

IDENTITY IN ART OF ALL KINDS.

THE GENESIS OF ART FORM. An Essay in Comparative Aesthetics, Showing the Identity of the Sources, Methods, and Effects of Composition in Music, Poetry, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. By George Lansing Raymond, L. H. D. New-York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The variety and unity of art are illustrated in Prof. Raymond's book in a manner that possesses not only singular value, but singular charm. In a spirit at once scientific and that of the true artist he pierces through the manifestations of art to their sources, and shows (by demonstrations so clear that he who runs may read) the relations, intimate and essential, between painting, sculpture, poetry, music, and architecture. He deals neither with special styles nor individual methods; he seeks rather to uncover the laws that underlie style and method, to show their origin in nature, and to trace the means by which man's first conceptions of their relation to art were elaborated into its more complicated forms.

He begins with the assertion that classification is the basis of method both in science and art. From this he goes on to analyze such elements of art and nature as unity and comparison, variety and contrast, complexity, complement, order, confusion, counteraction, principality, &c. It is impossible to do more than give these names, for the explanations and connecting lines of thought are so interdependent and so concisely stated that to attempt to describe them would be to quote the book entire. Let it suffice to say that we think those who read it will find their views of all art, and of any form of art that interests them more than others, enlarged and elevated. Mannerisms and fashions shrink into their real pettiness before this fine criticism that does not destroy but merely ignores all that is removed aside from the essential. There are not more than two or three instances of impatience at disobedience to first principles to be found in the volume, and these, in every case but one, are general. Nevertheless, the stimulating spirit of disapprobation of what is trivial and inconsequent is felt on every page.

A great deal of "beautiful language" has been written about art, and around it and over it and under it a certain mysterious jargon of the studio has been invented that has its meaning to the initiated and impresses the public as a foreign tongue, but nothing can be more eloquent to the ear of one who loves music or poetry or painting for the satisfaction of soul that he finds in it than the noble simplicity with which it is made to appear not merely an outer and unnecessary, though desirable, ornamentation of a world that could do very well without it, but a component part of a universe that moves in unity through laws essential to its whole. The writer says in his preface:

"In the degree in which the conclusions reached in this book are accurate, and appeal as such to the reader's judgment, it will make evident that the effects for which the artist seeks are due to laws that operate far more inflexibly than sometimes it is supposed; it will suggest that originality, while wider in its scope than those imagine who confound the methods of the master artists with their manner, has, too, its limits; and it will reveal beyond a doubt why many works of so-called art produced to-day, because devoid of almost every element of art, can never be of permanent interest, as well as why, for reasons just the opposite, so many of those that are now the classics of the past have charms that never can be lost."

There may be readers of this volume who will think Prof. Raymond has left inspiration too completely out of consideration, who will find the procedure of his reasoning too orderly, and who will say that there is an element that enters into art transcending all rules that cannot be classified or analyzed. This is the class to whom belongs the motto, "An artist is born, not made." They value individuality in art work above everything else, and are somewhat impatient of any attempt to relegate art among the things that can be explained and accounted for in a logical and consistent way. To this class particularly Prof. Raymond's work will prove helpful, provided they bring themselves to approach it with an open mind. It should be noticed, in the first place, that the book is in no sense a textbook from which one is expected to learn to paint a picture or write a poem or compose music, although a painter, writer, or composer ought any one of them to do better and more serious work for having had his observation of the fundamental rules and essential methods of his art awakened or, it might chance, confirmed by Prof. Raymond's exposition of what separates dignified and permanent art from that which is unworthy and profitless. That the great

masters observed these rules and methods without, perhaps, being conscious of one of them Prof. Raymond points out.

"It is a striking illustration of the rationality which characterizes the action of the mind when working naturally and instinctively, though without knowledge of reasons, that the forms of all the arts as developed in primitive ages should fulfill this rational requirement, [that of developing unity by putting like with like.] It is an equally striking illustration of the irrationality and departure from nature into which too much self-conscious ratiocination may plunge the same mind that in our own more enlightened age art forms should not only be tolerated but praised, in poems and buildings, for instance, in which the principle of putting like with like has been utterly disregarded."

In our opinion this difficulty springs from not carrying the reasoning far enough, rather than from reasoning too much. Beginning with complexity and reasoning backward, we do not seem to get so far as simplicity, except, perhaps, in cases where a man of scientific mind goes thoroughly to work to classify phenomena in the physical world, or, as with Herbert Spencer, in the more devious regions of the mind.

As proof—in default of quotations, which cannot well be made from so connected a work—of the essential simplicity of Prof. Raymond's method, we venture to assert that the illustrations he gives of the workings of the fundamental laws of art in music will be entirely clear and very interesting to the painter and, vice versa, that a person ignorant of architecture will find himself fitted to criticize buildings in a way that will educate and elevate his taste to high standards, while in the analysis of poetical forms it may as well be granted that Prof. Raymond is at his best. The whole forms an interesting and valuable contribution to thought and literature—large in motive and conception and fine in execution. The wood engravings that illustrate the pages are good and excellently adapted to representing the thought of the writer. The last words of the book contain a suggestion that another volume which will deal with the more complicated phases of the same subject may be forthcoming. We hope that this is so.