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The Art of Beauty

Mrs H. R. Haweis



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THE ART OF BEAUTY



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THE ART OF BEAUTY

BY
MRS H. R. HAWEIS



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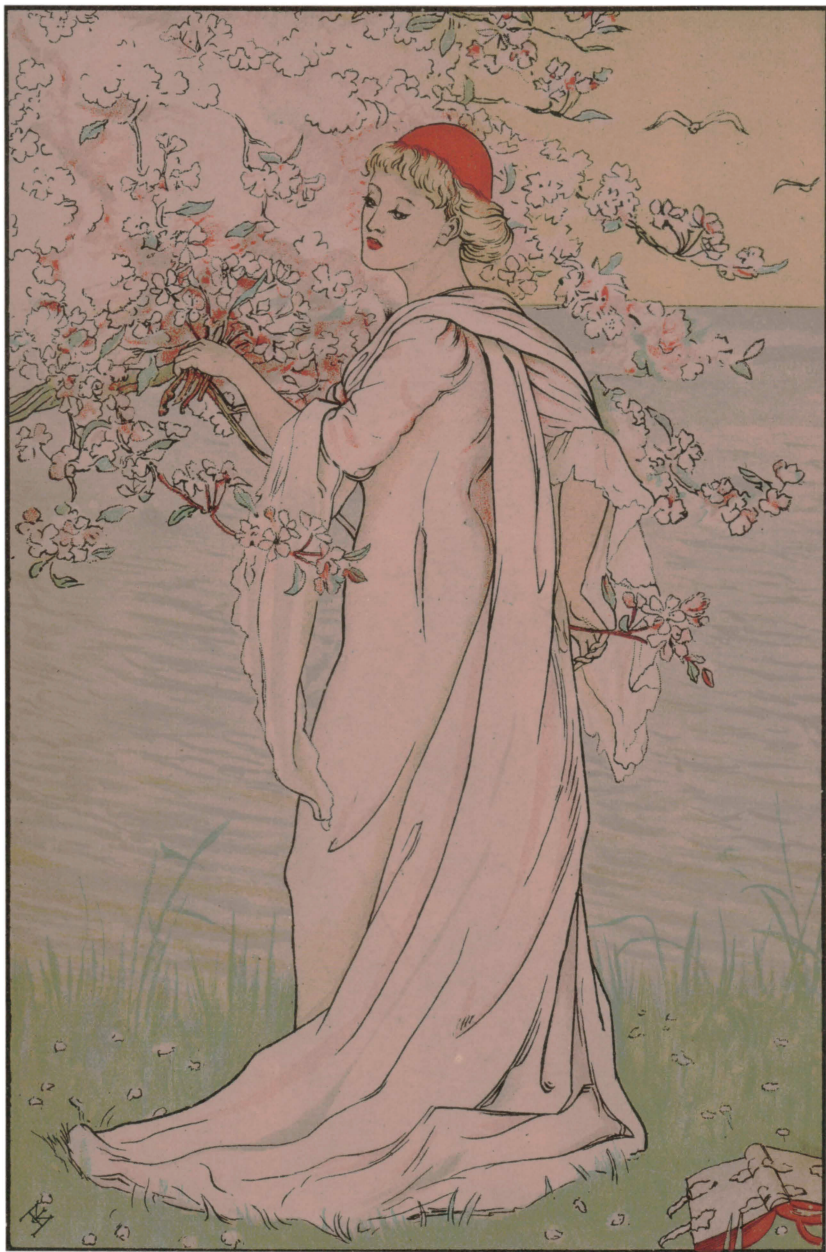
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THE ART OF BEAUTY

δοίητέ μοι καλῶ γένεσθαι
τ' ἄνδοθεν· ἐξωθεν δὲ ὅσα
ἔχω τοῖς ἐντὸς εἶναι μοι
φ.λια.

SOCRATES.—*Phædrus.*





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THE ART OF BEAUTY

BY

MRS H. R. HAWEIS

AUTHOR OF 'CHAUCER FOR CHILDREN



WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

London

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORDS.

THE basis of the present book is a series of articles which appeared some years ago in 'St. Paul's Magazine,' and which I have often been asked to reprint. I have considerably re-arranged and amplified the subject matter ; but whilst I have traversed a wide field I can lay claim to neither a fixed scheme nor a scientific method. Still I cannot but hope that the following pages may be helpful to some who have never thought much about the influence or the art of Beauty ; and I may perhaps add that among the portraits derived from nature there are no photographs from life.



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first Book

Beauty and Dress





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CHAPTER I.

Pleasure of Beauty.

THE culture of beauty is everywhere a legitimate art. But the beauty and adornment of the human form, the culture of personal beauty, and, in our age, especially of female beauty, is of the first interest and importance. It is impossible to separate people from their looks. A woman's natural quality is to attract, and having attracted, to enchain ; and how influential she may be for good or for evil, the history of every age makes clear. We may add, therefore, that the culture of beauty is the natural right of every woman.

It is not 'wicked' to take pains with oneself. In the present day our altered system of education, and an improved conception of woman's capacities, may have a little blinded us. We have begun to think of the mind almost to the exclusion of the body. It is, perhaps, time to notice that the new views, whilst pointing to one truth, are in danger of eclipsing another : not, as

some thoughtless people believe, that mental culture can ever harm a woman, or do aught but confer an added grace, but that the exclusive culture of one good thing involves a deplorable loss, whilst two good things do but enhance each other's lustre. However important the mind may be in fitting woman for her place in the world, either individually or as the companion of man, the body is hardly less important; and, after all, the old-fashioned notion that a woman's first duty is to be beautiful, is one that is justified by the utter impossibility of stamping it out.

I should be the last to imply that physical beauty is the only thing that can make a woman attractive. Many are attractive and magnetic without beauty as it is commonly understood, and some are too useful to provoke criticism; but physical beauty remains one of the sweetest and strongest qualities, and one which can scarcely be too highly valued or too falsely despised.

The immortal worth of beauty lies in the universal pleasure it gives. We all love it instinctively. We all feel, more or less, that beauty (or what we think beauty) is a sort of necessity to us, like the elements. One of the best proofs of this is the fact that we generally invest with ideal beauty any face or thing we are fond of. The beauty of the skies and seas soothes and uplifts our hearts; the beauty of faces passes into

our souls, and shapes our moods and acts. What we love is probably always worth cultivating ; and when we love what after all has an enormous refining influence, its cultivation may even become a duty.

The power and sanctity of physical, as well as moral beauty, has been recognised in all ages. The early myth of Beauty worshipped and respected by beasts of prey is a suggestive and touching instance of this. The Greeks considered beauty so essentially a divine boon, that the mother prayed to Zeus that her child might be before all things beautiful. Beauty seemed to the Greek the visible sign of an inward grace, and an expression of divine good-will.

Thus it naturally came to be cultivated at Athens with an enthusiasm and devotion such as it is difficult for us to realise. It was a part of their religion, and the common phrase, *καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν*, the Good and the Beautiful, embodied the fact.

It may seem strange that the Greeks, whose civilisation had made them so sensitive to beauty of a certain order, should have remained to a great extent untouched by other orders of beauty which we value so deeply ; but it is even more singular that we who know all that they knew, and have cultivated a susceptibility to sound, as in music, and colour, as in painting, far more keen and complex than theirs, should have become

so careless of what they held highest—human beauty, and surroundings in so far as they affect human beauty.

The wisest of men has called physical beauty a jewel of gold, the value of which is not destroyed, but only checked, by its being occasionally found in a swine's snout ; and though decking it with gold will never make a swine other than a swine, it is possible to cultivate the inner and the outer grace together, and it is possible to actually open a way for the development of the mental and moral good by smoothing the physical veil which encumbers and distorts it.

In fact, outward ugliness is an impediment in more ways than one ; influencing the character in an unmistakable degree (hereafter to be shown), and influencing surroundings and the chances of life, far more than is generally admitted.

The part which beauty played in the Middle Ages was a very real one. Woman, whose loveliness so swayed men, was at one time treated with something like divine honours, mistress as she was of the chief civilising influence of the time. Books being few, and secular education nearly confined to woman, her mere knowledge gave her almost unlimited power over her rude, warlike bread-winner.

Whilst he could only fight in battle, or wring treasure by force from the traveller crossing his domain,

she could often write or read a letter. While he could but teach the young hands to war, and the fingers to fight, to manage a fierce horse, or to bring down the quarry, the whole mental and moral training of the children and the household were in her hands. She could instruct them in the mysteries of their faith, the duties of their position, and teach them the hundred arts and occupations which engrossed the time of woman when shops were not. Knowledge is power; beauty and knowledge combined are well-nigh all-powerful; both belonged to woman, and she was, for good or evil, the incentive to action, the prize in the tourney, the leech who cured the sick and tended the wounded, the ruler of the servants, and the keeper of the castle keys. She it was who, pointing to courage and courtesy as the price of her grace, diffused courage and courtesy throughout the land. She it was who fixed the tone of morals and excellence in the court in which she reigned as queen. And she it is who (though books and education have come her master's way at last) still possesses a vast power for good or ill, a power of which her beauty in the abstract is the pivot and corner-stone.

Darwin has some very curious remarks in his book on the 'Descent of Man,' on the different standards of beauty.

'Beauty seems to some people to mean a very pro-

nounced form of whatever type of feature or hue we are most accustomed to ; in short, the exaggeration of characteristic peculiarities. Thus the African savage with his black hide, his large thick mouth, small eyes, flat nose, and heavy ears, considers that woman most lovely who has the blackest skin, the thickest mouth, the least apparent eyes, &c. We Western nations, whose characteristics are a small oval face, coloured pink and white, large eyes, prominent nose, and narrow jaw, think the excess of these characteristics to be *beauty*, and the deviation from them, *ugliness*.

‘The African savage considers the Englishwoman hideous, with her front teeth unextracted and white ‘like a dog’s,’ her lips untorn by either a copper ring or a piece of wood, and her cheeks coloured ‘like a potato flower.’ The Englishman recoils from a Nubian lady, whose smile brings her lips on a level with her eyebrows, and draws her nose back to her ears.’

There is no doubt a great deal in this theory—much more than we can at once realise—that beauty of form, like the colours of the prism, is non-existent except in our own eyes and minds. I do not, however, endorse it. I believe that there are abstract rules of beauty distinct from the charm of the habitual. But however this may be—for I am not concerned with definitions of what constitutes beauty—still on the lowest ground, the

pleasure excited in the mind by what *seems* to each to be beauty—even supposing it to be a flat nose—is so immense, that it has always been held worth living, and fighting, and dying for.

Is it not then a kind of duty to make life beautiful—to disguise deformity, to provide by care and forethought for others, a pleasure which costs so little and brings in so much even to the giver, that one is tempted at times to fancy vanity itself but the abuse or exaggeration of a natural and noble quality—since it seeks, in the pride of beauty, a possession which tends to refine and elevate the mind, and increase the sum of human happiness in a number of direct and indirect ways.

Pain of Ugliness.

Those whose taste has been cultivated by having beautiful things always about them, are incredibly sensitive to awkward forms, inappropriate colours, and in-harmonious combinations. To such persons, certain rooms, certain draperies, certain faces, cause not only the mere feeling of disapprobation, but even a kind of physical pain. Sometimes they might be unable to explain what affected them so unpleasantly, or how they were affected, but they feel an uneasy sense of oppression and discomfort—they would fain flee away, and let the

simple skies or the moon with her sweet stare, soothe them into healthy feeling again. This sense of oppression would probably be neither understood nor believed in by the ordinary run of educated people, in England, at least. But it is very real to those whose passionate care for the beautiful makes it a kind of *necessity* to them—and they are the subtle and delicate souls that build up the art-crown of a nation. The uneasiness to which I allude, is very similar to what we all feel more or less, according to our constitutional susceptibility, in the presence of unsympathetic persons.

