

A World Without God.pdf/13



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of earth. Art was turned away from its true function when it painted ugly hermits and shrivelled nuns instead of types of human beauty. Sculpture and painting have often given to the world human figures of ideal beauty, and in deference to the superstition of their day have named these Apollo or Aphrodite, Sebastian or Mary, but it has been the human element, not the religious, which has been of value; the ugly Madonnas are as valuable from the religious point of view as are the beautiful ones; indeed, the most sacred of all, the black virgin and child, served for Isis and Horus before worshipped as Mary and Christ. Miss Cobbe admits that "in the purer modern types of religion we should expect painting and sculpture to be less immediately concerned with it than in old days, because unable to touch such purely spiritual ideas. But", she goes on, "the elevation, aspiration, and reverence which have their root in religion must continue to inspire those arts likewise, or they will fall into triviality on one side (as there seems danger in England), or into obscene materialism on the other, as is already annually exemplified on the walls of the Paris *Salon*". The last phrase is well-chosen to terrify the British Philistine, but is very absurd. I doubt if Miss Cobbe has visited the Paris *Salon* annually, or has even taken the trouble to look over the *Paris Salon* issued by Louis Enault each year. What does she mean by "obscene materialism"? Studies of the nude? To many people the human body as "made by God" is obscene; to make God's work decent the

co-operation of Redfern or of Wörth is necessary. But if the nude is indecent, all great sculpture of the human body stands condemned. The statues of Apollo and of Aphrodite were not, as a rule, dressed; it has been left for the religious feeling of the Vatican to put tin cylinders over the majestic and exquisite nude figures of Pagan Greece. Further, some of the religious statues were really indecent, and the "obscene materialism" of the Paris *Salon* is modesty itself beside the "obscene religionism" of Egypt and of Southern Italy. In painting similar facts might be alleged; *e.g.*, the exquisite Magdalen of Corregio is as voluptuously seductive as any non-religious female figure ever limned by Parisian artist. But the main point is not that of decency and indecency. It is of the true source of inspiration for sculpture and painting. I allege that nature is the only source of inspiration for the graphic

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