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**A Bold Effort to Transform the Appreciation of Art
And the Principles of Beauty into a Science**

THE SCIENCE OF BEAUTY

Natural Law, Aesthetic Principles and the Bounty of Mankind

by John Bascom

In **THE SCIENCE OF BEAUTY**, John Bascom delivers an extraordinary systematic presentation of the facts which constitute the area of aesthetics, and, in so doing, he attempts to take the field from a subjective domain to one of a distinct science. Although at first this might appear an overly ambitious undertaking, Bascom succeeds admirably in tying together all this diverse material, giving a methodical review and analysis of beauty, and discussing its fundamental laws and principles. In order for aesthetics to achieve a high status in human society, Bascom believed that the components of art must exhibit a basic “righteousness”, a proper and respectful place within the sphere of presentation. Indeed, Bascom fully accepted the more profound metaphysical aspects of art, as he himself states that his book was aimed to help the reader understand “the beauties of the external and ideal worlds”. Consequently, he examines the fundamental laws which apply to many diverse issues such as motives for the cultivation of taste; expressions of beauty; conditions of beauty; symbols of expression; the faculty through which beauty is reached; principles which control the presence of beauty; and factors which mislead taste. Bascom provides insight into the aims and resources of art, and this makes the book extremely well suited to a wide variety of interests, for both professionals and laypersons.

Although he uses a philosophical approach, Bascom strives to make himself clear and lucid in his investigations of such areas as landscape gardening, architecture, sculpture, painting, and poetry. He acknowledges that his book could not take the place of a critical and protracted consideration of each “department” of fine art, but it would assist to “quicken the mind in this most pleasant, practical labor”. From the start, he desires that his book bring enjoyment to the reader, because a discriminating analysis of the beauties of nature and art was a most agreeable form of mental activity, and would immediately and abundantly repay the attention anyone devotes to it. To him, a thorough appreciation of art was indeed “exalted”, and it was important that all aspects of life, in whatever domain, were harmonized for the betterment of mankind. For those who are interested in understanding the challenging principles that underlie the natural laws of aesthetics, **THE SCIENCE OF BEAUTY** helps to bring into greater clarity the unique alliance between the artist and the spectator.

John Bascom, writer, professor, University President, was an influential and independent thinker in a wide variety of areas, including politics, art, economy and religion. Bascom was born in 1827, in Genoa, New York, and was a graduate of Andover theological seminary. He served as a professor of rhetoric at Williams College, MA, and as President of the University of Wisconsin from 1874 until 1887. His most well-known contribution was as originator of the “Wisconsin idea” of social obligation and service. He was also a prolific writer, who wrote such works as “Political Economy”; “Philosophy of Rhetoric”; “Principles of Psychology”; “Science, Philosophy, and Religion”; “Comparative Psychology”; “Natural Theology”; “Science of Mind”.

Bascom, until coming to Wisconsin, was a typical Christian conservative, with a rather indifferent if not slightly skeptical view of government. However, after attaining the Presidency, he swung markedly towards promoting the concept of state intervention in private matters. No doubt, changes in society and the maturing of his own views were responsible. He was in favor of income tax for the redistribution of wealth and also for the strict regulation of business practices, especially trusts and the railroads. Bascom became deeply convinced in the role of the state in people's lives, and urged his students to play a role in helping the public good. However, the role of his strong Temperance beliefs is a matter of debate: did he favor government intrusion mainly because this was the only way that people could remain sober? It is even more debatable as to whether he took the socialist view, that is, whether he believed that government had a deeper role in alleviating the status differences in society, which were often the impetus for self-destructive behavior, such as drinking to excess.

In any case, Bascom, never satisfactorily answered the question of government abuses. Perhaps his view of people became more pessimistic, rather than his view of government becoming more optimistic. Possibly in relation to this, Bascom at one time stated: "Liberty stands for the use of powers, not their abuse . . . If we allow the individual to seek what he regards as his own liberty without relation to that of others . . . the commonwealth itself crumbles away and is at length dispersed to all winds of heaven." In his powerful role as President of the University, Bascom appointed people who would preserve his ideals about the obligation of the individual to serve the interests of greater society, and not only his own.

Paul Dennis Sporer (editor) is the author of *The Dimensions of Companionship; Liberating Love; The Concept of Family; and Equal but Different*. He has also served as editor on more than 30 culturally and historically significant books, including *Painting Explained*, by Thomas Gullick; *Is Secession Treason?*, by Albert Bledsoe; *The Heart of Aryavarta*, by Lawrence Dundas; *Beauty and Art*; by Aldam Heaton; *The French at Home*, by Albert Rhodes; *From Slave Cabin to Pulpit*, by Peter Randolph; *Newer Ideals of Peace*, by Jane Addams; *Views of Old Europe*, by Bayard Taylor; *Gentle Measures*, by Jacob Abbott; *Parental Influences*, William Bacon; *Finding a Way Out*, by Robert Moton; *The New Birth*, by Austin Phelps; *Tupelo*, by John Hill Aughey; *An Incident of Travel*, Arthur Jerome Eddy; *End of an Era*, by John Sergeant Wise; *The Missionary*, by Samuel Mazzuchelli; *Half a Century*, by Jane Swisshelm; *Born Three Times*, by Thomas L. Johnson.

For further information about **THE SCIENCE OF BEAUTY**, or to arrange an interview with the editor, please contact Cassandra Foxton, inform_at_anzapublishing.com. The publisher's website address is AnzaPublishing.com.

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