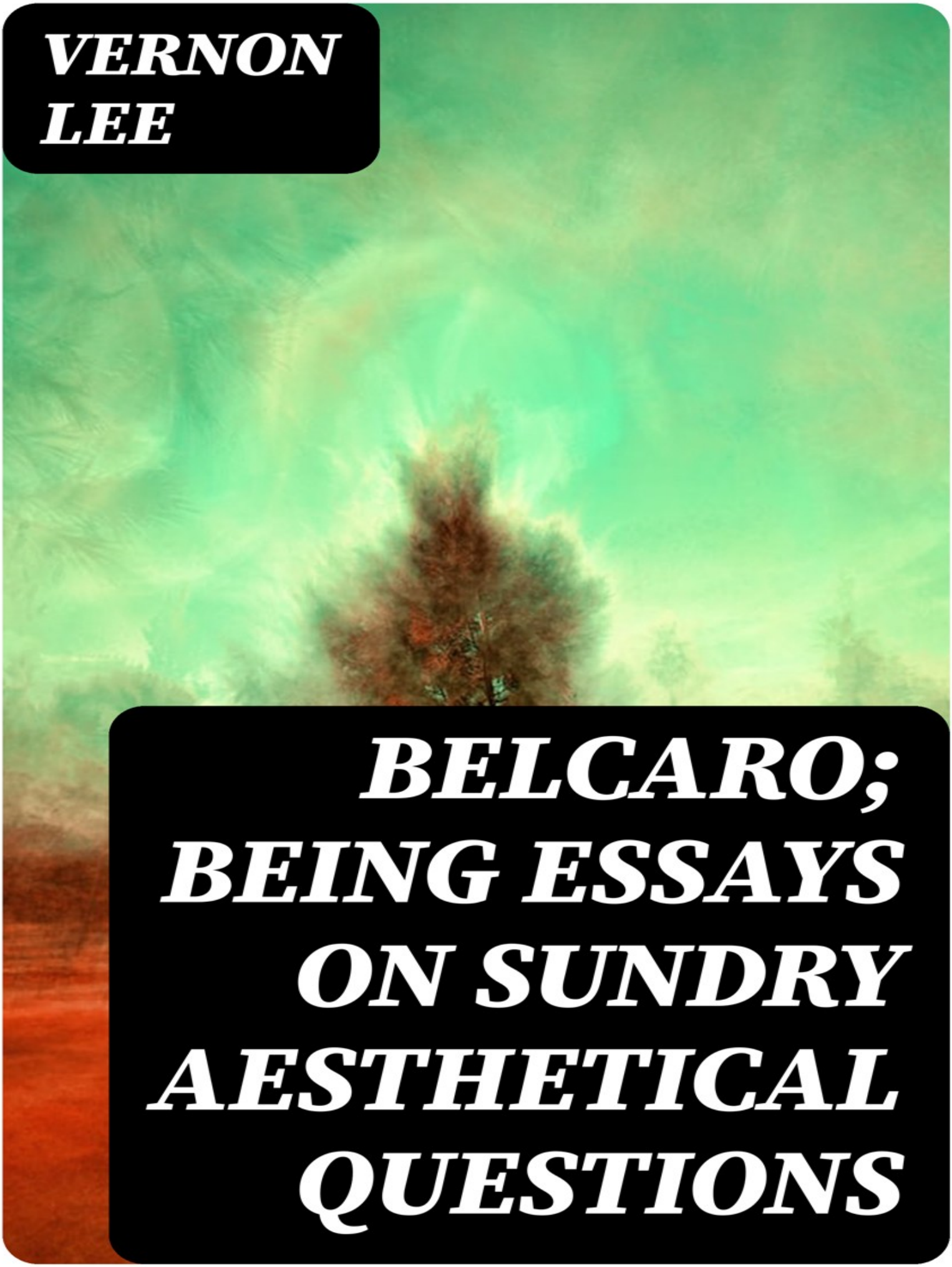
VERNON LEE
BELCARO; BEING ESSAYS ON SUNDRY AESTHETICAL QUESTIONS

Vernon Lee

Belcaro; Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions

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THE BOOK AND ITS TITLE.

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TO ONE OF MY READERS—THE FIRST AND EARLIEST.

A little while ago I told you that I wished this collection of studies to be more especially yours: so now I send it you, a bundle of proofs and of MS., to know whether you will have it. I wish I could give you what I have written in the same complete way that a painter would give you one of his sketches; that a singer, singing for you alone, might give you his voice and his art; for a dedication is but a drop of ink on a large white sheet, and conveys but a sorry notion of property. Now, this book is intended to be really yours; yours in the sense that, were it impossible for more than one copy of it to exist, that one copy I should certainly give to you. Because these studies represent the ideas I have so far been able to work out for myself about art, considered not historically, but in its double relation to the artist and the world for whom he works; ideas which it is my highest

ambition should influence those young enough and powerful enough to act upon them; and, this being the case, my first thought is to place them before you: it is, you see, a matter of conversion, and the nearest, most difficult, most desired convert, is yourself.

To you, therefore, before any one else, must I explain what manner of book this is, what are its origin and its aims. And first, the meaning of its title. Logically, this title means nothing; it is a mere negation, a mere arbitrary combination of letters chosen from sheer despair to find any name which should tell, what this title certainly does not, what is the contents of the volume. Yet, a meaning the name has: a meaning of association. For, even as a snatch of melody will sometimes, for no apparent reason, haunt us while we are about any particular work, follow us while we are travelling through a definite tract of country (as, two years since, Wagner's Spinning Chorus travelled with me from Mantua to Verona, and from Verona to Venice) in such a way that the piece of work, the tract of country, bring with their recollection the haunting tune to our mind; so, also, during the time of making up this volume, I have been haunted by the remembrance of that winter afternoon, when last we were together, on the battlements of Belcaro. Perhaps (if we must seek a reason), because, while driving to the strange, isolated villa castle, up and down, and round and round the hills of ploughed-up russet earth, and pale pink leafless brushwood, and bright green pine-woods, where every sharp road-turning surprises one with a sudden glimpse of Siena, astride, with towers and walls and cupolas, on her high, solitary ridge; while dashing up the narrow hedged lanes whose sere oak and ilex branches brushed across our faces; or, while looking down from the half-fortified old place on to the endless, vague, undulating Sienese fields and oak-woods; perhaps, because at that moment I may, unconscious to myself, have had a vague first desire to put

together more of the helter-skelter contents of the notes over which we had been looking, and give it you in some intelligible shape. Perhaps this may have served to set up the association; or perhaps it was something wholly different, unguessed, trumpery, inscrutable. Be this as it may, the fact remains that during the dull months of planning and putting together this book, I have been haunted, as by a melody, by the remembrance, the vision, the consciousness of that afternoon, warm and hazy, of early December, on the battlements of Belcaro castle, when we looked down over the top of the dense mural crown of sprouting pale green acorned ilex on to the hills and ravines, with the sere oak-woods reddened with the faint flush of sun-light, and the vague, white thinned olives and isolated golden-leaved oaks, and distant solitary belfries and castles; away towards Siena, grey on the horizon, beneath the grey, pinked, wet cloud masses, lurid and mysterious like Beccafumi's frescos, as if the clouds, if one looked at them long, might gather into clustered angels with palm-shaped wings and flushed faces and reddened pale locks. Thus have I been haunted by this remembrance, this inner sight, this single moment continuing, in a way, to exist alongside of so many and various other moments; so that, when it has come to giving a name to this book, I find that there is already indissolubly associated with it, the name of Belcaro.

So far of the title: now of the book itself, of what it is, and why it is such. When, two summers since, I wrote the last pages of my first book, it was, in a way, as if I had been working out the plans of another dead individual. The myself who had, almost as a child, been insanely bewitched by the composers and singers, the mask actors and pedants, and fine ladies and fops, the whole ghostly turn-out of the Italian 18th century; who had, for years, in the bustle of self-culture, I might almost say, of childish education, never let slip an opportunity of adding a new microscopic dab of

colour to the beloved, quaint, and ridiculous and pathetic century-portrait which I carried in my mind; this myself, thus smitten with the Italian 18th century, had already ceased to exist. Another myself had come instead, to whom this long accumulated 18th century lore had been bequeathed, but who would never have taken the pains, or had the patience, to collect it; who carried out with a sort of filial piety the long cherished plan of making into a book all that inherited material, seeing the while in this 18th century lore what the original collector had never guessed: illustrations, partial explanations, of questions of artistic genesis and evolution, of artistic right and wrong, which were for ever being discussed within me. This new myself, this heir to the task of putting into shape the historical materials collected by an extinct individuality, is the myself by whom has been written this present book: this present book represents the thoughts, the problems, the doubts, the solutions, which were haunting me while writing that first book from which this new one so completely differs. To plan, to work for such a book as that first one, seems to me now about the most incomprehensible of all things; to care for one particular historical moment, to study the details of one particular civilisation, to worry about finding out the exact when and how of any definite event; above all, to feel (as I felt) any desire to teach any specified thing to anybody; all this has become unintelligible to my sympathies of to-day. And it is natural: natural in mental growth that we are, to some extent, professorial and professorially self-important and engrossed, before becoming restlessly and sceptically studious: we may teach some things before we even know the desire of learning others. Thus I, from my small magisterial chair or stool of 18th century-expounder, have descended and humbly gone to school as a student of æsthetics.

To school, where, and with whom? A little to books, and this (excepting a few psychological works not bearing directly upon my subject) with but small profit; mainly to art itself, to pictures and statues and music and poetry, to my own feelings and my own thoughts; studying, in seemingly desultory fashion, in discussions with my friends and with myself. This volume BELCARO is the first fruit of these attempts at knowing: it is not the Sir-Oracle manual of a professor, with all in its right place, understood or misunderstood, truth and error all neatly systematised for the teaching of others; but rather the scholar's copy book, the fragmentary and somewhat helter-skelter notes of what, in his listenings and questionings, he has been able to understand, and which he hands over to his fellow-pupils, who may have understood as much of the lessons as himself, but have in all probability understood different portions or in different ways. Such a collection of notes this volume most unmetaphorically is: it is literally a selection of such pages out of my commonplace books as seemed (though written at various moments) to converge upon given points of æsthetical discussion; to coalesce, conglomerate naturally, and to admit of some sort of setting, or resetting. I say setting or resetting, because these thoughts, these questionings, these discussions, though in their written shape merely copied out from a confusion of quite heterogeneous notes, have nearly all had, while they were living, while thought or asked or discussed, a real setting of some sort. For the ideas have come mainly in the presence of works of art, or in discussions with friends: they have come, sometimes unperceived at the moment, together with the sight of a picture, the hearing of a bar or two of music, the reading of an accidentally met, familiar quotation; a reason, a long sought explanation has been suddenly struck out by a sentence, a word from a friend. Oh yes, a setting they have had, these ideas, such as they are: a real, living, shimmering setting of tones and

looks, and jests and passion, and anecdote and illustration, and irrelevant streakings and veinings of description and story; a setting too of place and time and personality. For they have come out of real desultory talks: re-echoed by the bare walls of glaring galleries and sounding statue cells; or whispered on the steps before the withdrawn curtain of some altar-piece, while the faint mass bell tinkled from distant chapels, or great waves of litany responses rushed roaring down the nave, and broke in short repeated echoes against the pillars of the aisle; or, never clearly begun or ended, between one piece of music and another, with the hands still on the keys, and the eyes still on the score; talks desultory, digressive, broken off by the withdrawing of the curtain from a fresh picture, by the prelude of another piece, by a cart blocking up the street or a cat in behind a window grating; by something often utterly trumpery, senseless and for the moment all important. And they have come also, these scattered ideas, in long discussions, rambling but eager (their seriousness shivered ever and anon by a sudden grotesque image or cutting answer, or inane pun, or diverted off, no one knew how, into anecdotes or folk tales), in the fire-lit winter afternoons, with the crackle of wood and the crackling of sparks; or, in the August-heated, shuttered room, with the midday drowsy silence brought home more completely by the never flagging saw of the cicalas on the vine-bearing poplars, by the uniform clatter of the wooden frame crushing the brittle silvery hemp straw in the dark courtyard outside. This manner of setting they have had; and a far finer than any that could artificially be given to them. In order to endure, they had, these ideas, to be removed out of all this living frame-work; to be written down, that is to say, to be made quite lifeless and inorganic, and dry and stiff, like some stuffed animal or bird. And when it came to sorting them, to preparing them to show to other folk; the vague melancholy sense of how different they now looked, my poor art thoughts all dreary in their

abstractness, from what they had been when they had first come into my head; this sense of difference made me wish and try to replace them in a setting, an artificial one, which should in a manner be equivalent to that original real setting of place and moment, and individuality and digression: equivalent as an acre of garden, with artificial rocks, streams, groves, grottoes, places for losing your way, flower-beds etc., is equivalent for all the country you can travel over in five or six years. I have done as best I could, merely to satisfy my own strong feeling that art questions should always be discussed in the presence of some definite work of art, if art and its productions are not to become mere abstractions, logical counters wherewith to reckon; also, that discussions should be, what real discussions are, a gradual unravelling of tangled questions, either alone or with others' assistance, not a mere exposition of a cut and dry system. I have always, in putting together these notes, had a vision of pictures or statues or places, had a sound of music in my mind, or a page of a book in my memory; I have always thought, in arranging these discussions, of the real individuals with whom I should most willingly have them: I have always felt that some one else was by my side to whom I was showing, explaining, answering; hence, the use of the second person plural, of which I have vainly tried to be rid: it is not the oracular *we* of the printed book, it is the *we* of myself and those with whom, for whom, I am speaking; it is the constantly felt dualism of myself and my companion.

Thus much of the form into which, as the only one which, however imperfectly, suited my liking, I have worked these notes, taken from out of the confusion of my commonplace books. Now, as to the notes, or rather as to the ideas which they embody. These ideas, I repeat, are not a system; they are mere fragmentary thinkings out of æsthetic questions. Yet, they have, taken altogether, a certain uniformity of

tendency, a certain logical shape: they look like a system. But if a logical shape they have, it is not because they have been deliberately fitted into each other, but because they have been homogeneously evolved; if a system they appear, it is because the same individual mind, in its attempt to solve a series of closely allied problems, must solve them in a self-consistent way. Hence, while dreading beyond all things to cramp my still growing, and therefore altering, ideas in the limits of a system, I find that I have, nevertheless, evolved for myself a series of answers to separate questions, which constitute a sort of art-philosophy. An art-philosophy entirely unabstract, unsystematic, essentially personal, because evolved unconsciously, under the pressure of personal circumstances, and to serve the requirements of personal tendencies. I have, of course, read a good deal about art, perhaps more than other people; and I have consciously and unconsciously assimilated a good deal of the books that I read; but I have never deliberately accepted (except in the domain of art-history and evolution, of which I have not treated in this book which deals only of art in its connection with the individual artist and his public) a whole theory, and set myself either to developing or correcting it: the ideas of others enter largely into the answers to my self-questionings, but they do so because they had become part and parcel of my own thought; and the questions and their answers have always been asked by myself and answered by myself. For, with respect to æsthetic training, I have been circumstanced differently from most writers on the subject, nay, from most readers of our generation. I was taught as little about art, I heard as little talk about pictures, statues, or music, as any legendary calvinist child of the 17th century; I jostled art of one kind or another as much as any child well can: I was familiar with art, cared about it (to the extent of requiring it) before well knowing that art existed: reversing the training of these days of culture and

eclecticism and philosophy, according to which one usually knows all about art, all about its history, ethics, philosophy, schools, epochs, moral value, poetic meaning, and so forth, before one knows art itself, long before one cares a jot for it. To me, art was neither a technical study, nor a philosophic puzzle, nor a rhetorical theme, nor a fashionable craze: it was something natural, familiar; indifferent at first, then enjoyed; only later read and thought about. It was only when I began to read what other people had thought and felt on the subject, that I began to discover (with surprise and awe) that there was something rare, wonderful, exotic, sublime, mysterious, ineffable about art. I read a great many books about all the arts, and about each art in particular, from Plato to Lessing, from Reynolds to Taine, from Hegel to Ruskin; I read, re-read, annotated, extracted, compared, refuted; I filled copy books with transcendental, romantic, and positivistic æsthetics; I began to feel, to understand art and all its wonderful mysteries; I began to be able to express in words all the vague sublimities which I felt. Any one reading my notes, hearing my conversation, would have sworn that I was destined to become an art philosopher. But it was not to be. Much as I read, copied, annotated, analysed, imitated, I could not really take in any of the things which I read; or if I took them in, they would remain pure literary flourishes. As soon as I got back into the presence of art itself, all my carefully acquired artistic philosophy, mystic, romantic, or transcendental, was forgotten: I looked at pictures and statues, and saw in them mere lines and colours, pleasant or unpleasant; I listened to music, and when, afterwards, I asked myself what strange moods it had awakened in my soul, what wondrous visions it had conjured up in my mind, I discovered that, during that period of listening, my mind had been a complete blank, and that all I could possibly recollect were notes. My old original prosaic, matter-of-fact feeling about art, as something simple, straightforward, enjoyable, always

persisted beneath all the metaphysics and all the lyrism with which I tried to crush it. I continued, indeed, to study art, to think about what it really was; but gradually I perceived that this thinking of mine, instead of developing my faculties for seeing in art all the wonderful things seen in it by others, tended more and more to confirm my original childish impression that art was a simple thing to be simply enjoyed. My thinking was mainly negative: instead of discovering new things in art, I discovered every day the absence in it of some of the strange properties with which I had learned to invest it; I perceived more and more distinctly that half of the ideas of æstheticians had merely served to hide the real nature of the art about which they wrote; I understood that while analysing psychological meanings in pictures, they were shutting their eyes to the form and the colour; that while they were dreaming about woods and lakes, and love and death, they were not listening to the music. I gradually took in the fact that most writers on art were simply substituting psychological or mystic or poetic enjoyment, due to their own literary activities, for the simple artistic enjoyment which was alone and solely afforded by art itself. I saw that the more value any work of art possessed in itself, and the greater the amount of pleasure which it could afford, the more extraneous and impertinent was the sort of interest with which æstheticians tried to invest it. I became aware that writers, being unable to awaken with their machinery of thoughts and feelings and words the activities awakened by the intrinsic qualities, visible or audible, of statues or pictures or music, had unconsciously substituted an appeal to other mental activities with which the works of art had at best but little connection. This gradual discovery amused me, but it also made me indignant. Had mankind appeared to me to be merely placidly enjoying as artistic effects those which were not artistic effects at all, it would have been a mere matter for amusement; but it seemed to me that as a

consequence of this mankind was entirely missing much of the enjoyment which art could give, and, moreover, which could be given only by art. Besides, art was for ever attempting really to produce those imaginary, imagined effects: sculpture was trying to give psychological amusement, music was trying to play tragedies and paint landscapes, and write religious meditations; and in so doing art was incapacitating itself for its real work, even as mankind was incapacitating itself for appreciating the real powers of art. Hence, in so far as I thought at all about art in its absolute relations to artist and public (as distinguished from art as a psychological, historical, merely scientific study) my thoughts all tended towards getting rid of those foreign, extra-artistic, irrelevant interests which æstheticians have since the beginning of time interposed between art and those who are intended to enjoy it; my work has, unconsciously enough, been to logically justify that perfectly simple, direct connection between art and ourselves, which was the one I had felt, as a child, before learning all the wonderful fantastications of art philosophers. My own art philosophy is therefore simply to try and enjoy in art what art really contains, to obtain from art all that it can give, by refraining from asking it to give what it cannot. To this end have tended all those most harum-scarum notes, written during the last six years, which I have here collected and tried to group according to the particular art, or the particular portion of an art, to which they referred. Some are about painting, some about music, some about poetry, some about art in general, some inextricably combined and mixed up with other subjects. They have been written at different times, hence with varying amount of experience and information; occasionally they may even be contradictory in a trifle. Thus, when I wrote the notes on musical expression incorporated in the essay called after Hoffmann's Kapell-Meister Kreisler, I was not yet acquainted with the discoveries of Mr. Herbert

Spencer on the subject; discoveries which have infinitely cleared my ideas, and which serve to correct, in the adjoining essay called *Cherubino*, much that was vague, and perhaps equivocal, in my earlier notes. Had I been constructing a system, I should have recast all the old (or suppressed all the new); but I am merely collecting notes, so I have let them stand as they were written. My object is not to teach others, but to show them how far I have taught myself, and how far they may teach themselves. I must always return to my comparison of the copy books of the boy attending a course of lectures: this is not all that I conceive can be said on the subject; it is merely as much as I have been able to understand thereof; and the more I have listened and questioned, the more what I have understood has become connected within itself and seemed to indicate connections with unstudied problems belonging to different orders of thought. Thus, after having thought and written only about art; about what each art can and cannot do, about the relations of the various arts amongst each other and to their artists, I have gradually found myself thinking and writing about what art as a whole can do and should do; about the relations between all art and life taken as a whole: after the purely æsthetical questions has come the question, no æsthetical question this time—what value, in this world of good and evil, of doubt and certainty, of action and inaction, in this world struggling for physical and social and moral good, what value have æsthetical questions at all? And with these notes, written latest of all, and threatening to divert me more than they should from my present field of study to the wider, nobler, far more intricate and dangerous field of ethics, I have thought it best to close my book; since these latest notes supply the explanation—felt all along, but only vaguely formulated till now—of my whole æsthetic, because of my whole philosophic, tendencies: the greatest amount of good work to be obtained from everything, and this possible only by all being

seen in its right light, and consequently used in its right place.

This is what my new book is, and this is how such it has come to be. And just because it is what it is, because it is not a mere piece of work, not a mere something made by me and thrust away, in its systematic cut and dryness, from my living personality; but a certain proportion of my growing, altering, enlarging, disjointed, helter-skelter thoughts, of the thoughts which come to me whether I will or not; because it is not a real book but a collection of notes, do I wish it to be read by you. So now I tie together and make a packet of all the pages of proofs and sheets of MS., and send it all to you. The summer has come round: the tall grass, brocaded like some rough, rich mediæval stuff, with yellow buttercups and blue sage flowers, is already beginning to be scythed and raked away; the last clusters of hawthorn, which, a few days since, still stood out white and crisp against the blue of the sky, fall to pieces as soon as one tries to gather them; the Tuscan country has already got its summer sheen of pale green poppied wheat, and pale green budding vine, and dim blue distance, and pervading faint yellow haze; the hills of Siena are green with sprouting arbutus and ilex and fern and hellebore bells; the oakwoods that we saw russet under the reddening light, are in tender, yellowish new leaf; the olives are in blossom from which we broke the fruit-laden twigs; it seems so long, so very long, since that soft grey winter day when last we were together, looking down from the battlements of the old Sienese villa; and yet the memory of that winter day seems as real as the present reality of this summer one; and haunts me still, as I write these words, even as it has haunted me throughout the putting together of this book, which I have called, from that haunting remembrance, and, perhaps, a little also that the association might make it more pleasant in your eyes, by the name of that strange, isolated, ilex-circled castle villa

of Belcaro. And now, unroll the tight-rolled manuscript and smooth out the rumpled proof sheets; read, and tell me whether or not what you have read is ever to be read by any one else.

FLORENCE, *May, 1881*.

THE CHILD IN THE VATICAN.

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There were a lot of children in the Vatican this morning: small barbarians scarce out of the nursery, who should have been at home, at their lessons, or reading fairy books, or carpentering, or doll-educating, or boat-sailing, or amusing themselves in the hundred nondescript ways which we seem to forget (remembering only ready-made toys and ready-made stories) when we grow up. Some were left to their own devices, and scampered, chattering and laughing, through the gallery; jumping up three steps at a time, clambering up to windows, running round isolated statues, feretting into all the little nook and corner rooms, peeping into the lidless sarcophagi and the great porphyry baths, with the rough-hewn rings and lions' heads. The others were being led by their elders: talking in whispers, or silent: demure, weary, vacant, staring about with dreary, vague little faces; these, who were not permitted to rush about like the others, seemed chilled, numbed by a sort of wonder unaccompanied by curiosity, oppressed by a sense of

indefineable desolation. And, indeed, it is a desolate place, this Vatican, with its long, bleak, glaring corridors; its half-lit, chill, resounding halls; its damp little Belvedere Court, where green lichen fills up the fissured pavement; a dreary labyrinth of brick and mortar, a sort of over-ground catacomb of stones, constructed in our art-studying, rather than art-loving times where once—when Michael Angelo was stretched painting on the creaking scaffolding slung from the roof of the Sixtine—the poppies waved scarlet among the trailing vines of the pope's orchard, and the white butterflies, like wind-blown blossoms, swarmed in the tall grass beneath the bending apple trees, and the fire-flies danced in luminous spirals among the wild rose-hedges. A dismal scientific piece of ostentation, like all galleries; a place where art is arranged and ticketed and made dingy and lifeless even as are the plants in a botanic collection. Eminently a place of exile; or worse, of captivity, for all this people of marble: these athletes and nymphs and satyrs, and warriors and poets and gods, who once stood, each in happy independence, against a screen of laurel or ilex branches, or on the sun-heated gable of a temple, where the grass waved in the fissures and the swallows nested, or in a cresset-lit, incense-dim chapel, or high against the blue sky above the bustle of the market place; poor stone captives cloistered in monastic halls and cells, or arranged, like the skeletons of Capuchins, in endless rows of niche, shelf, and bracket. Galleries are necessary things, to save pictures and statues (or the little remaining of them) from candle smoke, sacristans' ladders, damp, worms, and street boys, but they are evil necessities; and the sense of a sort of negative vandalism always clings to them, specially to the galleries of statues, so uninhabited, so utterly sepulchral. Going to a gallery of sculpture, we must be prepared to isolate what we wish to enjoy, to make for it a fitting habitation in our fancy: it is like going to read a page of Homer, or the Georgics, or Shelley, in some great musty,

dusty library, redolent of crumbling parchment and forgotten rubbish. Such is this Vatican, even for us accustomed to it and knowing what we do and do not want: for us grown-up creatures, familiar with such matters, and with powers of impression quite deadened by culture. What, therefore, must not this Vatican be for a child: a quite small, ignorant barbarian such as has never before set its feet in a gallery, to whom art and antiquity have been mere names, to whom all this world of tintless stone can give but a confused, huge, overpowering impression of dreariness and vacuity. An impression composed of negative things: of silence and absence of colour, of lifelessness, of not knowing what it all is or all means; a sense of void and of unattractive mystery which chills, numbs the little soul into a sort of emotionless, inactive discomfort. What we were, how we felt, how we understood and vaguely guessed things, as children, we can none of us know. The recollection of ourselves when we were so different from ourselves, this tradition handed down from a dim, far-off creature of whom we know, without feeling it, that he, was our *ego*, this mysterious tradition remains to us only in fragments, has been printed into our memory only by desultory patches: at one point we can read, at another the ink has not taken; we know as distinctly as the sensation and impressions of this very morning this or that sensation or impression of so many, many years ago; and we ask ourselves at the same time—"how did such another thing affect our mind?"—with the utter hopelessness of answer with which we should try to look into the soul of a dog or a cat. Thus it is with our small barbarian child in the Vatican: how did it feel? Alas, we should, in order to know, first have to find that little obscure, puzzled soul again; and where is it gone? this thing which may once have been ourselves, whither has it disappeared, when has it been extinguished? So we can only speculate and reconstruct on a general basis. Certain it is that to this child, to any child, this Vatican must have been the most

desolate, the most unintelligible of places. For, strange as it may seem, this clear and simple art of sculpture, born when the world was young and had not yet learned to think and talk in symbolical riddles, this apparently so outspoken art is, to the childish soul of our days, the most silent art of any. To the child, the modern child, it is speechless; it knows not a word of the language understood by the child's fancy. For this fancy language of our modern child is the language of colour, of movement, of sound, of suggestion, of all the broken words of modern thought and feeling: and the statue has none of these. The child does not recognise in it anything familiar: these naked, or half-naked, limbs are things which the child has never seen, at least, never observed; they do not, in their unfamiliarity, their vagueness, constitute an individual character; the dress, the furrowed face, the coloured hair, the beard, these are the things which the child knows, and by which it recognises; but in these vague, white things, with their rounded white cheek, and clotted white hair, with their fold of white drapery about them, the child recognises nothing: men? women? it does not ask: for it, they are mere things, figures cut out of stone. And thus, in their vagueness, their unfamiliarity, they seem also to be all alike, even as, on first acquaintance, we sometimes ask ourselves whether those sisters or brothers we know are four or only three; for in the unknown there is no diversity. Mysterious things, therefore, these statues for the child; but theirs is a mystery of mere vacuity, one which does not haunt, does not seek a solution. For they are dull things, in their dirty whiteness: they are doing nothing, these creatures, merely standing or sitting or leaning, they are looking at nothing with their pupilless white eyes, they have no story to tell, no name to be asked. The child does not say to them, as to the people in pictures, the splendid people in strange colours, and holding strange things, "Who are you? why are you doing that?" It does not even ask or answer itself whether these white things, who

seem to be all the same, are dead or alive: they are not ghosts, they are things which, for aught the child knows or cares, have never been born and never will die. A negation, oppressive and depressing, that is all; and in the infinite multitude of statues in such a place as this Vatican, their sense must become actively painful to the child. Hence, the children we meet either rush headlong through corridor and hall, looking neither to the right nor to the left, or let themselves be passively led through, listless, depressed, glancing vaguely about, looking wistfully at the little glimpses of sunlit garden outside, at the clipped box hedges and trim orange trees in the court of the Pine Cone. For there, outside, is life, movement, green; little hedged beds to run round; fountains to be made to spirt aside by sticking fingers into their pipes; walls on which to walk balanced, and benches to jump over: there is field and food for the child's fancy, and here, within, among all these cut stones, there is none.

Hence it is that the child, who will one day become ourselves, rarely cares to return to these sculpture galleries; or, if it care to return to any, it is to mixed galleries like those of Florence, where, instead of the statues, it looks at the pictures. And out of pictures, out of the coarse blurs of colour in picture-books, out of the black, huddled, infinitively suggestive engravings in bible and book of travel; out of fine glossy modern pictures which represent a definite place, or tell a definite story; out of all this, confused with haunting impressions, of things seen or heard of (the strange, deeply significant sights and words of our childhood), do we get our original, never really alterable ideas and feelings about art; for much as we may clip, trim, and bedizen our minds with borrowed things, we can never change, never even recast its solid material: a compact, and seemingly homogeneous soul mass, made up of tightly-pressed, crushed odds and ends of impression; broken,

confused, pounded bits of the sights and sounds and emotions of our childhood. To the statues we return only quite late, when this long-formed, long-moulded soul of ours has been well steeped in every sort of eclectic and artificial culture; has been saturated with modern art and modern criticism, with mysticism and realism and sentiment and cynicism, with Dante and Zola, and Mozart and Wagner and Offenbach, saturated, with every kind of critically distilled æsthetic essence, till there is not a flavour and not a scent, good or bad, sweet or foul, which may not be perceived in this strange soul of ours. Then we return to the statues; and, having imbibed (like all things) a certain amount of Hellenic, Pagan, antique feeling, we try also to assimilate the spirit of the statues of Phidias or Praxiteles; we expound the civilisation, the mode of thought; we trace the differences of school, we approve and condemn, we speak marvellously well, with subtlety or passion; we imagine all manner of occult, ineffable virtues and vices in this antique art, we dabble deliciously in alternate purity and impurity (this being the perfection of artistic pleasure), as we even occasionally, for a few moments, feel actual, simple, unreasoning, wholesome pleasure in the sight of the old broken marbles. All this we do, and most often are therewith satisfied. Yet if, weighing our artistic likings and dislikings, comparing together our feelings towards so many and so various manifestations, trying to determine what is fresh and wholesome food to our depraved æsthetic (and æsthetico-moral) palate, and what is mere highly flavoured, spicy or nauseous drug-stuff, if, in such a moment of doubt, we ask ourselves, overheard by no one, whether in reality this antique art is, in the life of our feelings, at all important, comforting, influential? we shall, for the most part, whisper back to ourselves that it is not so in the very least. But could it ever have been? Could this, or any art have been for us more than merely one of a hundred feebly enjoyed, more or less exotic mental luxuries; than an historic fossil, by study

of which, as with the bone of a pterodactyl or an ichthyosaurus, we can amuse ourselves reconstructing the appearance and habits of a long dead, once living civilisation? Or might these statues have been much more to us? Might they, perhaps, have shaped and trained our souls with their unspoken lessons?

Well, once upon a time (let us invent a fairy tale), a child was brought to the Vatican: just such an one, only perhaps a trifle more wayward, than those we met this morning, demurely led about, or scampering through the galleries: its name signifies nothing, suffice it that it was a child. Now, it so happened, that upon that day the statues (who, as our forefathers of the middle ages knew) are merely stone imprisoned demons, dethroned gods of antiquity, were bent upon getting some small amount of amusement in their dreary lives: all the more dreary since the great joyful hope of restoration in the hearts of men which they had conceived when Winckelmann and Goethe came to them and adored, had been slowly disappointed by seeing that what men cared for was not them, but merely their own impertinent theories and grandiloquent speeches. The Statue-demons were sick of the bitter amusement of watching the follies of their pretended or deluded worshippers. So they sorely wanted excitement, diversion of some sort; and in their idleness, they capriciously determined to amuse themselves, no longer with grown men, but with children. So, as a toy for the moment, they singled out this particular child we are speaking of, who was wandering wearily through the gallery, overpowered like its companions by the sense of negativeness, of greyness, of silence, of want of character and movement and story, and as it passed them, the statue-demons looked at each other with their pupilless eyes, as much as to say: "This is the one we shall take," and determined to cast a spell upon it which would make it theirs. How they did is more than any of us

can tell: there was a little gurgling fountain in the garden outside, where a broken-snouted dragon spirted a trickle of water through the maiden-hair choking up the basin, and of this water the child did drink a little in the palm of its hand, the rest running up its sleeve; there was also an old noseless Vertumnus in a corner, on whose pedestal a great tuft of wild grass had shot up, and round whose arms and neck an ivy plant had cast its green trailing leaves; and one of these bitter glossy leaves that child did certainly munch; but whether the charm was in the water or the leaf, or in neither, and only a mysterious spell, a sort of invisible winged seed of passion which they cast direct into that little soul, no one may ever decide. Be it as it may, the child remained for a while conscious of nothing at all, never dreaming that it had in any way come in contact with that demon world imprisoned in the stone. It lived its child life of romping and day dreams and lessons and punishments, and, with its companions, fretted to get away from this dreary, horrible Rome of the popes: this warm, wet place with its sordid houses, its ruins embedded in filth and nettles; its tawdry, stuffy churches, filled with snuffling of monks and jig-quavering of strange, cracked, sickening-sweet voices; its whole atmosphere of decay and sloth, as of a great marsh-pond, sprinkled with bright green weed and starred with flaunting nauseous yellow lilies. The child wondered at all these things: dug bits of porphyry and serpentine out of gutters, collected pieces of potshard from the Palatine; read and re-read the stories of shipwrecks and red Indians and volcanoes: played in dressing-gowns and shawls, at processions of cardinals and prelates, and, with yelling companions in pinafores and napkins, at church music, with tremendous time-beating with rolls of paper; laughed and pouted and quarrelled as children do; quite unconscious of being the chosen one, the changeling, the victim of the statues. But little by little, into its everyday life, stole strange symptoms; sometimes there would come like

a sudden stop, as of a boat caught in the rushes, a consciousness of immobility in the midst of swirling, flowing movement, a giddy brain-swimming feeling; and then things went on again just as before. But the symptoms returned, and others with them. What was the matter? A vagueness, a want; a seeking, a clinging, but seeking for, clinging to the unknown. In the evenings of early spring, when the children had returned from their scrambling walks, and were waiting for supper, chattering, looking at books, or strumming tunes; this child would watch the bank of melting colours, crimson, and smoke-purple and gold, left by the sun behind the black dome of St. Peter's; and as the white vapours rose from the town below and gathered on the roofs like a veil, it would feel a vague, acheless pain within it; and at any stray, trifling word or bar of dance music, its eyes and its whole little soul would fill with a mist of tears. The spell cast by the statues was not idle, the mysterious philter which they had poured into it was working throughout that childish soul: the child was in love; in love with what it had hated; in love intensely, passionately, with Rome. And as a part of Rome it loved, blindly, for no other reason, that desolate Vatican; to the statues it returned, and in a way, grew up in their presence. And one day the child looked at itself, and perceived that it was a child no longer; knew all of a sudden, that in those drowsy years of childish passion and day dreams, it had been learning something which others did not know. For it heard one day a few pages of a symphony of Mozart's; the first it had ever heard save much more modern music; and those bars of symphony were intelligible words, conveyed to the child a secret. And the secret was: "we are the brethren, the sounding ones of the statues: and all we who are brethren, whether in stone, or sound, or colour, or written word, shall to thee speak in such a way that thou recognise us, and distinguish us from others; and thou shalt love and believe only in us and those of our kin." Then the child went forth from the Vatican, and went in