## The Genesis of Art-Form[1]

The real principle of identity in the several forms of Art is motion. Æsthetics, as the derivation of the word reveals, has to do with perception through the nerve termini—that is to say, through sensation. These termini are affected by the vibrations of air or of ether—vibrations which we call sound, light, color, taste, odor, hardness, heat, and so on; and the nerve filaments convey to centers of nerves the effects upon their termini. We do not deny that back of the vibrations of ether and nerve there is somewhat, or rather some One, who transmutes this crude stuff into the spiritual bodies which inhabit the thought-world; nevertheless, the principle of identity in æsthetics will be found to underlie the conditions of sensation in motion.

Professor Raymond approaches the subject from the opposite direction. His method is *a priori* and deductive. He does not trouble himself with physiological psychology or with sensational philosophy. His temper is Platonist, and he starts from the sphere of pure ideas. The fundamental proposition with which he begins is that "All phenomena are traceable to three sources—spirit, matter, and thought. Subjects of thought of any importance involve relations to all of the three; but the chief place is assigned to the first in religion, to the second in science, and to the third in art, the phenomena of which, corresponding to those of life in general, are all traceable to man as the possessor of *mind*, which is the embodiment of spirit; to *nature*, which is the embodiment of matter, and to a combination of the effects of mind and nature in a *product*."

With these three elements our author constructs the palace of art, with its wonders of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. By the by, why should not we have, sometime, in the process of the evolution of æsthetics, a fine art of perfumes? Why not construct a symphony out of odors, a picture with perfumes, a scene of scents? "A sunset touch, a fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death, a chorus-ending from Euripides," all equally are open pathways into the world of ideas and spiritual life. Is not the sense of taste as just and worthy and honorable as the sense of hearing and the sense of smell? Let some one who is treating of the genesis of art treat us to an investigation into the causes, theological or psychological, of our distrust, our contempt, of some of our normal, natural, healthy sensations; and show us if it was in reality St. Augustine or Plato who is responsible for our pious distrust of the arts of the pastry-cook and the perfumer. Ignoring such questions as irrelative to his purpose, Professor Raymond goes on to develop the laws of art-form out of the three fundamental elements we have already named. These laws logically fall into groups of threes, with the result of their combination following them.

The mental principle of unity, when introduced into matter, produces order. This finds illustration in Rubens's "Descent from the Cross," from the Niederwald National Monument, the Acropolis of ancient Athens, a Greek drama, Trinity Church on Broadway, a poem of Mr. Stedman's, and from Anton Rubinstein's Melody in F; while Walt Whitman's poetry, some bank buildings on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, and long passages from Wagner's operas, are equally pertinent to exemplify a lack of order. Unity is not destroyed by variety, if the variety be introduced according to some method; but the variety of the buildings about City Hall Square, and the variety of tunes in Gilbert and Sullivan's opera of "Pinafore," cannot be unified. The following passage from the "Columbian Ode" shows want of unity, resulting possibly from poverty of ideas or anxiety to rhyme:

> For lo! the living God doth bare his arm.
> No more he makes his house of clouds and gloom.
> Lightly the shuttles move within his loom;
> Unveiled his thunder leaps to meet the storm.
> From God's right hand man takes the powers that sway
> A universe of stars.

Differences, says the author, should be introduced into forms of art in a distinct and well-contrasted way. We recognize this in music, where a third, a fifth, or an octave is more satisfying than a semi-tone or a seventh. The principle was likewise carried out by the Greeks in their architectural ornaments, consisting of alternating curves and straight lines. Lord Macaulay in his literary style sacrificed even historic truth to this principle of antithesis. Doré was always using strong contrasts in his drawings, and Shakespeare makes the persons of his plays act as foils to one another. Browning followed the same instinctive principle in the arrangement of the parts of "The Ring and the Book," and Raphael, in his great picture of the Transfiguration, finely contrasts the maniac boy with the glorious figure of the transfigured Jesus on the mountain beyond.

Willingly, had we the space at our disposal, would we follow Professor Raymond in the fascinating analysis of motives of the fine arts. Whether the reader accepts or rejects the author's theory, his book remains of practical worth. We confidently commend it to composers of buildings, pictures, statuary, music, or literature; and we are sure that all artists can study it with a profit of which they will themselves be distinctly conscious. We have but two faults to find with this book: some of its pictures are badly blurred, and the cross-references are distracting and annoying. It is a pity that a work of so great value should be marred with mechanical blemishes.

[1] *The Genesis of Art-Form.* An Essay in Comparative Æsthetics, Showing the Identity of the Sources, Methods, and Effects of Composition in Music, Poetry, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. By George Lansing Raymond, LL.D., Professor of Oratory and Æsthetic Culture in the College of New Jersey. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. $2.25.