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THE British Isles have been ringing for the last few years with the word ‘Art’ in its German sense; with ‘High Art,’ ‘Symbolic Art,’ ‘Ecclesiastical Art,’ ‘Dramatic Art,’ ‘Tragic Art,’ and so forth; and every well-educated person is expected, nowadays, to know something about Art. Yet in spite of all translations of German ‘Æsthetic’ treatises, and ‘Kunstnovellen,’ the mass of the British people cares very little about the matter, and sits contented under the imputation of ‘bad taste.’ Our stage, long since dead, does not revive; our poetry is dying; our music, like our architecture, only reproduces the past; our painting is only first-rate when it handles landscapes and animals, and seems likely so to remain; but, meanwhile, nobody cares. Some of the deepest and most earnest minds vote the question, in general, a ‘sham and a snare,’ and whisper to each other confidentially, that Gothic art is beginning to be a ‘bore,’ and that Sir Christopher Wren was a very good fellow after all; while the middle classes look on the Art movement half amused, as with a pretty toy, half sulkily suspicious of Popery and Paganism, and think, apparently, that Art is very well when it means nothing, and is merely used to beautify drawing-rooms and shawl patterns; not to mention that, if there were no painters, Mr. Smith could not hand down to posterity likenesses of himself, Mrs. Smith, and family. But when ‘Art’ dares to be in earnest, and to mean something, much more to connect itself with religion, Smith’s tone alters. He will teach ‘Art’ to keep in what he considers its place, and if it refuses, take the law of it, and put it into the Ecclesiastical Court. So he says, and what is more, he means what he says; and as all the world, from

Hindostan to Canada, knows by most practical proof, what he means, he sooner or later does, perhaps not always in the wisest way, but still he does it.

Thus, in fact, the temper of the British nation toward ‘Art’ is simply that of the old Puritans, softened, no doubt, and widened, but only enough so as to permit Art, not to encourage it.

Some men’s thoughts on this curious fact would probably take the form of some æsthetic *à priori* disquisition, beginning with ‘the tendency of the infinite to reveal itself in the finite,’ and ending—who can tell where? But as we cannot honestly arrogate to ourselves any skill in the *scientia scientiarum*, or say, ‘The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He set a compass upon the face of the deep;’ we shall leave æsthetic science to those who think that they comprehend it; we shall, as simple disciples of Bacon, deal with facts and with history as ‘the will of God revealed in facts.’ We will leave those who choose to settle what ought to be, and ourselves look patiently at that which actually was once, and which may be again; that so out of the conduct of our old Puritan forefathers (right or wrong), and their long war against ‘Art,’ we may learn a wholesome lesson; as we doubtless shall, if we believe firmly that our history is neither more nor less than what the old Hebrew prophets called ‘God’s gracious dealings with his people,’ and not say in our hearts, like some sentimental girl who sings Jacobite ballads (written forty years ago by men who cared no more for the Stuarts than for the Ptolemies, and were ready to kiss the dust off

George the Fourth’s feet at his visit to Edinburgh)—‘Victrix causa Diis placuit, sed victa puellis.’

The historian of a time of change has always a difficult and invidious task. For Revolutions, in the great majority of cases, arise not merely from the crimes of a few great men, but from a general viciousness and decay of the whole, or the majority, of the nation; and that viciousness is certain to be made up, in great part, of a loosening of domestic ties, of breaches of the Seventh Commandment, and of sins connected with them, which a writer is now hardly permitted to mention. An ‘evil and adulterous generation’ has been in all ages and countries the one marked out for intestine and internecine strife. That description is always applicable to a revolutionary generation; whether or not it also comes under the class of a superstitious one, ‘seeking after a sign from heaven,’ only half believing its own creed, and, therefore, on tiptoe for miraculous confirmations of it, at the same time that it fiercely persecutes any one who, by attempting innovation or reform, seems about to snatch from weak faith the last plank which keeps it from sinking into the abyss. In describing such an age, the historian lies under this paradoxical disadvantage, that his case is actually too strong for him to state it. If he tells the whole truth, the easy-going and respectable multitude, in easy-going and respectable days like these, will either shut their ears prudishly to his painful facts, or reject them as incredible, unaccustomed as they are to find similar horrors and abominations among people of their own rank, of whom they are naturally inclined to judge by their own standard of civilisation. Thus if any one, in justification of the