



## XXVII. Dissertation on the paintings of the middle age, and those called Gothic

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4, 6, 3, 5, 14, by successive steps of the index L: then, on examination of the second or shilling column, 16 will be found beneath the index, and the nearest red figure which it has passed by will be 1, denoting 1 pound 16 shillings: 16 therefore is set down, and the pin *x* still kept in the same hole to denote that one is carried forwards; the circle is again brought to the zero, by bringing it back as far as it will go; and lastly, the column of pounds is added, in exactly the same manner.

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**XXVII.** *Dissertation on the Paintings of the middle Age, and those called Gothic. Extracted from an unpublished Work on Painting, by M. PAILLOT DE MONTABERT.*

[Continued from p. 44.]

*Of the various Schools of the middle Age.—Roman School of the middle Age.—Greek School of Constantinople from the ninth to the sixteenth Century exclusively.—Florentine School of the middle Age.—Venetian School of the middle Age.—Gothic School of the North.*

*Roman School of the middle Age.*

**C**ONSTANTINOPLE for a long period gave laws to Europe in the arts; but in spite of the influence which this school may have had over the painters of Rome, the ancient models, always reviving in this rich capital of the world, presented nourishment too abundant and too wholesome to encourage a preference for the new style of paintings sent from the East, to which they conformed occasionally merely out of condescension. All the artists of Rome, in short, down to the time of Raphael, knew how to profit by the innumerable sculptures and subterranean paintings which were daily discovered in that famous city. There cannot be a doubt, therefore, that the character of this school consisted at all times in a correct style, in clear and expressive pantomimes, forcible and yet agreeable, as well as in draperies of a good taste; and we ought therefore to regard this school as the first preserver of the true ancient style of painting\*.

*Greek*

\* All the Christian sarcophagi of Rome are executed exactly in the style of the last sculptures of Paganism: and it is surprising enough to see upon these sepulchral ornaments Moses striking the rock, Jesus entering into Nazareth, or standing in the midst of his apostles, and so many other sacred subjects, similar in the costume and workmanship to the representations

*Greek School of Constantinople.*

When Byzantium became the residence of Constantine, his favourite city was enriched not only with beautiful monuments brought from Rome, but there were also collected at the same place such objects of the greatest rarity as still existed in ancient Greece. The number of famous statues and pictures, according to historians, was immense; and it is truly astonishing that so many fine models had not perpetuated a race of good artists even in spite of every obstacle. To say nevertheless that there no longer remains any thing of the ancient simplicity, or of the grandeur and dignity so essential to the majesty of the art, would betray an ignorance of the progress of the human mind; and, we may even conjecture, that in the same way as certain emperors at Rome caused either from taste or caprice, the ancient style of the Greek sculpture to be imitated, so also we see certain artists of the present day, from motives which we cannot exactly divine, assume the ancient characters of the schools, and reproduce recollections of the beautiful, in such a way that observers, more than once in this school, must have met with figures full of elegance and simplicity\*. In general the characters of the Greek school of Constantinople are gravity, dignity, and even beauty, although indicated by feeble means †.

*Florentine School of the middle Age.*

I should be inclined to believe that the zeal and enthusiasm which were manifested at Florence for ancient literature, at a period probably anterior to that of the Medici, produced among the artists of that period an inventive and poetical taste, and that it was in this school that the

tions of the ancient mythology. In the same way there is reason to believe that the style of portable pictures painted upon wood, and which have been destroyed by time, was a continuation of the style of the preceding paintings. The Catacombs exhibit proofs of this.

\* Witness, for example, the statue of Julian the apostate in the Napoleon Museum, No. 6.

† Those who have not seen the grand Mosaics of the most ancient churches in Rome may consult, *inter alia*, the engravings of Ciampini, and particularly that which represents the Mosaic of Saint Agatha. of Ravenna, tom. i. tab. xlv. as well as the engraving tab. liv. and several others in the same work, which will show the noble simplicity of the Greek style of Constantinople. It is worthy of remark, that the artists which Italy attracted from this city were rather Mosaic daubers, than painters properly so called. It is a pity that they should have so frequently repeated the ideas of each other: nevertheless, upon considering their works with attention, we discover more variety than is at first imagined; and they possess this in common with all the ancients, who are very different from each other, when they are considered with care and without prejudice.

qualities

qualities of expression were most frequently to be found. To attain this there was no occasion for the assistance of the Greeks and Romans: the mere bent of the genius of the artists and the study of the passions were sufficient. Hence those painters, who gradually got rid of the ancient maxims in their taste and in their style, gave more animation to their figures. Hence proceeded those expressive and true images which have been subjects of imitation with so many subsequent painters; hence those physiognomies truly natural, and inspired by a sound judgement and feeling heart. In this school therefore may be acquired a great accuracy of delineation, a quality which alone perhaps, when it was properly appreciated, formed the Verrochios, the Michael-Angelos, the Leonardis, and the bold designers who adorned Tuscany, and whose celebrity was such that the whole of the painters of Italy, in studying their designs, were forced to imitate their new taste. May we not suppose also, that this custom of servilely copying individual peculiarities, and this neglect of the ancient models, may have led them to introduce into almost all their subjects the costumes of contemporaries? and perhaps several pictures of that time, in which the costume is Grecian, have been executed by Florentine artists.

*Venetian School of the middle Age.*

Venice received the arts from the East, and her school of painting was much more influenced by the painters of Constantinople than by those of Rome or Florence: there was a direct and commercial communication with the city in which the emperors had taken up their residence; and if commerce ought to be considered as a vehicle of, or as influential on, the arts, we may easily conceive that all the portable works, which could be regarded as objects of speculation, must have had the character of those which were exported from the East. The Venetians, following the example of the Orientalists, studied brilliancy of colouring, and all the arts by which this effect could be obtained; and it would seem that not only did they profit by the rich colouring materials which commerce procured them, but long before the time of Giorgioni there were painters who studied the calculation of the masses of *chiaro-oscuro*, as well as the effects of opposite shades; so that this school cannot fail to be regarded as the parent of the modern colourists; since long before the Carpacci, the Basacti, and even the Bellini, they had always painted with vivid and durable colours.

lours \*. Thus, I have no doubt that, by carefully pursuing these researches; we may be able to discover the source of the colouring in the most distant periods of this school. We may also add to these causes the custom of contemplating the highly coloured dresses of the Levantines who visited Venice; but their painters, not having the ancient models, nor the manners of the East, could not perpetuate the grand style which belongs to design.

*Gothic School of the North.*

Although the general appellation of Gothic has been given to the architecture of the middle age, the constant contemplation of ancient monuments must nevertheless force us to acknowledge certain distinctions in the various styles. The Italians, for example, gave the name of Arabo-tudesco to the style of the dome of the Great Church at Florence, built by Arnolfo in 1290; and they add that it is a mixture of the Moorish or good Greek with the Germano-Gothic. In architecture a distinction has also been made among other styles, of the Saracen and the Saxo-Gothic. Sculpture has not been submitted to the same analyses, since its productions have been too much neglected; but the styles of painting were still more forgotten, and their different characters have not even been inquired into. The appellation of Gothic has therefore been given indiscriminately to all those paintings of a different physiognomy from those of the modern schools of Italy, and a great confusion of ideas has consequently been the result. Now, as the few paintings which were to be found in the North, before the existence of the Florentine school, were confined to some imitation of the *Greek-Christian* style, and presented but a very small number of images, it was thought that the Gothic style in painting was precisely that which had so abundantly filled France, Germany, and the whole of the North, with the vicious studies which were brought from Italy. We may therefore say that the school which has been called Gothic, originated much later than has been imagined, beginning only at the epoch when the influence of the ancient styles had become almost null; and when caprice, the barbarous taste of the times, and the

\* All the movable paintings anterior to the innovation of John of Bruges, introduced at Venice by Antonello de Messina about the year 1450, were executed with white of eggs, wax, or gum; and when oil was introduced into the colours, it was merely used to finish, or to give permanence to, the pictures already far advanced by the first processes. Several Venetian pieces in the Napoleon Museum are painted in this way.

tone given by the manners of men, were the only guides which artists had: if architecture and occasionally sculpture, which was then tributary to it, preserved under the superintendance of priests and monks some of their essential qualities, painting also, which was more generally attainable, was almost entirely abandoned to the taste of those who attached themselves to it as a study. The painters of the North were no longer in contact with the ancient pupils of Rome and Constantinople; and notwithstanding the ingenuity of some figures in certain manuscripts, it can never be said that in these countries the art was upon the same level as in Italy. Some time afterwards the influence of the styles of some men very justly celebrated elsewhere, such as Albert Durer and Van Eecke, did nothing but degrade even the bad taste which prevailed; and it was after their time in particular, and after the pretended imitations of the Florentine school, that artists every where produced on glass, in altar-pieces, and in books, those works equally ridiculous as disgusting, and which are still to be met with daily: it is probable, therefore, that if in these countries there are occasionally paintings of some value, they have been the productions of foreigners invited there either by the princes and churchmen, or by some rich individuals. We may therefore repeat that, in the North, the style of almost all the paintings of the sixteenth century, notwithstanding certain qualities which sometimes render them valuable, is truly barbarous; and that this is the sole and true cause of that disgust which has been erroneously referred to causes originating in former ages, which were supposed to have been still more barbarous.

It will be no longer astonishing that it has been falsely supposed that painting took its rise in the sixteenth century, since, in fact, we generally find in the countries of the North styles which may be referred to the æra of the new schools, and since the churches, monasteries, and public buildings, were every where emblazoned with the mixed tastes of so many new painters; tastes which were even combined with that of Michael Angelo, the aspect of which gives to the public the false idea of works executed more than a hundred years before. This school was the æra of those attitudes and of those harsh and angular postures, the æra of the barbarous superfluity of back grounds and accessories, perpetuated perhaps by the slight degradation of the colours of glass; and afterwards came the æra of those pantomimic and academical contorsions which were said

to have been brought from the Vatican: in a word, it was then that they introduced the strange and revolting custom of employing grotesque draperies of woollen stuff or moistened parchment: a style which even for gravest subjects too much resembles that which painters would study at present in our great cities, were they to frequent every public masquerade.

Let persons call these shameful perversions of painting Gothic if they please; they possess nothing in common with the fine arts of antiquity, and it is unfair to class them with the simple and rational productions of the middle age: certainly it was not these miserable daubings which Raphael made use of as his models; and it would not be absurd to suppose, that in these degraded times that contempt arose which the Italians have ever since cherished for ultramontane artists.

I conclude therefore from these observations, that Rome in the middle age produced paintings of a simple, rational, and regularly composed style, and that there are to be found in the works of that time subjects clearly conceived and finely expressed,—methodical compositions, and draperies of a happy and graceful flow: that the Greek school of the Lower Empire always presented figures of a severe and dignified character; that it still excels with the lustre of the colours of the East, and that it propagated this grand and ancient problem, *magnificence on simplicity*. I conclude that Tuscany witnessed the cultivation of painting by men of genius who formed for themselves a style animated, but not very conformable to the elevation of the arts: that Venice exhibited in the most distant periods proofs of intelligence in colouring and *chiaro-oscuro*, and participated in some respects with the Greek taste of Constantinople: in a word, that the Goths of the North, who went in search of the arts to that Florence whose celebrity attracted the whole world, brought nothing from it, or from Rome, but superficial and altered ideas, or false and trivial traditions, which spread throughout their own still barbarous country all those hideous images which I willingly abandon to the ill-nature of the malcontents.

There certainly were mixtures of these various manners in different countries; but the characters of these schools are not the less determined, and seem to be founded on the nature of things.

It has been already shown how erroneous the opinion of those has been, who, confounding all times and styles, do not admit of common sense as guiding the painters until the

the efforts of the celebrated men of the sixteenth century. Here we ought to enforce a principle which is very palpable, and easy of being retained, viz. that the art of painting is the purer, the nearer it approaches ancient times; that all which it has acquired in practical perfection, in subsequent ages, has only improved it in so far as artists have preserved a respect for ancient doctrines; and lastly, that if the manners and society of posterior times have restored its credit and activity, it is nevertheless true, that the best productions of the epoch called improperly enough the æra of the revival of letters, are those in which the new styles and imitations were not substituted for the ancient documents. The art therefore never perished; and when we compare the evils which it experienced at the periods of the conquests of the barbarians, with those which were brought upon it by the theories of the new students, we shall not hesitate to affirm, that it has suffered much more from the latter than from the former, and that their true destroyers have exerted their ravages much more directly and much more slowly than has been imagined.

Besides, in order to have a clear idea of these influences, and of the progress of the art, we must necessarily have seen and attentively considered the various productions on which these influences were exercised. But how much have these inquiries been despised! In fact, that person who, after having expressed his disgust at the sight of some of the vignettes of a manuscript of the sixteenth century, or of some badly stained glass much more modern, will inform us that the Gothic is a pitiful style; such a person, I say, who has seen those insufficient objects and some scraps of portraits, has never visited Tuscany, Venice, or Rome, has no knowledge of the fragments deposited in the voluminous collections of Bosio, Aringhi, Ciampini, Battari, and others: he passes by with disdain some valuable paintings which are frequently found in the cabinets of the curious, and he despises them because they are not decorated with the livery of our schools. In a word, the belief is too prevalent, that with the sixteenth century painting revived; and on the contrary the term *revival* is applied very improperly to the æra at which, perhaps, the art began to receive the last touches of degradation: and if eminent men and bold and original artists have adorned this memorable æra, if the too famous Michael Angelo by his pompous works has attracted the notice of all men; it is notwithstanding true, that he has stripped the ancient art of its *naïveté*, and the best pictures even of the present

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day are those in which we trace the beauty, the true simplicity, and the striking truths of nature. Thus the period of the corruption of the art was not when it lost its honours and consideration, but rather that it was no longer founded upon the grand principles which are its true supporters; and such is the immutable order of things, that all the splendour of the Cartoni, the Bernini, all the noise made by the Vanloos and the Bouchers never disguised the degraded state of painting.

Since therefore a new æra has commenced, and the art has risen by the force of genius alone, and without the aid of that cruel benefit of nature, which generally paves the way for the lustre of the arts by the previous darkness of destruction,—ought we not boldly to extinguish the prejudices which still pursue us, and reject with dignity all that is unworthy of our new glory?

But we shall now point out more precisely the various qualities observed in the last productions of the languishing and enfeebled art, and prove that they have been common at all times to the works of the most distinguished, both among ancient and modern artists.

[To be continued.]

XXVIII. *Remarks on Don JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ's Animadversions on Part of the Trigonometrical Survey of England.* By OLINTHUS GREGORY, LL.D. of the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich.

To Mr. Tilloch.

DEAR SIR,—WHEN I say that I have been greatly surprised to see in the second part of the Philosophical Transactions for 1812, Don Rodriguez's animadversions upon part of the English Trigonometrical Survey, I conjecture that I am merely describing a feeling which has been more or less experienced by every man of science in this kingdom. The publication of an attempt by a *foreigner* to cast discredit upon a great national undertaking, in the Transactions of the most eminent philosophical institution of that nation, the Royal Society, that is, in a work which learned men on the continent contemplate as a fair picture of the science and genius of England, is, I believe, a thing unprecedented in the history of literature. If the great work which Don Rodriguez has taken upon himself to examine, had been really reprehensible, it would still have been extraordinary that he should be permitted to give his  
censures