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WHAT IS ART?

How often do we meet people who affect an indifference to what is commonly termed "art." The great majority of our people assume that art is valueless excepting as a pastime accomplishment, or as a means to keep youngsters busy—out of mischief. There is no doubt but this is the general view in which art is held. If you have any doubt about accepting our statement regarding the relation of a majority of people to art let us suggest that you interview some of your friends and neighbors.

While we do not wish to condemn either our readers or ourselves, we feel compelled, to make our point clear, to state that we believe most people ignorant of the true meaning of art and its importance in our everyday life. There are many definitions that apply to art. The one most acceptable to us at present may be stated as follows: "A method of doing something well." How does that appeal to you, reader? Let us consider for a moment: In the majority of "methods" there is no art, for the very simple reason that things are not "well" done, but are shoved off in a bungling manner. We agree that there is no art in such accomplishment. But—"doing something well"—that is an art. "Why is it an art?" you ask. We reply that it is because so few really do things well—considering what might be done—that a given thing "well done" is an example of art.

The seed of art lies in the desire of the human mind for perfection as nearly as it is possible to see it and the hand to accomplish the working of it. If you are a wood worker and can make a finer joint than the mass of your fellow-workers, and have developed your method and skill to a point where you have no fear of failure, art is yours, because you possess a "method of doing something well." It is the same with the blacksmith who is able to do an exceptionally fine job of welding iron—he has the art. The same may be said of the leather worker. All who excel are artists, we believe. It need not be working wood, iron, leather or steel—but it must be "doing something well."

It has often been the pleasure of the writer to watch other men at their work and to admire the skill of their hands at a given task, reflecting that, after all, the skill of the hand is but a manifestation of mental domination. But who dares to deny that dexterity and skill of the hand at one thing is not as great an art,

where demands are equal, as when employed at some other task?

A love of the beautiful, of perfection as nearly as it is obtainable, leads to art. Art and Truth and the beautiful things of earth provide us with inspiration and with vision. Without inspiration little is done—aside from machine-like work. An inspired vision is the need of most of us. When we have vision we desire to labor and it wearies us but little, for we heed not the passing of time, as our minds are centered upon our work—not on the clock. Art—a desire to "do something well"—should permeate everything that we undertake. If it did, we, one and all, would be better off, for we would have more and that which we required and possessed would be of finer quality than that which now suffices us. Would not more art in our work stand for "better work?" And would not better work create better conditions? And would not better conditions make all of us happier? These questions provide food for the most serious reflection. After all, as we think so we are.

Let us now consider the aesthetic side of art. In the ages that have passed the world has fostered arts necessary to the people of a given period—the age in which said people lived. When we look back upon the achievements of those human beings whom we now term "ancients" we are likely to be astonished by what was the art of a given period. Some things will cause us to wonder if, after all, our civilization has advanced very far along certain lines in recent centuries. In literature, in painting, and in sculpture we are still impressed by the work of men of former centuries. That which endures and outlives its age becomes a classic and truly represents art, because it is "something well done." The world would be poor, indeed, without its art—without its men and women writers, painters and musicians. What they create becomes the property of the world, for if it has merit it outlives its creator.

To read a good book, to gaze upon a magnificent painting, to listen to the music of the masters, is to enter the realm of art—and whose life is not in some degree affected by such an experience? He or she who holds art in contempt in so doing places the brand of limitation upon himself or herself. Consider the thought and labor necessary to write a good book;

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