

Alcohol and Creative Work*

PART I. PAINTERS

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IN learned treatises on genius and geniuses, as well as in folklore and popular opinion, reference to the role of alcohol in the life and work of creative men is common. "Alcoholic" poets and artists figure in the histories of literature and painting no less than in fiction. Alcohol has frequently been blamed as a baleful influence wrecking the personal if not the creative lives of artists. But since antiquity alcohol has also been praised as a stimulant to creativity. Thus Huneker (1) remarks that "Art and alcohol are inseparably wedded as in the Greek myth Apollo and Dionysos imaged beauty and ecstasy"; and Jacobsen (2) speaks of "That small group of geniuses of peculiar constitution whose spiritual and artistic powers have been liberated, at propitious times, by alcohol."

There has been no specific study, however, of the actual role, if any, that alcohol customarily has played, or of the various roles that it may have played in the lives of different artists. Because of the theoretical importance of this question not only for the psychology of the use of alcohol but also for the psychology of art and the understanding of creativity, the present study has been undertaken, and the following pages are a first report of the results.

Careful consideration of possible methods of approach led to the conclusion that analysis of the lives and productions of historical figures was perhaps feasible in the case of writers but offered little promise in the case of painters. Many poets, novelists and playwrights have

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