



BUT the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

Those objects possessing the greatest beauty of all may never grace the eye of the beholder. As Thomas Gray wrote in his epic poem, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

I believe the above verse could apply to many precious children born under hard and austere conditions who are never able to escape the squalid conditions of their home to rise to meet their full, God-given potential. Every place in the world I have traveled, I see beautiful and innocent children who hunger after knowledge and love. Many who never acquire either of those possessions grow into hardened men and women without compassion. In order to love, a child must be imbued with love. The same is true of the Christian. In order to share the love of Christ with others, that love must be shared with him – and Christ shares that love abundantly.

Love and beauty are the treasures of Heaven, and no one can rob Heaven of her possessions. These are granted to us by a loving and beautiful Father in Heaven. If we sow that which we receive, we shall bear a bountiful harvest in both. If we fail to sow, then we shall end with no love, no beauty, and no hope. *And hope maketh not ashamed;*

because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.
(Romans 5:5)

What is beauty and where may it be found? Beauty is an endowment of God. All that He has made is beautiful in its own way and purpose. But anything that mars the beauty of God's Creation is ugly and not beautiful. The great master artists of music, canvas and stone attempt to emulate the beauty of God's Creation to the highest degree of human achievement. True art approaches, as closely as possible, the perfection of beauty God has abundantly showered upon His Creation. Great artists of the past have said:

Nothing makes the soul so pure, so religious, as the endeavor to create something perfect; for God is perfection, and whoever strives for it, strives for something that is Godlike. True painting is only an image of God's perfection, - a shadow of the pencil with which He paints, a melody, a striving after harmony.

~ Michael Angelo

Art, as far as it is able, follows nature, as a pupil imitates his master; thus your art must be, as it were, God's grandchild.

~ Dante

He is the greatest artist who has embodied, in the sum of his work, the greatest number of great ideas.

~ Ruskin

Beauty is simple and unassuming. The most beautiful young maiden is the one with the least paint which would mar and obscure the beauty of God's gift. But in the modern sense, beauty must be crushed in every media of art – music, canvas, marble, etc. With the rise of sadistic ideologies which attempt to destroy the human spirit and soul such as Communism, Nihilism, Fascism, etc., the burgeoning inclination to mar the beauty of God's Creation is everywhere evident from Picasso, Matisse, Rodin, and the hip rock and gutter music of our own day. What is beautiful about a woman with severed head and arms; or twisted and torn scenes of nature that are scenes of horror and malformation? Modern art simply reflects the fallen nature of mankind at its worst.

Some of you may remember the greatest basketball player of his time, Pete (the Pistol) Maravitch. Pete was an unusually gifted player scoring the highest number of goals in NCAA history. He was compelled by his father to practice, practice, practice as a boy. But that practice paid off in high school, college and pro-basketball. Success at first took its toll on Maravitch. A friend says that he visited Maravitch in the early to mid 70's and saw his walls covered with modern art of the most sadistic nature. But Maravitch answered the call of Christ and became a Christian later. The same friend said that he observed nothing but beautiful classical art on the walls of Maravitch's home after he had become a Christian. He died unexpectedly while playing a simple game of basketball with fellow church members in Pasadena on 5 January 1988, age 40. He was in Pasadena to be interviewed by James Dobson of Focus on the Family. Art reflects our view of the world and of heaven.

Frederick Ruckstuhle, a renowned art critic, avers that those who were involved in the development of so-called modern, abstract art had character flaws which their art revealed. Most were as sadistic in character as their art was in appearance.

I have read of an event in the life of Michael Angelo also commented on by Rev FE Marsh in his book, *Pearls, Points, and Parables*, (1908). Below is Reverend Marsh's commentary entitled, *Angel in the Marble*:

Angel in the Marble

And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3:3)

We need a lot of chipping. So said a saint as we were talking together about the Lord's gracious dealings with His people. The saying suggested to my mind the Lord Jesus as the loving Sculptor at work upon the marble of our humanity. There is an angel in the marble, because the pierced hand of the Artist has it in His mind and brings it out by His skill, but there is a 'lot of chipping to be done before the beautiful image of His holy character stands out, displaying the perfection of His work. The hard stone of unbelief, the rough points of self-will, the prominences of worldly ambition, the sharp angles of pride, the ugly faults of temper, the stubborn marks of hereditary trait, and the dark veins of selfishness, are some of the things He removes.

The Lord uses various similes to illustrate His dealings with us. He uses the sieve of sifting to get rid of the chaff of worldliness and to preserve the corn of consecration. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. (Amos 9:9)

He uses the rod of chastisement to remove from us the folly of wilfulness and to train us in the ways of righteousness. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (Hebrews 12:5-6)

He puts us in the crucible of refining to remove the dross of unbelief, and waits to see the face of His own character in the silver of our life (Mal. 3:3).

He uses the knife of pruning to cut off the fruitless branches of profession, and to strengthen the fruitful branches of love. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (John 15:2)

He puts us in the fire of trial to burn up the evil remnants of old habits formed in sin, and to test the reality of our faith in Christ (1Pet. 1:7).

He puts us on the wheel of fashioning to save us from the uselessness of an aimless life, and to make us a vessel meet for His use (2 Tim. 2:21)

And He pours the metal of our inner nature into the mould of His truth, that He may keep us from the shapelessness of worldly ambition and make us answer to the humility of His character (Rom. 6:17, margin).

The hammer of His word and the chisel of His grace, are used by the hands of Him, whose hands were once transfixed for our benefit on Calvary's cross.

Perhaps, if we look with more Godly resolution, beneath the rough and stony façade of those we meet daily, we might find an angel hidden beneath the rocky exterior.