

## The Church and the Arts.

IN these days of vast conflict and universal suffering and destruction, when day by day the world is breathless with expectation, waiting in hope or in fear, it may seem out of harmony with men's thoughts and feelings to dwell, even for a little, on a theme which speaks of beauty and of peace, the flowers of man's higher life, far removed in spirit from the tragedy of War.

We live in days greater in possibilities for the future of our race than any which have been since the coming of our Lord broke the silence of the Syrian night. *We* are of the night also—looking for the dawn, and, as is so often pressed upon us by our National leaders, we must, even now, look to the future and be prepared to build a better and a nobler world.

There are many directions in which these efforts must be made, and this one, in relation to the Church, requires thought and study, that, when peace comes and opportunity offers, action may be taken to make our Sanctuaries worthier of their high purpose and our worship richer and deeper in spiritual appeal.

“The Church and the Arts” concern all who have at heart the growth in influence of this Divine Institution, and desire its progress and the recapture of those who have left its courts, chilled and dissatisfied. It is impossible to emphasise too strongly that the Church is and must remain the heart of the world, and, notwithstanding the shadow of these dark years of evil, will continue to be the defender of the highest life of the people, and in the near future, as once it was, the home of the highest art.

In the years previous to the outbreak of War, there were, in varied directions, evidences of a deepening interest in these things which have long been neglected in the Scottish Church to its grave loss and starvation. Changes are now surging forward in this age of exploration and doubt, and in the minds and hearts of those who strive to read the times and pierce the future, there is eager enquiry into the place and function of the Church, and its call to the Arts to rally to its side and thus establish it on broader foundations as the home of the beautiful.

Art, if one in spirit, takes many forms, Music, Poetry, Eloquence, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, and others; but with one end, to express beauty in all its thoughts and works. Its place and purpose is to discover and interpret the beauty of the world, to find the eternal amid the transient, the Spiritual in the Material. It is a language capable of revealing the profoundest thoughts and struggles of the soul; not as a mere recorder of facts, but finding its true vocation in translating into sound and form and colour the emotions and imaginings which may be hidden from the ordinary ear or eye. Once the Church was the chiefest friend of all the Arts, and the Arts found their utmost joy in the service of the Church. That was the golden age. May not that come again?

Too often have the Arts been cast aside in fear or scorn—a scorn bred of ignorance—until they were finally divorced with serious loss on either hand.

In the Arts we cannot throw aside tradition, as so many seem striving to do at present, but with profound and reverent admiration may the architects and artists of to-day realise their grave responsibility and study the mighty works which have gone before, strengthening themselves

with their fire and inspiration, gathering and zealously guarding our rich inheritance, that so, when called on in the quickened days to come, they may be able to respond not with mere echoes but with new creations adapted to the feelings and emotions of the new age. A true Christian Church should always reveal the faith and all its mysteries, and be infinitely more than a mere auditorium. In Gothic architecture, which is the imaginative expression of the Northern Spirit, there is infinite variety, allowing great freedom of thought and design, and in general plan and details (as contrasted with Classic churches or temples) revealing religious truth in a symbolical language all its own. The earthly building is but the symbol of the Spiritual Church, the Heavenly Jerusalem. It is in the understanding of this that we have failed for so many generations, in Scotland, and are failing still to realise what our Churches might be, Sanctuaries where Art in its manifold and beautiful forms ministers to worship through the eye as well as the ear. Without and within, every part and every detail should be a setting forth in the language of art of Jesus Christ, the chief Corner Stone. Christ first, the ever open western door; and Christ last, the Holy Table in the East, the end, the sacrifice, the triumph, the holy place where the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

Nearly all the finest churches which our little Northern land constructed are more or less in ruin, destroyed, neglected, and now but places of dream and memory. Two or three have been restored in part, and amid western seas new life is returning to Iona which once again may lead the way with love and new desire to re-awake the crumbling walls in many a valley. All these holy places were built by a very small population and very poor, but possessed of ideals and intensity of purpose, seeking after the finer things which seem absent to-day. Once our fathers lived and wrought in these places, and in procession sang their "Glorias."

Beauty, like the spirit of life, in its own nature infinite and independent, such as no time nor place can bound, no thought can grasp nor words define, is the subtlest witness that the universe affords of the nature of spiritual life.

It connects the two worlds, leading to perfection on one side and on the other material, drawing out all that is finest into one pure river of life. In this stream the Mortal and Immortal meet, clasped by the spirit of beauty, which transfuses all things and brings into Divinest harmony. What an inscrutable mystery is this Beauty which, when it captures and holds our spirits, can make even the ruined places holy with a music so deep that even thoughts of the dark agonies of war and man's cruelties are quelled for a time, when we tarry in them.

We must travel back to the Middle Ages for the highest revelations of this Beauty spiritualized. Not that there has failed us of great Beauty since, but it has been different, and lacking in the profounder purpose and inspiration of early days. One can only account for this by remembering that then the high works of the Arts were dedicated to the faith and worship of the Church, and not, as later, to satisfy wealth, or display ambition for private, or public, or national ends. When works were commissioned for the Church, the sense of their high ends, their permanence and spiritual appeal, moved the artist to the highest plane, there to speak to all the people of the truths everlasting. For the last two or three centuries little has been achieved to excel or equal the works of nameless artists, who wrought so obviously, in joy, their great creations for the glory of God's House.

The Early as well as the Mediaeval Christian Church, in their desire to teach, employed all the resources of form and colour and symbol,

realising—what we do not do to-day, in spite of all our supposed growth in scholarship and knowledge—that man can be taught, and not only taught, but inspired, by the eye rather than by the spoken word. There are many who learn very little by the ear, but only by the eye; and there are many also to whom the word means little as compared with the chord. Will the Church consider this other way of expressing belief by way of outward and visible signs, and thus save for itself many who have withdrawn from its worship and await the return of more poetry and mystery, which may contribute so much to the sense of the supernatural, essential for those spirits who enter the Holy of Holies by the doorway of Art? The details of these varied arts, which truly were created by the Church in the passion of its faith, cannot be studied individually in a brief paper; but in these commercial and practical days let us remember there still is, among many, an overpowering desire for expression through art, which, if turned to its highest ends, could revive and quicken a deeper sense of worship and loyalty to the Church.

Be man material or no, be he indifferent to beauty or no, be he a scorner of the Church or no, the House of God is the culmination of his creative genius, and the inevitable centre of the parish or village or city in which he dwells; and when he travels, even then his thoughts and footsteps turn towards some place of Art erected to the Glory of God, even though it be but some crumbling arch in languorous valley or blackened Holy Place in crowded city.

There the people gather when in trouble, and thither they hasten when men go forth to war. There they crowd when, from afar, is heard the trouble of the drums, and, when darkness of defeat broods upon the land, for prayer and watching. When the trumpets of victory are sounding and gladness is in every heart, it is there man finds his place of peace and assembles for rejoicing.

All this proves how great a place Art at its highest, and with noble purpose, holds in the human heart, and how essential it is for the complete life, filling that place which cannot be satisfied by pleasure, or success, or even learning. In some way or other, in varying degree, it touches all hearts, saddened though one often is by the real or apparent indifference to it in the presence of its highest or profoundest manifestations.

Out of this time of national suffering, when heads and hearts are in grave anxiety and in doubt as to the future of our country and the world, out of the sorrow and crucifixion may the consummation of high hope and desire be realised, and a new world born in which all that is richest in the past may be wedded to what has been learned in tribulation, and thus give us a nobler faith and more spiritual beauty.

Even now new leaders must be preparing, and among them must be dreamers and idealists, to use the powers of the men of affairs. If we would have a new country, beauty and its inspiring presence must be called in for guidance. We cannot aim too high, and must recover the spirit of the golden age of Art in the Church, when the population was but a little company compared with our time, but with a fire of creative energy which filled our land with triumphs devoted to the Christian faith. Not only were these sanctuaries themselves perfect in craftsmanship, but they were filled with joy, colour and gold being employed to enrich and adorn the walls and carvings, while windows of great beauty and tapestries and embroideries contributed their full share to the teaching which was their end. Are we able to recapture this joyful spirit, this Hallelujah of colour which has been completely lost? Can our Divinity Halls teach something of this to our young clergy and can the clergy teach the people?

Would that our architects would study more the significance and symbolism of colour, or enlist the help of those gifted with colour that so a new "renaissance" might be born, to deliver us from the woes of varnish which hint only at syrup or treacle, and cast their weary influence upon the people.

The time is ripe for quickening in Diviner things and raising the whole standard of life and thought, and in this endeavour we first turn not to schools and Universities but to the Church, greater in power and influence than all others put together. Aware of their Divine origin, confident in their high purpose, the Arts seek a place in the front line with those who are seeking the redemption of our Church and country. The reconciliation of Art with the Church, and of the Church with Art, would vastly widen the appeal of both and allure into the field of mutual action the many who feel the need to worship through the eye as well as through the ear.

Is it proven that a higher spirituality has been achieved by worshipping in a place in which no love has been bestowed or into which no beauty has found entrance? Is the spoken word the only means of grace? Are all the other gifts of God to be cast aside? Are the Cross and Crucifix to be forever banished? The Gospels tell the story of the Cross and Crucifixion, and many hymns bearing on this great theme are sung by all; but if painter or sculptor dares to tell the story in his own language, the repulse is certain. Why?

Let every Church raise the Cross again in all its amazing significance, and thus prove we are not ashamed of this great symbol of our Faith, nor yet afraid of it, but with outstretched hands and hearts on fire welcome it as the exalted and poignant emblem of Him who was the Founder and is the Eternal Inspiration.

In these days of tribulation and anxiety little or nothing can be done in any of our Churches; but the time is coming, the day of deliverance, and in view of that there must be thinking and conceiving how best we can worship and adore the Father Almighty, and attune our hearts to those great opening words of the Benedicite:

"O all ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord;  
Praise Him and magnify Him for ever."

There will be many calls for remembrance and songs of deliverance which Art must express and satisfy.

After this world war and its suffering are past, may these our offerings be lifted up, not in square or crowded street, which already possess them, but in our Churches, their true home. There are enough memorials in our public places, but our Scottish Churches are still desolate and closed, awaiting love with its colour and its gold to tell of those who have laid down their lives, or to tell of new hope and high resolve.

If, also, our Scotland desires—as it did before, in the National Memorial in Edinburgh Castle, that place of pilgrimage—to recall for generations to come the struggle, and heroism, and sacrifice of these later years, let it turn its eyes and hearts to the lower end of the "Royal Mile," and see there a wondrous opportunity to restore to new life and service the crumbling walls of its ancient Abbey of Holyrood. Let Scotland and all its lovers gather together there to make of it the "Westminster" of our Northern land, the place of burial of her greatest sons and daughters, and a shrine of infinite beauty where holy worship may once again arise, and all the Arts unite in adoration of God the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ His Son.

D. Y. CAMERON.