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**What Is Art?**

The activity of art is based on the fact that a man receiving through his sense of hearing or sight another man’s expression of feeling, is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it. To take the simplest example: one man laughs and another, who hears, becomes merry; or a man weeps and another, who hears, feels sorrow. A man is excited or irritated, and another man, seeing him, is brought to a similar state of mind. By his movements or by the sounds of his voice a man expresses courage and determination or sadness and calmness, and this state of mind passes on to others. A man suffers, manifesting his sufferings by groans and spasms, and thus suffering transmits itself to other people; a man expresses his feelings of admiration, devotion, fear, respect, or love to certain objects, persons, or phenomena, and others are infected by the same feelings of admiration, devotion, fear, respect, or love to the same objects, persons, or phenomena.

And it is in this capacity of man to receive another man’s expression of feeling, and to experience those feelings himself, that the activity of art is based.

If a man infects another or others directly, immediately, by his appearance or by the sounds he gives vent to at the very time he experiences the feeling; if he causes another man to yawn when he himself cannot help yawning, or to laugh or cry when he himself is

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If a man is infected by the author's condition of soul, if he feels this emotion and this union with others, then the object which has affected this is art; but if there be no such infection, if there be not this union with the author and with others who are moved by the same work—then it is not art. And not only is infection a sure sign of art, but the degree of infectiousness is also the sole measure of excellence in art.

The stronger the infection the better is the art, as art, speaking now apart from its subject-matter—that is, not considering the quality of the feelings it transmits.

And the degree of the infectiousness of art depends on three conditions—

(1) On the greater or lesser individuality of the feeling transmitted;
(2) On the greater or lesser clearness with which the feeling is transmitted;
(3) On the sincerity of the artist, that is, on the greater or lesser force with which the artist himself feels the emotion he transmits.

The more individual the feeling transmitted the more strongly does it act on the recipient; the more individual the state of the soul into which he is transferred the more pleasure does the recipient obtain and therefore the more readily and strongly does he join in it.

The clearness of expression assists infection because the recipient who minglest in consciousness with the author is the better satisfied the more clearly the feeling is transmitted which as it seems to him has long been known and felt and for which he has not now found expression.

But most of all is the degree of infectiousness of art increased by the degree of sincerity in the artist. As soon as the spectator, hearer, or reader, feels that the artist is infected by his own production and writes, sings, or plays, for himself and not merely to act on others, this mental condition of the artist infects the recipient; and, contrariwise, as soon as the spectator, reader, or hearer, feels that the author is not writing, singing, or playing, for his own satisfaction—does not himself feel what he wishes to express—but is doing it for him, the recipient, resistance immediately springs up and the most individual and the newest feelings and the cleverest technique not only fail to produce any infection but actually repel.

I have mentioned three conditions of contagion in art, but they may all be summed up into one, the last, sincerity, that is, that the artist should be impelled by an inner need to express his feeling. That condition includes the first; for if the artist is sincere he will express the feeling as he experienced it. And as each man is different from everyone else, his feeling will be individual for everyone else; and the more individual it is—the more the artist has drawn it from the depths of his nature—the more sympathetic and sincere will it be. And this same sincerity will impel the artist to find a clear expression of the feeling which he wishes to transmit.

Therefore this third condition—sincerity—is the most important of the three. It is always complied with in peasant art, and this explains why such art always acts so powerfully; but it is a condition almost entirely absent from our upper-class art, which is continually produced by artists actuated by personal aims of covetousness or vanity.

Such are the three conditions which divide art from its counterfeits, and which also decide the quality of every work of art considered apart from its subject-matter.

The absence of any one of these conditions excludes a work from the category of art and relegates it to that of art's counterfeits. If the work does not transmit the artist's peculiarity of feeling and is therefore not individual, if it is unintelligibly expressed, or if it has not proceeded from the author's inner need for expression—it is not a work of art. If all these conditions are present, even in the smallest degree, then the work, even if a weak one, is yet a work of art.

The presence in various degrees of these three conditions: individuality, clearness, and sincerity, decides the merit of a work of art, as art, apart from subject-matter. All works of art take rank of merit according to the degree in which they fulfil the first, the second, and the third of these conditions. In one the individuality of the feeling transmitted may predominate; in another, clearness of expression; in a third, sincerity; while a fourth may have sincerity and individuality but be deficient in clearness; a fifth, individuality and clearness, but less sincerity; and so forth, in all possible degrees and combinations.

Thus is art divided from what is not art, and thus is the quality of art, as art, decided, independently of its subject-matter, that is to say, apart from whether the feelings it transmits are good or bad...
PART II

ON TRUTH IN ART

Preface to a Miscellany, 'The Flower Garden,' for Children.

'O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things: and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.' (Matt. xii, 34-37).

IN this book, besides tales in which true occurrences are narrated, there are also stories, traditions, proverbs, legends, fables, and fairy tales, that have been composed and written for man's benefit.

We have chosen such as we consider to be in accord with Christ's teaching, and therefore regard as good and truthful.

Many people, especially children, when reading a story, fairy-tale, legend, or fable, ask first of all: 'Is it true?' and if they see that what is described could not have happened, they often say: 'Oh, this is mere fancy, it isn't true.'

Those who judge so, judge amiss.

Truth will be known not by him who knows only what has been, is, and really happens, but by him who recognizes what should be according to the will of God.

He does not write the truth who describes only what has happened and what this or that man has done, but he who shows what people do that is right—
that is, in accord with God's will; and what people do wrong—that is, contrary to God's will.

'Truth is a path.' Christ said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.'

And so he who looks down at his feet will not know the truth, but he who discerns by the sun which way to go.

Verbal compositions are good and necessary, not when they describe what has happened, but when they show what ought to be; not when they tell what people have done, but when they set a value on what is good and evil—when they show men the narrow path of God's will, which leads to life.

And in order to show that path one must not describe merely what happens in the world. The world abides in evil and is full of offence. If one is to describe the world as it is, one will describe much evil and the truth will be lacking. In order that there may be truth in what one describes, it is necessary to write not about what is, but about what should be; to write not the truth of what is, but of the kingdom of God which is drawing nigh unto us but is not as yet. That is why there are mountains of books in which we are told what really has happened or might have happened, yet they are all false if those who write them do not themselves know what is good and what is evil, and do not know and do not show the one path which leads to the kingdom of God. And there are fairy-tales, parables, fables, legends, in which marvellous things are described which never happened or ever could happen, and these legends, fairy-tales, and fables, are true, because they show wherein the will of God has always been, and is, and will be: they show the truth of the kingdom of God.

There may be a book, and there are indeed many novels and stories, that describe how a man lives for his passions, suffers, torments others, endures danger and want, schemes, struggles with others, escapes from his poverty, and at last is united with the object of his love and becomes distinguished, rich, and happy. Such a book, even if everything described in it really happened, and though there were in it nothing improbable, would nevertheless be false and untrue, because a man who lives for himself and his passions, however beautiful his wife may be and however distinguished and rich he becomes, cannot be happy.

And there may be a legend of how Christ and his apostles walked on earth and went to a rich man, and the rich man would not receive him, and they went to a poor widow, and she received him. And then he commanded a barrel full of gold to roll to the rich man and sent a wolf to the poor widow to eat up her last calf, and it might prove a blessing for the widow and be bad for the rich man.

Such a story is totally improbable, because nothing of what is described ever happened or could happen; but it may all be true because in it is shown what always should be—what is good and what is evil, and what a man should strive after in order to do the will of God.

No matter what wonders are described, or what animals may talk in human language, what flying carpets may carry people from place to place, the legends, parables, or fairy-tales will be true, if there is in them the truth of the kingdom of God. And if that truth is lacking, then everything described, however well attested, will be false, because it lacks the truth of the kingdom of God. Christ himself spoke in parables, and his parables have remained eternally true. He only added, 'Take heed how ye hear.'