ſolidity and truth of principle upon which alone we can reaſon.” Who­ever poſſeſſes the ordinary powers of perception, ſensibilſty of heart, good ſenſe, and an imagination capable of being rouſed by the ſtriking objects of nature and of art, may, without inſpiration, become, by mere experience, a man of fine taſte in the objects of which he aſpires to be a critical judge.

This being the caſe, we may easily account for the variety of taſtes which prevail among men, not only as individuals but as nations. We have already mentioned the difference in one inſtance between the European taſte and the Afri­can reſpecting female beauty ; and we may now affirm, as we hope to prove our affirmation, that the one taſte is equal­ly correct with the other. The charms of female beauty exiſt not in the mere external form and colour conſidered by themſelves (for then the inanimate ſtatue of the Venus de Medicis would give more delight to the European be­holder than the fineſt woman that ever lived) ; but we aſſociate external beauty with ſweetneſs of diſpoſition, and with all the train of endearments which take place in the union of the sexes ; and it is this association which delights the man of taſte, as giving refinement to an appetite which in itſelf is groſs and ſenſual. A ſimilar aſſociation muſt be formed in the breaſt of the African who has any taſte ; and as he never knew feminine ſoftneſs, or any of the en­dearing qualities of the ſex, but as united with thick lips, a flat noſe, a black ſkin, and woolly hair—a sable beauty of that deſcription muſt excite in his breaſt the ſame emotions that are excited in the breaſt of an European by the fair wo­man with Grecian features.

But is there not an ideal or perfect beauty of the human form ? There certainly is, as of every other natural object ; but it cannot be the same in Europe as in Africa, unleſs to a Being who is acquainted with all the peculiarities of form, national and individual, that are to be found among the in­habitants of the whole earth. It has been ſuppoſed, and we think completely proved, by one of the beſt writers that we have on the philoſophy of taſte @@\*, that the ſublimity or beauty of forms ariſes altogether from the aſſociations we con­nect with them, or the qualities of which they are expreſſive to us. The qualities expressed by the male and female forms are very different ; and we would by no means think the woman beautiful who ſhould have the form of the Farneſe Hercules, or admire the ſhapes of the hero who ſhould be formed like the Venus de Medicis ; becauſe the proportions of ſuch a woman would indicate ſtrength and intrepidity, where we wiſh to find only gentleneſs and delicacy; and the delicate form of the hero would indicate ſoftneſs and effemi­nacy, where the oppoſite qualities only can be eſteemed. As we associate with the female form many deſirable qualities, every woman is eſteemed more or leſs beautiful as her figure and features indicate a greater or ſmaller number of theſe qualities ; and the ſame is the caſe with reſpect to the qua­lities which adorn the male character, and the form and fea­tures by which they are expressed. Upon comparing a number of human beings with one another, we find, that with reſpect to every feature and limb, there is one central form to which nature always tends, though she be continu­ally deviating from it on the right hand and on the left: (See Nose). This form therefore is conſidered as the moſt perfect form of the ſpecies, and moſt expressive of the qua­lities for which that ſpecies is valued ; but in Africa, the central form, with reſpect to the proportions of the human body and the features of the human face, is very different from what it is in Europe ; and therefore the ideal or per­fect beauty of the human form and features cannot be the ſame in both countries. No doubt, if a man could examine the limbs and features of every individual of the human race, he would diſcover one central form belonging to the whole, and be led to eſteem it the ſtandard of beauty ; but as this is obviouſly impoſſible, the common idea or central form belonging to each great claſs of mankind muſt be eſteemed the ſtandard of beauty in that claſs, as indicating moſt completely the qualities for which individuals are eſteemed. Thus there is a common form in childhood and a common form in age ; each of which is the more perfect as it is the more remote from peculiarities : but though age and childhood have ſomething in common, we ſhould not deem the child beautiful who was formed exactly like the moſt handſome man, nor the man handſome who was form­ed exactly like the moſt beautiful child. This doctrine is well illuſtrated by Sir Joſhua Reynolds, who has applied it to every object eſteemed beautiful in nature ; and proved, that the ſuperiority of Claude Lorrain over the landscape- painters of the Dutch and Flemiſh ſchools, ariſes chiefly from his having generalized his conceptions, and formed his pictures by compounding together the various draughts which he had previouſly made from various beautiful scenes and proſpects. “On the whole (ſays he), it ſeems to me that there is but one preſiding principle which regulates and

@@@[m]\* Discourse delivered at the Royal Academy, Dec. 14. 1770.

@@@[m]\* Mr. Allison.