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# GREEK LINES

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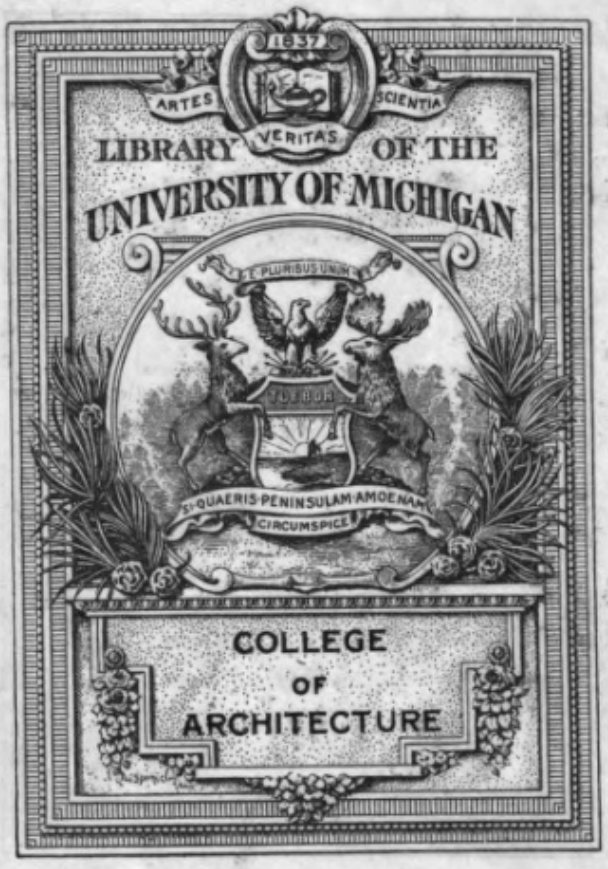


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# GREEK LINES

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## *AND OTHER ARCHITECTURAL ESSAYS*

BY

HENRY VAN BRUNT
FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1893

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To

WILLIAM ROBERT WARE,

THIS BOOK,

AN INADEQUATE RESULT OF MANY FRUITFUL YEARS OF

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS WITH

HIM, IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR.

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# PREFACE.

THIS little book contains a selection of architectural essays which have been written at intervals during an active professional career of more than thirty years. The kindly indulgence with which they have been received by my brethren in the craft, and the friendly curiosity with which they have been regarded by the laity, may be attributed perhaps mainly to the fact that, unlike most literary expositions of the subject, they have been developed rather from practice than from theory, and that they had the advantage of that sort of sincerity which is the natural product of conviction rather than sentiment. I have been encouraged to believe that it might be possible so to collate a few of these papers as to form a sequence, in which, from first to last, there should be evident a more or less orderly development of thought. To this end the earlier

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essays in especial have been largely rewritten, and all have been, so far as practicable, brought to date. The essay on Blois is the only one of the series which now makes its first appeal to the public. Perhaps, in their present consecutive form, these papers may have enough of symmetrical unity to secure for the architectural matters of which they treat a more intelligent popular interest than could be obtained by any sort of disconnected publication.

H. V. B.

KANSAS CITY, Mo., July, 1893.

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# GREEK LINES

AND

# OTHER ARCHITECTURAL ESSAYS.

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## GREEK LINES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON MODERN ARCHITECTURE.

### I.

THE material beauty of the world, as exhibited in the manifold forms, colors, sounds, perfumes, motions of nature, is created for a nobler purpose than only to delight the senses and please the æsthetic faculties. When, according to the suggestions of our merely human passions and instincts, we ease our hearts of love by heaping treasures and the choicest gifts of fancy in the laps of those whom we most dearly cherish, we take no credit to ourselves for such precious prodigalities; for they are the inevitable and disinterested outpourings of affection. They are received as such. When, therefore, we see that all the beneficent energies of nature are

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expressed with a profusion of beauty which is not necessary to their efficient operation, we accept the manifestation, are made happy in the consciousness of being beloved, and, constituted as we are in the image and likeness of God, express our instinctive gratitude in those fine human sympathies which impress the seal of truth on the primary idea of our creation.

But if our

> "little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love"

are a reflection of the divine spirit within us, and if our capacity for enthusiasm, in the primary etymological use of the word — that is, our ability to be possessed or inspired by the spirit of a god, — is one more proof that we are created in the image of Deity, there is still another and more significant mark of relationship.

The human heart, in its best estate, forever yearns *to create*, to give in some form expression and life to those evasive ideals of loveliness which are planted within our consciousness by the aspects of nature. Our instinctive longing to embody these illusive phantoms of beauty is godlike. But the immortal songs which remain unsung, the exquisite idyls which gasp for words, the bewildering and

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restless imagery which seeks in vain the eternal repose of marble or of canvas, — while these reveal the affectionate and divine desires of humanity, they prove, also, how few there are to whom it is given to learn the great lesson of creation. When one arises among us who, like Pygmalion, makes no useless appeal to the Goddess of Beauty for the gift of life for his ideal, and who creates as he was created, we cherish him as a great interpreter of human love. We call him poet, composer, artist, and speak of him reverently as *Master*. We say that his lips have been wet with dews of Hybla; that, like the sage of Crotona, he has heard the music of the spheres; that he comes to us, another Numa, radiant and inspired from the kisses of Egéria.

Thus, as infinite Love begets infinite Beauty, so does infinite Beauty reflect into finite perceptions that image of its divine parentage, which the antique world worshiped under the personification of Astarte, Aphrodite, Venus, and recognized as the *great creative principle* lying at the root of all high Art.

There is a curious passage in Boehme, which relates how Satan, when asked the cause of the enmity of God and his own con-

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sequent downfall, replied, — "I wished to be an Artist." So, according to antique tradition, Prometheus manufactured a man and woman of clay, animated them with fire stolen from the chariot of the sun, and was punished for the crime of creation; Titans chained him to the rocks of the Indian Caucasus for thirty thousand years.

This Ideal, this Aphrodite of old mythologies, still reigns over the world of art, and every truly noble effort of the artist is saturated with her spirit, as with a religion. It is impossible for a true work of art to exist, unless this great creative principle of love is present in its inception, in its execution, in its detail. It must be pervaded with the warmth of human, passionate affection. The skill which we are so apt to worship is but the instrument in the hands of love. It is the means by which this humanity is transferred to the work, and there idealized in the forms of nature. Thus the test of art is in our own hearts. It is not something far away from us, throwing into our presence gleaming reflections from some supernal source of light and beauty; but it is very near to us, — so near that, like the other blessings which lie at our feet, we overlook it in our far-reaching

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searches after the imaginary good. We, poor underlings, have been taught in the school of sad experience the mortal agony of love without skill, the power of perception without the power of utterance. We know how dumb are the sweet melodies of our souls, how fleeting their opulent and dreamy pageantries. But we have not fully learned the utter emptiness and desolation of skill without love. We accept its sounding brass and tinkling cymbals for immortal harmonies. We look reverently upon its tortured marbles, its architectural affectations, its canvases stained with academic knowledge, as revelations of higher intelligence; unaware that if we go down to the quiet places of our own souls, we shall find there the universe reflected, like a microcosm, in the dark wellsprings, and that out of these wellsprings in the deep silence rises the beautiful ideal, Anadyomene, to compensate and comfort us for the vacancy of life. If we know ourselves, it is not to the dogmas of critics, the artificial rules of æsthetics, that we most wisely resort for judgments concerning works of art. Though technical externals, though conventionalities, sophisticated by the complications of modern life, and the address of manipulation naturally take

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possession of our senses and warp our opinions, there are depths of immortal truth within us, rarely sounded, indeed, but which, when dimly revealed in some rare moment of insight, seem to show that we possess a standard and a criterion far nobler than the schools can give us.

The broken statues and columns and traditions and fragmentary classics, which Greece has left us, are so still and tranquil to the eye and ear, that we search in vain for the Delphic wisdom they contain, till we find it echoed in the sympathetic depths of our souls, and repeated in the half-impalpable ideals there. It is in this favored land of art that we must seek for the earliest, the clearest, and the purest external expressions of these ideals, whose existence we but half suspect within us. It is not pleasant, perhaps, to think that we were nearly unconscious of some of the highest capacities of our humanity till we recognized their full expression in the ashes of a distant and dead pagan civilization; that we did not know ourselves till

> "The airy tongues that syllable men's names
> In pathless wildernesses"

uttered knowledge to us among the ruins of Hellas. It is good for us to lend a spiritual ear to these ancient whisperings, and hear

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nymph calling to nymph and faun to faun, as they caper merrily with the god Pan through the silence. It is good for us to listen to that "inextinguishable laughter" of the happy immortals of Olympus, ever mingling with all the voices of Nature and setting them to the still sweet music of humanity, — good, because so we are reminded how close we are to the outward world, and how all the developments of visible beauty are figurative expressions of our own humanity. Thus it is that the poetic truths of old religions exquisitely vindicate themselves; thus we find, even we moderns, with our downward eyes and our wrinkled brows, that we still worship at the mythological altars of childlike divinities; and when we can get away from the distracting Bedlam of steam-shrieks and machinery, we behold the secrets of our own hearts, the Lares and Penates of our own households, reflected in the "white ideals" on antique vases and medallions.

Abstract lines are the most concentrated expressions of human ideas, and as such are peculiarly sensitive to the critical tests of all theories of the Beautiful. Distinguished from the more usual and direct means by which

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artists express their inspirations and appeal to the sympathies of men; distinct from the common language of art, which contents itself with conveying merely local and individual ideas by imitations or translations of natural forms, abstract lines are recognized as the grand hieroglyphic symbolism of the aggregate of human thought, the artistic manifestations of the great human Cosmos. The natural world, passing through the mind of man, is immediately interpreted and humanized by his creative power, and assumes the colors, forms, and harmonies of Painting, Sculpture, and Music. But abstract lines as we find them in Architecture and in the ceramic arts are the independent developments of this creative power, coming directly from humanity itself, and obtaining from the outward world only the most distant motives of composition. Thus it is an inevitable deduction that Architecture is the most *human* of all arts, and its lines the most *human* of all lines.

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever;"

and the affectionate devotion with which this gift is received by finite intelligences from the hand of God is expressed in art, when its infinite depth *can* be so expressed at all, in a

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twofold language, — the one objective, the other subjective; the one recalling the immediate source of the emotion, and presenting it palpably to the senses, but more or less infused with the thought or mood of the artist; the other portraying rather the emotion than the cause of it, and, by an instinctive and universal symbolism, reflecting the character of the impression made by it upon the creative instinct and inner consciousness of mankind. Hence come those lines which æsthetic writers term "Lines of Beauty," suggesting rather than expressing meanings, — simple and elementary, but of far-reaching and various significance; animated with life and thought and musical motion, and yet still and serene and spiritual.

The mysteries of orb and cycle, with which old astrologers girded human life, and sought to define from celestial phenomena the horoscope of man, have been brought down to modern applications by learned philosophers and mathematicians, who have labored with ingenuity and skill to trace the interior relationships existing between the recondite revelations of their geometry, their wonderful laws of mathematical harmonies and unities, and those lines which are creations of art, as

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distinguished from imitations of nature, and which, because their various characteristics emanated from the inborn genius, or spirit of the races of mankind, have become symbols of humanity. No well-organized intellect can fail to perceive that some sublime and immortal truth underlies these speculations. Undoubtedly, in the straight line, in the conic sections, in the innumerable composite curves of the mathematician, lie the germs of all these symbolic expressions. But the architect, whose lines of beauty vary continually with the emotions which produce them, who feels in his own human heart the irresistible impulse which gives to them their exquisite balance, their sensitive poise, their delicate significance and value, cannot allow that the spirit and motive of these lines are governed by the exact and rigid formulas of the mathematician to any greater extent or in any other manner than as the numbers of the poet are ruled by the grammar of his language. These formulas may be applied as a curious test to ascertain what strange sympathies there may be between such lines and the organic harmonies of nature and the universe; but these formulas do not enter into the soul of their creation any more than the limitations of counterpoint and rhythm

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laid their incubus on the lyre of Apollo. The porches where Callicrates, Hermogenes, and Callimachus walked were guarded by no such Cerberus as the disciples of Plato encountered at the entrance of the groves of the Academy, —

"Οὐδεὶς ἀγεωμέτρητος εἰσίτω,"

"Let no one ignorant of Geometry enter here;"

but the divine Aphrodite welcomed all mankind to the tender teachings of the lotus, the acanthus, the honeysuckle, and the seashell, and all the sweet relationships of nature to the heart of man.

The tendency of many modern writers to account for the lines of Greek mouldings and vases by considering them developments of strict scientific laws, results of mathematical proportions, and by endeavoring to restrict their freedom to the narrow limitations of geometric lines and curves, nicely adapted from the frigidities of Euclid, is dispiriting to the artist. "The melancholy days have come" for art when the meditative student finds his early footsteps loud among these dry, withered, and sapless leaves, instead of brushing away the dews by the fountains of perpetual youth.

Now it is capable of distinct proof that abstract lines of beauty, as in all their infinite

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variations of movement they are delicately sensitive to the moods or emotions of the artist, are results of the noblest creative capacities of mankind and expressions of the highest art.

The water-lily, or lotus, perpetually occurs in Oriental mythology as the sublime and hallowed symbol of the productive power in Nature, — the emblem of that great life-giving principle which the Hindu and the Egyptian and all early nations instinctively elevated to the highest and most cherished place in their Pantheons. Mr. W. H. Goodyear, in his recent essay on "The Ionic Capital and the Origin of the Anthemion," attempts very ingeniously to prove that from the drooping calyx leaves of this plant were derived some of the most characteristic decorative features of Greek art. But however this may be, Payne Knight many years ago attributed the adoption of this symbol to the fact that the lotus, instead of rejecting its seeds from the vessels where they are germinated, nourishes them in its bosom till they have become perfect plants, when, arrayed in all the irresistible panoply of grace and beauty, they spring forth, Minerva-like, float down the current, and take root wherever deposited. And so it

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was used by nearly all the early peoples to express the creative spirit which gives life and vegetation to matter. Lacshmi, the beautiful Hindu goddess of abundance, corresponding to the Venus Aphrodite of the Greeks, was called "the Lotus-born," as having ascended from the ocean in this flower. Here, again, is the inevitable intermingling of the eternal principles of Beauty, Love, and the Creative Power in that pure triune medallion image which the ancients so tenderly cherished and so exquisitely worshiped with vestal fires and continual sacrifices of art. Old father Nile, reflecting in his deep, mysterious breast the monstrous temples of Nubia and Pylæ, bears eloquent witness to the earnestness and sincerity of the old votive homage to Isis, "the Lotus-crowned" Venus of Egypt. For the symbolic water-lily, *recreated* by human art, blooms forever in bud or flower in the capitals of Karnac and Thebes, and wherever columns were reared and lintels laid throughout the length and breadth of the "Land of Bondage." It is the keynote of all that architecture and the basis of its decorative character. A brief examination into the principles of this new birth of the Lotus, of the monumental straightening and stiffening of its graceful

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and easy lines, will afford some insight into the strange processes of the human mind, when by divine instinct it creates out of the material beauties of nature a work of art.

It is well known that the religion of the old Egyptians led them to regard this life as a mere temporary incident, an unimportant phase of their progress toward that larger and grander state imaged to them with mysterious sublimity in the idea of Death or Eternity. In accordance with this belief, they expressed in their dwellings the sentiment of transitoriness and vicissitude, and in their tombs an immortality of calm repose. And so their houses have crumbled into dust ages ago, but their tombs are eternal. In all the relations of life the sentiment of death was present in some form or other. The hallowed mummies of their ancestors were the most sacred mortgages of their debts, and to redeem them speedily was a point of the highest honor. They had corpses at their feasts to remind them how transitory were the glory and happiness of the world, how eternal the tranquillity of death.

Now, how was this prevailing idea expressed in their art? They looked around them and saw that all organic life was full of movement

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and wavy lines; their much-loved Lotus undulated and bent playfully to the solemn flow of the great Nile; the Ibis fluttered with continual motion; their own bodies were full of ever-changing curves; and their whole visible existence was unsteady, like the waves of the sea. But when the temporary life was changed, and "this mortal put on immortality," when the mummy was swathed in its everlasting cerements for its long sleep, their eyes and souls were filled with the utter stillness and repose of its external aspects; its features became rigid and fixed, and were settled to an everlasting and immutable calm; the vibrating grace of its lines departed, and their ever-varying complexity became simplified, and assumed the straightness and stiffness of death. In this manner the straight line, the natural expression of eternal repose, in contradistinction to the wavy line, which represents the animal and vegetable movements of life, became the motive and spirit of their art. The anomaly of death in life was present in every development of the creative faculty, and no architectural or decorative feature could be so slight and unimportant as not to be thoroughly permeated with this sentiment. The tender and graceful lines

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of the Lotus became sublime and monumental under the religious loyalty of Egyptian chisels. Whether used in construction or decoration, these lines, so stiffened and formalized, seem to bring us into the presence of a strange phase of human life and thought, long since passed away from any other contact with living creatures. When applied to the rendering of the human figure, especially in the heroic forms of Egyptian art, — in the statues and portraits of kings, in the sphinxes, in the colossi of Memnon, and the royal tombs, — these solemn and fateful lines appear in effect to overwhelm the idea of human mutability and movement in the awful repose of immortality. It seems sufficiently evident that this process of formalizing the lines of the human figure in Egyptian art was not the result of a limitation of the powers of the artist to express movement and life, but rather of a consecration of his art to the service of a fundamental religious dogma.

"Solid-set,
And moulded in colossal calm,"

all the lines of this lost art thus recall the sentiment of endless repose, and even the necessary curves of its mouldings are dead with straightness. The love which produced

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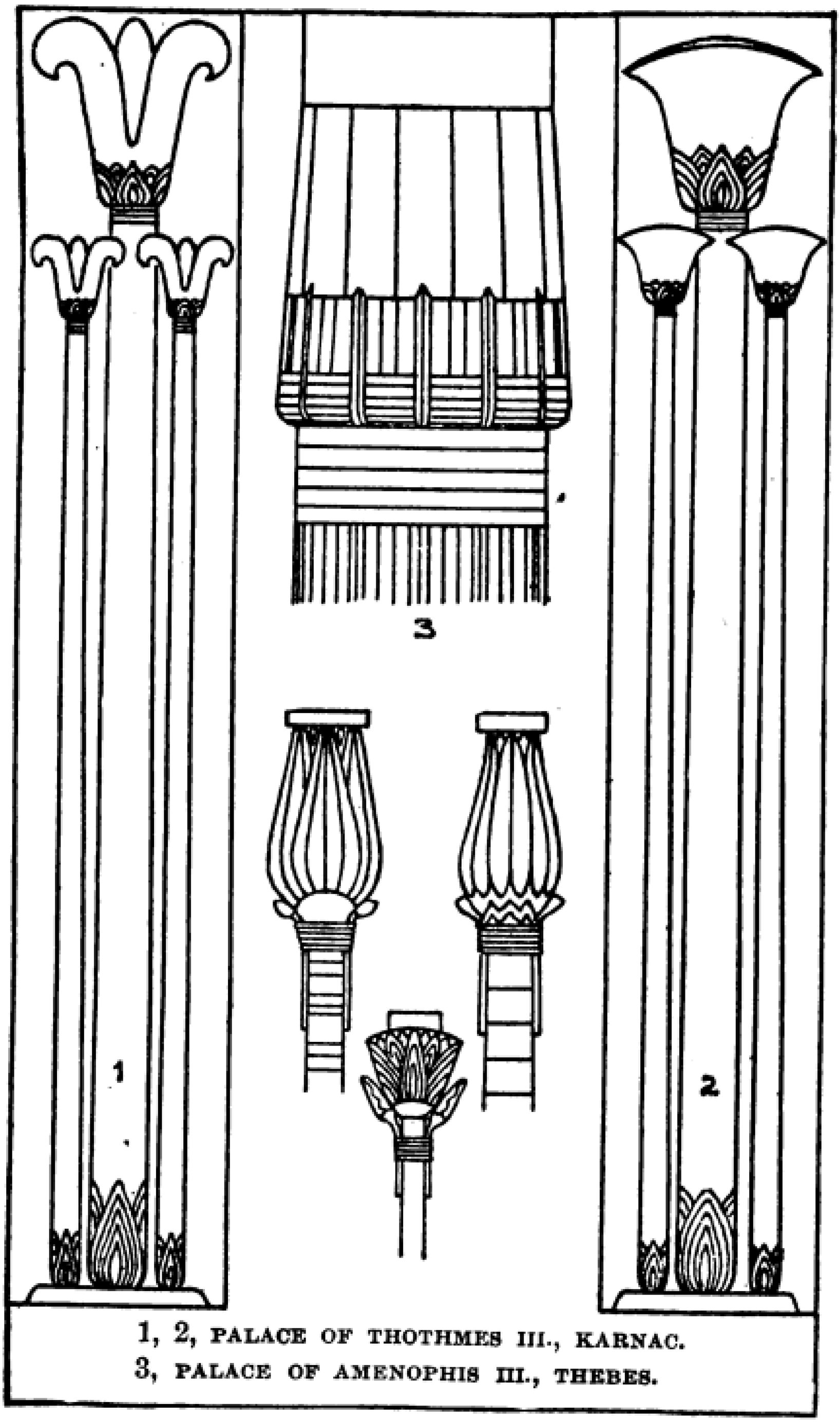


1, 2, PALACE OF THOTHMES III., KARNAC.
3, PALACE OF AMENOPHIS III., THEBES.

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these lines was not the passionate love which *we* understand and feel; they were not the result of a sensuous impulse; but the Egyptian artist seemed ever to be standing alone in the midst of a trackless and limitless desert, — around him earth and sky meeting with no kiss of affection, no palpitating embrace of mutual sympathy; he felt himself encircled by a calm and pitiless Destiny, the cold expression of a Fate from which he could not flee, and in himself the centre and soul of it all. Oppressed thus with a vast sense of spiritual loneliness, when he uttered the inspirations of art, the memories of playful palms and floating lilies and fluttering wings, though they came warm to the love of his heart, were attuned in the outward expression to the deep, solemn, prevailing monotone of his humanity. His love for the lotus and the ibis, more profound than the passion of the senses, dwelt serene in the bottom of his soul, and thence came forth transfigured and dedicated to the very noblest uses of life. This is the art of Egypt.

But among all the old nations which have perished with their gods, Greece appeals to our closest sympathies. She looks upon us with the smile of childhood, free, contented, and happy, with no ascetic self-denials to check

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her wild-flower growth, no stern religion to bind the liberty of her actions. All her external aspects are in harmony with the weakness and the strength of human nature. We recognize ourselves in her, and find all the characteristics of our own finite nature there developed into a theism so human, clothed with a personification so exquisite and poetical, that the Hellenic mythology seems still to live in our hearts a silent and shadowy religion without ceremonies or altars or sacrifices. The festive gods of the Iliad made man a deity to himself, and his soul the dwelling-place of ideal beauty. In this ideal they lived and moved and had their being, and came forth thence, bronze, marble, chryselephantine, a statuesque and naked humanity, chaste in uncomprehended sin and glorified in antique virtue. The beauty of this natural life, and the love of it, was the soul of the Greek ideal; and the nation continually cherished and cultivated and refined this ideal with impulses from groves of Arcadia, vales of Tempe, and flowery slopes of Attica, from the manliness of Olympic games and the loveliness of Spartan Helens. They cherished and cultivated and refined it, because here they set up their altars to known gods and

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worshiped attributes which they could understand. The ideal was their religion, and the art which came from it, the expression of their highest aspiration.

When the Apostle Paul read upon the Athenian altar the dedication "To the *Unknown* God," inscribed when the old mythology was becoming obsolete in the progress of philosophic doubt, he saw a manifestation of that Greek spirit, inquisitive, restless, but ever creative, which, three hundred years afterwards at Byzantium, made this people the first interpreters of Christianity in a new art. Heine, in his "Reisebilder," tells the strange story of the Homeric feast of the immortal gods upon Olympus, interrupted by a pale Jew, crowned with thorns, dripping with blood, and bearing a heavy cross of wood, which he threw with a thunderous crash upon the high table, and immediately the golden goblets were overturned and the pagan pageant faded from the sight forever; with it faded the Greek ideal, to be dimly recalled, as we shall presently see, after many centuries of complete slumber, in the rediscovery of the principle of Greek Lines.

Lines of beauty, produced in such a soil, were not, as might at first be supposed, tropic

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growths of wanton and luxurious curves, wild, spontaneous utterances of superabundant life. The finely studied perception of the Greek artist admitted no unimaginative, pre-Raphaelite imitations of what Nature was ever giving him with a liberal hand in the whorls of shells, the veins of leaves, the life of flames, the convolutions of serpents, the curly tresses of woman, the lazy grace of clouds, the easy sway of tendrils, flowers, and human motion. He was no literal interpreter of her whispered secrets. But the grace of his art was a *deliberate grace*, — a grace of thought and study. His lines were *creations*, and not *instincts* or *imitations*. It was his religion so to nurture and educate his sensitiveness to beauty and his power to love and create it, that his works of art should be deeds of worship and expressions of a godlike humanity. Unlike the Egyptian's, there was nothing in *his* creed to check the sweet excess of Life, and no grim shadow, "feared of man," scared him in his walks, or preached to him sermons of mortality in the stones and violets of the wayside. Life was hallowed and dear to him for its own sake. He saw it was lovable, and he made it the theme of his noblest poems, his subtlest philosophies, and his high-

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est art. Hence the infinite joy and endless laughter on Olympus, the day-long feasting of the gods, the silver stir of strings in the hollow shell of the exquisite Phœbus, "the soft song of the muse with voices sweetly replying."

I believe that all true lines of grace and beauty, though they are necessarily infinite in variety and meaning, are capable of division into three distinct classes, according to the respective spirit or genius of the three civilizations out of which they grew, and that each class, as it expresses a unity of great significance in the history of the human race, is capable of concentrating its distinguishing characteristics in one representative line, which may stand as the symbol, the gesture, as it were, of an era in this history. If this is possible, these three symbols would represent not only the arts of three great eras, but the essential quality of their life and thought, of which these arts are themselves the symbol and the record. These lines, from the nature of the case, are not precise or exact, like a formula of mathematics, to which the neophyte can refer for deductions of grace to suit any premises or conditions. This, of course, is contrary to the spirit of beautiful design; and

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the ingenious Hay, who maintained that his "composite ellipse" is capable of universal application in the arts of ornamental composition, and that by its use any desirable lines in mouldings or vases can be mechanically produced, especially Greek lines, fell into the grave error of endeavoring to materialize and fix that *animula vagula, blandula*, that coy and evasive spirit of art, which is its peculiar characteristic, and gives to its works inspiration, harmony, and poetic sentiment. Ideal beauty can be hatched from no geometrical eggs. Of these lines one expresses the most subtle grace yet conceived by the mind or executed by the hand of man. This line pretends to be merely a type of that large language of forms, with which the most refined intellects of antiquity uttered their joyful worship of Aphrodite in Greek art.

The three great distinctive eras of art, in a purely psychological sense, were the Egyptian, the Grecian, and the Romanesque, — including in the latter term both Roman art itself and all subsequent art, whether derived directly or indirectly from Rome, as the Byzantine, the Mahometan, the Mediæval, and the Renaissance. Selecting the most characteristic works to which these great

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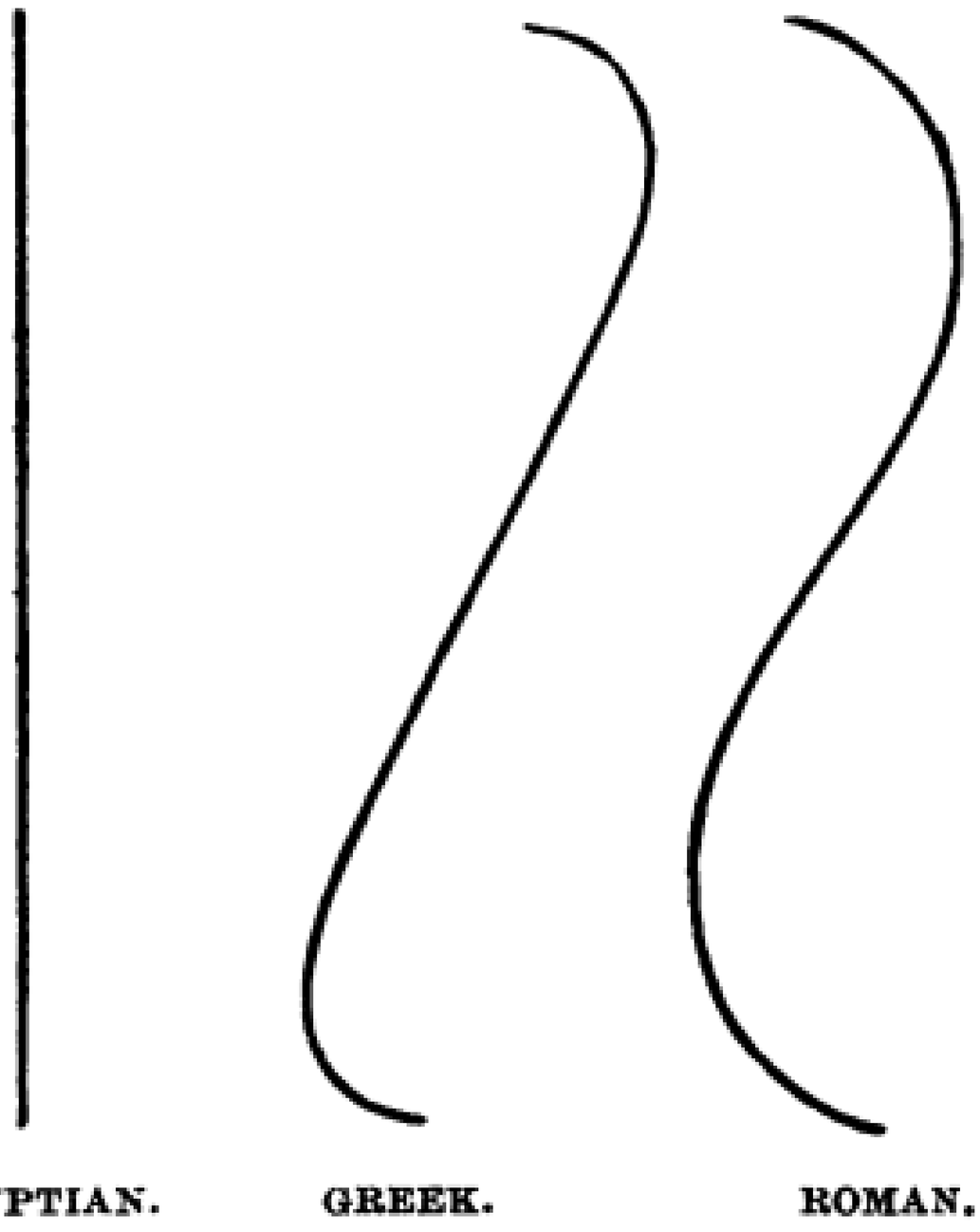
eras respectively gave birth, it is not difficult by comparison to ascertain the master-spirit, or type, to which each of these three families may be reduced. If we place these types side by side, the result will be as in the diagram,



EGYPTIAN. GREEK. ROMAN.

presenting to the eye, at one view, the concentration of three civilizations, DESTINY, LOVE, and LIFE; — destiny, finding utterance in the stern and inflexible simplicity of the tombs and obelisks of Egypt; love, expressing itself in the statuesque and thoughtful grace of Grecian temples, statues, and urns; life, in the sensuous and impulsive change, evident in all the developments of art, since Greece be-

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came Achaia, a province of the Roman Empire. In the central type, as exhibited in the diagram, we see a happy mingling of the essential qualities of the other two. The genius of Greece, on the one hand, tempers the rigid repose of Egypt with the passion of life, and, on the other, restrains the passion of life with a spirit of intellectual tranquillity. Humanly speaking, it seems to stand for a condition of perfect art, representing the highest development of creation by man. At one point in the history of the race the secret of perpetual youth seemed to have been disclosed, at once grave with memory and jocund with hope. This intermediate line is the essence of the age of Pericles; and in it "the capable eye" may discover the pose of the Cnidian Venus of Praxiteles, of the Jupiter Olympus of Phidias, and the other lost wonders of ancient chisels, and, more directly, the tender severity of Doric capitals and the secret grace of the shafts of the Parthenon.

According to Pliny, Apelles, when he visited the great painter Protogenes, at Rhodes, and found him not at home, inscribed a *line* upon a board, assuring the slave that this line would signify to the master who had been to see him. Whatever the line was, Protogenes, we hear,

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recognized in it the hand of the greatest limner of Greece. It was the signature of that Ideal, known to the antique world by its wider developments in the famous pictures of the Venus Anadyomene, and Alexander with the Thunderbolt, hung in the temple of Diana at Ephesus.

The gravity with which this apparently trifling anecdote is given us from antiquity evidently proves that it was one of the household tales of old Greece. It did not seem absurd in those times, when art was recognized as a great unity, an elaborate and copious language, founded on the simplest elements of life, and, in its grandest and widest flowings, bearing ever in its bosom, like a great river, the memory of the little weeping Naiad far up among the mountains with her "impoverished urn."

Thus every great national art, growing up naturally out of the necessities of an earnest people, expressing the grand motives of their life, as that of the Greeks and the Egyptians and the mediæval nations of Europe, is founded on the simplest laws. So long as these laws are obeyed without affectations or sophistications, art is good and true; so long as it remembers the purity and earnestness of its childhood,

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the strength that is ordained out of the mouth of babes is present in all its expressions; but when it spreads itself abroad in the fens and marshes of humanity, when it becomes reminiscent and imitative, when it is governed by archæology and pretends to be what it is not, it loses the purity of its aim, the singleness and unity of its action, — it becomes stagnant, and sleeps in the death of idleness.

When one studies Greek art, the whole motive of it seems so childlike and so simple that the impulse to seek for that little Naiad which is the fountain and source of it all is irresistible. I have endeavored, in the representative line which I have traced, to embody the characteristic grace of the delicate and elegant lines in the profiles of Greek mouldings and vases, and to present a type of the restrained and carefully balanced rhythmic movement, the aristocratic poise, which distinguish the composition of Greek ornament. It is impossible to produce this line with a wanton flourish of the pencil, as I have done in that easy and thoughtless curve which Hogarth, in his quaint "Analysis of Beauty," assumed as the line of true grace; nor yet are its motions governed by any cold mathematical laws. In it is the earnest and deliberate labor of love.

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There are thought and tenderness in every instant of it; but this thought is grave and almost solemn, and this tenderness is chastened and purified by wise reserve. Measure it by time, and you will find it no momentary delight, no voluptuous excess which comes and goes in a breath; but there is a whole cycle of deep human feeling in it. It is the serene joy of a nation, and not the passionate impulse of a man. Observe, from beginning to end, its intention is to give expression by the serpentine line to that sentiment of beautiful life which was the worship of the Greeks; but they did not toss it off, like a wine-cup at a feast. They prolonged it through all the varied emotions of a lifetime with exquisite art, making it the path of their education in childhood and of their wider experience as men. All the impulses of humanity they bent to a kindly parallelism with it. This is that famous principle of Variety in Unity which St. Augustine and hosts of other philosophers considered the true ideal of Beauty. Start with this line from the top upon its journeying: look at the hesitation of it ere it launches into action; how it cherishes its resources, and gathers up its strength! — with a confidence in its beautiful Destiny, and yet with a chaste

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shrinking from the full enjoyment of it, how inevitably, but how purely it yields itself to the sudden curve! It does not embrace this curve with a sensuous sweep, nor does it, like Sappho, throw itself with quick passion into the tide. It enters with maidenly and dignified reserve into a new life which, as you glance at it, seems almost ascetic, and reminds you of the rigid fatalism of Egypt. Its grace is almost strangled, as those other serpents were in the grasp of the child Hercules. But if you watch it attentively, you will find it ever changing, though with subtlest refinement, ever human, and true to the great laws of emotion. There is no straight line here, no death in life, but the composure of "maiden meditation" moving with serious pleasure along the grooves of happy change. It certainly does not seem to be merely fanciful to attribute the character of this line to a habit of chastity in thought and of elegant reserve in expression. Follow it still farther, and you will find it grateful to the sight, neither fatiguing with excess of monotony nor cloying the appetite with change. And when the round hour is full and the end comes, this end is met by a Fate, which does not clip with the shears of Atropos and leave an aching void,

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but fulfills itself in gentleness and peace. The line bends quietly and unconsciously towards the beautiful consummation, and then dies, because its work is done.

When we examine the innumerable lines of Greek architecture, we find that the artists never for an instant lost sight of this ideal. Its deliberate and carefully studied grace was everywhere present, and mingled not only with such grand and heroic lines as those of the sloping pediments, the long-drawn entablatures, and massive stylobates of the Parthenon and Theseion, bending them into curves so subtly modulated that our coarse perceptions did not perceive the variations from the dead straight lines till the careful admeasurements of Penrose and Cockerel and their *confrères* of France assured us of the fact, still further confirmed by the skillful photographs of Stillman; not only did it make these enormous harp-strings vibrate with deep human soul-music, but there is not an abstract line in moulding, column, or vase, belonging to old Greece or the islands of the Ægean or Ionia or the Greek colonies of Italy, which does not have the same deep meaning, the same statuesque and thoughtful pose. Besides, I very much doubt if the same line, in all its parts and proportions, is

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ever repeated twice, — certainly not with any emphasis; and this is following out the great law of our existence, which varies the emotion infinitely with the occasion which produced it. Let us suppose, for example, that a moulding was needed to crown a column with fitting glory and grace. Now the capital of a column may fairly be called the throne of ideal expression; it is the *cour d'honneur* of art. The architect in this emergency did not set himself at "the antique," and seek for authorities, and reproduce and copy; for he desired not to present with pedantic accuracy and historical respect some effect of beautiful design which he had seen in the capitals of Assyria, or Persia, or Egypt, and which had been developed from some condition of structure, or use, or habit of mind different from his own, but to devise a feature which physically and æsthetically should answer all the requirements of its peculiar position, a feature whose lines should have essential relationships with the other lines around it, those of shaft, architrave, frieze, and cornice, — should swell its fitting melody into the great fugue. And so, between the summit of the long shaft and that square block, the *abacus*, on which reposes the dead weight of the lintel of Greece, the

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Doric *echinus* was fashioned, crowning the serene Atlas-labor of the column with exquisite completion, and uniting the upright and horizontal masses of the order with a marriage ring, whose beauty is its perfect fitness. The profile of this moulding may be rudely likened to the upper and middle parts of the line assumed as the representative of the Greek ideal. But it varied ever with the exigency of circumstances. Over the short and solid shafts of Pæstum it assumed the shape of a crushed cushion; that of the Acropolis at Selinus (shown in diagram at A) had a similar character. The conditions in these early examples of the style seemed to the artist, as the shaft had an abundance of reserved strength, to require at this point a moulding of softened grace, while the Parthenon (shown at B) and the temple of Ceres at Eleusis (shown at C) exhibited in their *echini* more energetic profiles, as if their service of support could not be performed satisfactorily to the eye without an expression of effort, somewhat like that of a muscle in strong tension. The comparatively slender grace of the shafts in these two latter and later examples — a grace emphasized by the almost imperceptible vertical curves with which these shafts diminish, in the

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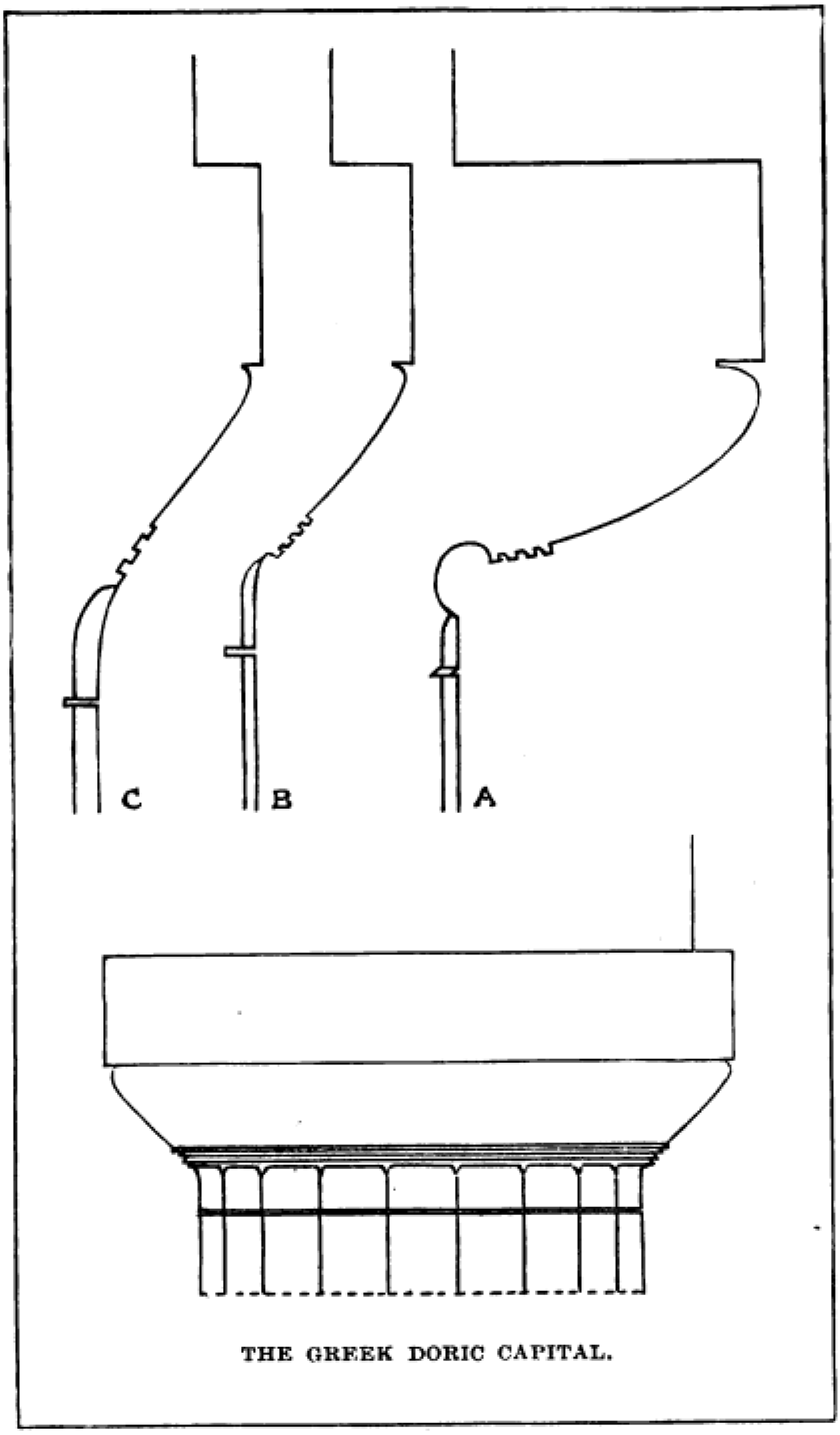


THE GREEK DORIC CAPITAL.

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*entasis*, from base to summit — demanded at the bearing point a demonstration of power to justify their delicacy of proportion. The especial profile of the *echinus* in these cases seemed to be preordained from the base of the shaft, like a flower from the root. It was created as with "the Dorian mood of soft recorders." Between these two extremes there is an infinity of change, everywhere modified and governed by "the study of imagination."

The same characteristics of nervous grace and severe intellectual restraint are found wherever the Greek architect put his hand and his heart to work. Every moulding bears an impress of refinement, and modulates the light which falls upon it with exquisite and harmonious gradations of shade. The sun, as it touches the mouldings of the entablature, makes visible music there, as if it were the harp of Memnon, — presenting a series of horizontal and parallel shade and shadow lines, delicately contrasting in melodious succession, according to the profiles of the mouldings which produced them; the cymas, ovolos, and beads, creating fine graduated pencilings of shade, whose upper and lower boundaries die away with soft modulations; the fillets, throwing sharp and thin shadows along the

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illuminated marble surfaces; the overhanging corona making a broad, defined shadow, broken by reflected lights playing on the supporting bed-mouldings. All the phenomena of reflected lights, half lights, and broken lights are brought in and attuned to the great dædal melody of the edifice. The antiquities of Attica afford nothing frivolous or capricious or merely fanciful, no playful extravagances or wanton meanderings of line; nor did they ever submit to the tyranny of conventional formulas; but, ever loyal to the purity of a high ideal, they give us, even in their ruins, a wonderful and very evident unity of expression, pervading and governing every possible mood and manner of thought.

No phase of art that ever existed gives us a line so very human and simple in itself as this Greek type, and so pliable to all the uses of monumental language. If this type were a mere mathematical type, its applicability to the expression of human emotions would be limited to a formalism absolutely fatal to the freedom of thought in art. But because it has its birth in love, as distinguished from pedantry, from scholastic or archæological conformity; because it indicates a refined appreciation of all the movements of life and

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all the utterances of creation; because it is the humanized essence of these motions and developments, it becomes a prolific unity, containing within itself the germs of a new world of ever new delight.

When this type in Greek art was brought to bear on the interpretation of natural forms into architectural language, we shall curiously discover that the creative instinct of the artist and his reverence for the integrity of his ideal were so great, that he not only subjected these forms to a rigid subservience to the abstract line till nature was nearly lost in art, but the adoption of these forms under any circumstances was limited to some two or three of the most ordinary vegetable productions of Greece and to one seashell.[1] This wise reserve and self-restraint present to us the best proof of the fastidious purity of his thought. Nature poured out at the feet of the Greek artist a most plenteous offering, and the lap of Flora overflowed for him with tempting garlands of beauty; but he did not gather these up with any greedy and indiscriminate hand, he did not intoxicate himself at the harvest of the vineyard. If he adorned his festivals

[1] Mr. Goodyear, as we have seen, argues that they were all derived from one, the Egyptian lotus.

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profusely with garlands and wreaths of flowers, he decorated his works of art with serious and reverential reserve, contenting himself with two or three simple types, which he varied with an invention at once chaste and elegant. Intent upon the nobler aim of creating a pure work of art, he considered what expression or character of line or movement was required in the surface which he was to decorate, whether frieze, soffite, necking, border, moulding, capital, or vase, and taking two or three of the most familiar products of the soil, he studied their principles of growth, their creative sentiment, and adjusted them to his decorative purpose, in fact re-created them. The design was not bent to accommodate them, but they were translated and lifted up into the sphere of art. It is not impossible that the Greek artist, in this process of secondary creation, may have been influenced more or less by certain crude traditionary forms, which had reached him from the Nile and the Euphrates; for the artistic instinct quickly appreciates and absorbs any motive of design which may pass under his observation. But the Greek work was developed so far beyond all these precedents that, if possibly his initiative may be ques-

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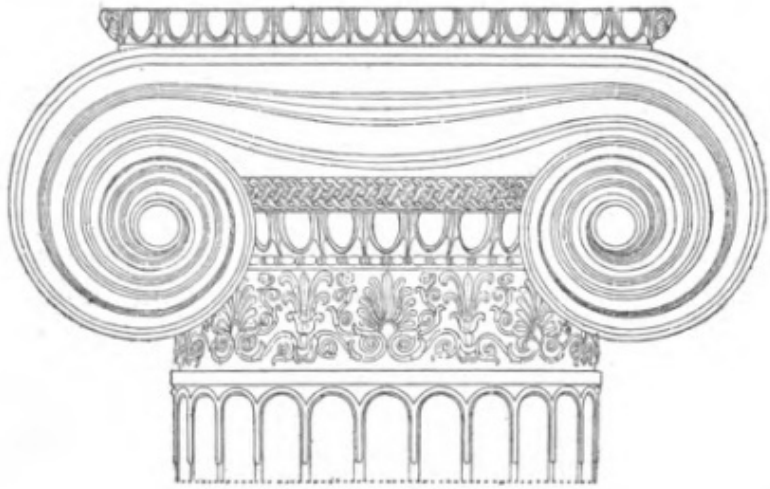
tioned, his supreme creative power cannot for a moment be disputed.

If we examine the magnificent Ionic capitals of the porch of Athene Polias in the Erechtheum, we may see that the Greek could be profuse without being redundant.



GREEK IONIC.

Whether the main idea of this lovely and elaborate creation came from some archaic type of Ionia or Persia or Assyria, or whether it was drawn from the convolutions of a sea-shell, he made "old things new" with his perfect art, and remodeled whatever they may have given him of suggestion into a composition of exquisite harmony and order. Examine the volute: this is the nearest approach to a mathematical result that can be

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found in Greek architecture; yet this very approximation is one of the greatest triumphs of art. No geometrical rule has been discovered which can exactly produce the spirals of the Erechtheum, nor can they be found in shells. In avoiding the exuberance of the latter and the rigid formalism of the former, a work of human thought and love has been evolved. Follow one of these volutes with your eye from its centre outwards, taking all its congeries of lines into companionship; you find your sympathies at once strangely engaged. There is an intoxication in the gradual and melodious expansion of these curves. They seem to be full of destiny, bearing you along, as upon an inevitable tide, towards some larger sphere of action. Ere you have grown weary with the monotony of the spiral, you find that the system of lines which compose it gradually leave their obedience to the centrifugal forces of the volutes, and, assuming new relationships of parts, sweep gracefully across the summit of the shaft, and become presently involved in the reversed motion of the other volute, at whose centre Ariadne seems to stand, gathering together all the clues of this labyrinth of beauty. This may seem fanciful to one who regards

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these things as matters of convention. But inasmuch as, to the studious eye of affection, they suggest human action and human sympathies, this perhaps may be accepted as a proof that they had their birth in some corresponding affection. It is the inanimate body of Geometry made spiritual and living by the creative power in the human heart. And when a later generation reduced the Ionic volutes to rule, and endeavored to inscribe them with the gyrations of the compass, they have no further interest for us, save as a mathematical problem with an unknown value equal to a mysterious symbol $x$, in which the soul takes no comfort. When we reasonably regard the printed words of an author, we not only behold an ingenious collection of alphabetical symbols, but are placed by them in direct contact with the mind which brought them together, and, for the moment, our train of thought so entirely coincides with that of the writer, that, though perhaps he died centuries ago, he may be said to live again in us. The capitals of the Erechtheum have the same renaissance in every heart capable of being touched by a work of art, which, though conventional in form, is inspired by the breath of imagination. The spirit of the ancient artist

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lives again in us for a happy moment, and the beautiful thing has a new existence in our affections. Studying it, we become artists and poets ere we are aware. The alphabet becomes a living soul.

Under the volutes of this capital, and belting the top of the shaft, is a broad band of ornamentation so happy and effectual in its uses, and so pure and perfect in its details, that a careful examination of it will, perhaps, afford us some knowledge of that spiritual essence in the antique ideal out of which arose the silent and motionless beauty of Greek marbles.

Here are brought together the *sentiments* of certain vegetable productions of Greece, but sentiments so entirely subordinated to the flexure of the abstract line that their natural significance is almost lost in a new and more human meaning. Here is the honeysuckle, the wildest, the most elastic and undulating of plants, under the severe discipline of order and artistic symmetry assuming a strict and chaste propriety, a formal elegance, which render it at once monumental and dignified. The harmonious succession and repetition of parts, the graceful contrasts of curves and their strict poise and balance, their unity in variety, their entire subjection to æsthetic

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laws, — these qualities combine in the creation of one of the most beautiful, most useful, and most effective devices of decoration ever applied to a work of art. It is called the Ionic *Anthemion*, and suggests in its composition all the creative powers of Greece. Its value is not alone in the sensuous gratification of the eye by its elegant symmetries and its formal repetitions, as with the Arabesque tangles of the Alhambra, but it is more especially in its intellectual expression, its fastidious and high-bred poise, — the evidence there is in it of thoughtfulness and judgment and deliberate care in the adjustment of natural forms and movements to decorative uses. The inventor studied not alone the plant as it grew by nature, but as it might grow in the garden of art when informed with a spirit of humanity; and ere he made his interpretation he considered perhaps how, in mythological traditions, each flower once bore a human shape, and how Daphne and Syrinx, Narcissus and Philemon, and those other idyllic beings, were eased of the stress of human emotions by becoming Laurels and Reeds and Daffodils and sturdy Oaks, and how human nature was thus diffused through all created things and was epigrammatically expressed in them.

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> "And he, with many feelings, many thoughts,
> Made up a meditative joy, and found
> Religious meanings in the forms of nature."

Like Faustus, he was permitted to look into her deep bosom, as into the bosom of a friend; to find his brothers in the still wood, in the air, and in the water; to see himself and the mysterious wonders of his own breast in the movements of the elements. And so he took Nature as a figurative exponent of humanity, and extracted the symbolic truths from her productions and used them nobly in his art.

Garbett, an English æsthetical writer, assures us that the *Anthemion* bears not the slightest resemblance to the honeysuckle or any other plant, "being no representation of anything in nature, but simply the necessary result of the complete and systematic attempt to combine unity and variety by the principle of *gradation*." But here he speaks like a geometer, and not like an artist. He seeks rather for the resemblance of form than the resemblance of spirit, and, failing to realize the object of his search, he endeavors to find a cause for this exquisite effect in pure reason. With equal perversity, Poe endeavored to persuade the public that his "Raven" was the result of mere æsthetical deductions!

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