

# CHAPTER 20 - As the Twig is Bent

You are being provided with a book chapter by chapter. I will request you to read the book for me after each chapter. After reading the chapter, 1. shorten the chapter to no less than 300 words and no more than 400 words. 2. Do not change the name, address, or any important nouns in the chapter. 3. Do not translate the original language. 4. Keep the same style as the original chapter, keep it consistent throughout the chapter. Your reply must comply with all four requirements, or it's invalid. I will provide the chapter now.

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### CHAPTER 20 - As the Twig is Bent

I KNEW, in my youth, a French village far up among the Cevennes Mountains, where the one cultivated man of the place, saddened by the unlovely lives of the peasants around him and by the bare walls of the village school, organized evening classes for the boys. During these informal hours, he talked to them of literature and art and showed them his prints and paintings. When the youths' interest was aroused he lent them books, that they might read about the statues and buildings that had attracted their attention. At first it appeared a hopeless task to arouse any interest among these peasants in subjects not bearing on their abject lives. To talk with boys of the ideal, when their poor bodies were in need of food and raiment, seemed superfluous; but in time the charm worked, as it always will. The beautiful appealed to their simple natures, elevating and refining them, and opening before their eager eyes perspectives of undreamed-of interest. The self-imposed task became a delight as his pupils' minds responded to his efforts. Although death soon ended his useful life, the seed planted grew and bore fruit in many humble homes. At this moment I know men in several walks of life who revere with touching devotion the memory of the one human being who had brought to them, at the moment when they were most impressionable, the gracious message that existence was not merely a struggle for bread. The boys he had gathered around him realize now that the encouragement and incentive received from those evening glimpses of noble works existing in the world was the mainspring of their subsequent development and a source of infinite pleasure through all succeeding years. This reference to an individual effort toward cultivating the poor has been made because other delicate spirits are attempting some such task in our city, where quite as much as in the French village schoolchildren stand in need of some message of beauty in addition to the instruction they receive, - some window opened for them, as it were, upon the fields of art, that their eyes when raised from study or play may rest on objects more inspiring than blank walls and the graceless surroundings of street or schoolroom.

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We are far too quick in assuming that love of the beautiful is confined to the highly educated; that the poor have no desire to surround themselves

with graceful forms and harmonious colors. We wonder at and deplore their crude standards, bewailing the general lack of taste and the gradual reducing of everything to a commonplace money basis. We smile at the efforts toward adornment attempted by the poor, taking it too readily for granted that on this point they are beyond redemption. This error is the less excusable as so little has been done by way of experiment before forming an opinion, - whole classes being put down as inferior beings, incapable of appreciation, before they have been allowed even a glimpse of the works of art that form the daily mental food of their judges.

The portly charlady who rules despotically in my chambers is an example. It has been a curious study to watch her growing interest in the objects that have here for the first time come under her notice; the delight she has come to take in dusting and arranging my belongings, and her enthusiasm at any new acquisition. Knowing how bare her own home was, I felt at first only astonishment at her vivid interest in what seemed beyond her comprehension, but now realize that in some blind way she appreciates the rare and the delicate quite as much as my more cultivated visitors. At the end of one laborious morning, when everything was arranged to her satisfaction, she turned to me her poor, plain face, lighted up with an expression of delight, and exclaimed, "Oh, sir, I do love to work in these rooms! I'm never so happy as when I'm arranging them elegant things!" And, although my pleasure in her pleasure was modified by the discovery that she had taken an eighteenth-century comb to disentangle the fringes of a rug, and broken several of its teeth in her ardor, that she invariably placed a certain Whister etching upside down, and then stood in rapt admiration before it, still, in watching her enthusiasm, I felt a thrill of satisfaction at seeing how her untaught taste responded to a contact with good things.

Here in America, and especially in our city, which we have been at such pains to make as hideous as possible, the schoolrooms, where hundreds of thousands of children pass many hours daily, are one degree more graceless than the town itself; the most artistically inclined child can

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hardly receive any but unfortunate impressions. The other day a friend took me severely to task for rating our American women on their love of the big shops, and gave me, I confess, an entirely new idea on the subject. "Can't you see," she said, "that the shops here are what the museums abroad are to the poor? It is in them only that certain people may catch glimpses of the dainty and exquisite manufactures of other countries. The little education their eyes receive is obtained during visits to these emporiums."

If this proves so, and it seems probable, it only proves how the humble long for something more graceful than their meagre homes afford.

In the hope of training the younger generations to better standards and less vulgar ideals, a group of ladies are making an attempt to surround our schoolchildren during their impressionable youth with reproductions of historic masterpieces, and have already decorated many schoolrooms in this way. For a modest sum it is possible to tint the bare walls an attractive color - a delight in itself - and adorn them with plaster casts of statues and solar prints of pictures and buildings. The transformation that fifty or sixty

dollars judiciously expended in this way produces in a school-room is beyond belief, and, as the advertisements say, "must be seen to be appreciated," giving an air of cheerfulness and refinement to the dreariest apartment.

It is hard to make people understand the enthusiasm these decorations have excited in both teachers and pupils. The directress of one of our large schools was telling me of the help and pleasure the prints and casts had been to her; she had given them as subjects for the class compositions, and used them in a hundred different ways as object-lessons. As the children are graduated from room to room, a great variety of high-class subjects can be brought to their notice by varying the decorations.

It is by the eye principally that taste is educated. "We speak with admiration of the eighth sense common among Parisians, and envy them their magic power of combining simple materials into an artistic whole. The reason is that for generations the eyes of those people have been unconsciously educated by the harmonious lines of well-proportioned buildings, finely finished detail of stately colonnade, and shady

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perspective of quay and boulevard. After years of this subtle training the eye instinctively revolts from the vulgar and the crude. There is little in the poorer quarters of our city to rejoice or refine the senses; squalor and all-pervading ugliness are not least among the curses that poverty entails.

If you have a subject of interest in your mind, it often happens that every book you open, every person you speak with, refers to that topic. I never remember having seen an explanation offered of this phenomenon.

The other morning, while this article was lying half finished on my desk, I opened the last number of a Paris paper and began reading an account of the drama, *LES MAUVAIS BERGERS* (treating of that perilous subject, the "strikes"), which Sarah Bernhardt had just had the courage to produce before the Paris public. In the third act, when the owner of the factory receives the disaffected hands, and listens to their complaints, the leader of the strike (an intelligent young workman), besides shorter hours and increased pay, demands that recreation rooms be built where the toilers, their wives, and their children may pass unoccupied hours in the enjoyment of attractive surroundings, and cries in conclusion: "We, the poor, need some poetry and some art in our lives, man does not live by bread alone. He has a right, like the rich, to things of beauty!"

In commending the use of decoration as a means of bringing pleasure into dull, cramped lives, one is too often met by the curious argument that taste is innate. "Either people have it or they haven't," like a long nose or a short one, and it is useless to waste good money in trying to improve either. "It would be much more to the point to spend your money in giving the poor children a good roast-beef dinner at Christmas than in placing the bust of Clytie before them." That argument has crushed more attempts to elevate the poor than any other ever advanced. If it were listened to, there would never be any progress made, because there are always thousands of people who are hungry.

When we reflect how painfully ill-arranged rooms or ugly colors affect our senses, and remember that less fortunate neighbors suffer as much as we do from hideous environments, it seems like keeping sunlight from a

plant, or fresh air out of a sick-room, to refuse glimpses of the beautiful to