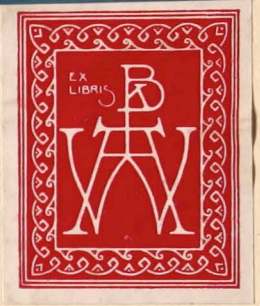


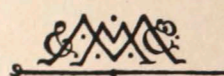
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## THE ART OF BOTTICELLI



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# THE ART OF BOTTICELLI

AN ESSAY IN PICTORIAL CRITICISM

BY  
LAURENCE BINYON

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED, LONDON  
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1913

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TO  
SIGNORA CANTAGALLI

## PREFACE

AMONG the multitude of books on artists which, during the last score of years, have been poured from the press, Mr. Herbert Horne's 'Sandro Botticelli' stands apart, distinguished by a most rare union of original research, laboriously and indefatigably pursued, with masterly handling of fact and document; of thoroughness and minute precision with lucidity of narrative and a sober beauty of style. When therefore I was invited to write on the same master, being no friend to superfluous books, I felt at first that for me the subject was closed. But thinking over the matter, I found that there was still something that might be said from a different point of view. Mr. Horne has told all that is known about Botticelli, though I understand that since the publication of his book he has added yet further to his discoveries; but his aim has been to present the art of the master as it appeared to his Florentine contemporaries, and to clear his presentment of it from the modern sentiment that has coloured the view of our own generation. My aim in this essay has been rather to discover what the art of a Florentine of the Quattrocento means for us to-day and for our own art; an inquiry which has led me also to discuss some current modes of pictorial criticism. But in a

# Preface

hundred ways, and especially in all questions of fact and chronology, I am indebted to Mr. Horne's great work, which cannot be too much admired as a monument of English scholarship.

L. B.

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## BOTTICELLI'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR MODERN ART

## Botticelli's Significance for Modern Art

### I

**I**N the collection of Prince Pallavicini at Rome there is a small picture ascribed to Sandro Botticelli. It is called *La Derelitta*, and it represents a woman alone crouching, with head bowed upon her hands, before a closed door in the archway of a high wall. She is sitting huddled upon the steps of the door.

Some years ago a reproduction of this little-known picture was published ; and I remember hearing a group of connoisseurs discussing it. The unusual and strange character of the subject, which has not with certainty been identified, impresses itself on the mind ; it is the kind of subject which a modern painter might readily choose : and one of the group was moved to hazard the possibility that the picture might even be a modern work. If so, said another, it is by a nineteenth century hand ; it must either be of the fifteenth century or the nineteenth ; nothing between. It took no thought to realize at once the truth of this remark.

Yet how singular this is, that three whole centuries should elapse during which it was quite inconceivable that a painter should feel, and see, and draw in this particular way, and that a fourth century should supervene in which once again it was possible.

What does this mean, this recovery of a certain mood, with the reawakening of a sensitiveness to a certain vein of emotion, certain aspects of life and the world, long submerged ?

# The Art of Botticelli

Was it merely the caprice of mental fashion, as some would assert, a whimsical accident, which brought an art like Botticelli's into subtle relation with the mood of our own day? Was it an insignificant reaction of dilettante minds from the realities of life and art in their own day, toying affectedly with the fascinations of a dead past? A morbid quest of romance in the backward of Time, a refusal to march in the sun with the banners and trumpets of Progress? Was it only to nourish the vanity of a coterie of aesthetes, with their cult of languor and wistfulness?

No; it was something that lay much deeper than this; and it was not for nothing that Botticelli, a painter whom the world had passed by for near four hundred years, emerged again into recognition and found once more a home in human joy.

It is true that to the generation which, inspired by Walter Pater's essay of 1870, an essay which apologizes for devoting attention to a painter of secondary rank, first fell under Botticelli's spell, the art of the master meant something very different from what it meant to his own contemporaries. The conception of his art was founded more upon the school-pieces than the original works; on the exaggerations of his mannerisms and the fainter echoes of his sentiment, as they die away into languor and prettiness among the feeble of his imitators. 'Hardly any collection of note,' said Pater forty years ago, 'is without one of those circular pictures' of the Madonna and Child 'into which the attendant angels depress their heads so naïvely.' Whereas now we should say that scarcely any collection, even of great note, can boast of that rarest of treasures, an authentic tondo of Botticelli. Yet these school-pieces, with all their mannerism and feeblenesses, are a part of Botticelli's creation; but for him they would never have come into being. The peculiar mood, the peculiar fantasy, which they reflect more or less clearly or faintly, are in his own work too. It was not the characteristic of his art which gave him fame in Florence. His contemporaries, as Mr. Horne has emphasized in his book, praised him for his con-

## THE MADONNA OF THE POMEGRANATE

*Uffizi, Florence*



## Significance for Modern Art

structive power, his judgment and fine sense of proportion; they ignored the wistfulness of his Madonnas, they admired the energy and character of his figures, with the 'manly air' of their heads.

In neither aspect, I think, does the whole significance of Botticelli's art appear. What that significance is, I shall try to explain.

It was in our own country that Botticelli was first appreciated; and for the moment I will confine myself to art and thought in England.

All through the nineteenth century, along with the ever-increasing mastery of material forces, the multiplication of mechanical inventions, and the complacency with scientific progress these engendered, we mark the symptoms of spiritual dissatisfaction, restlessness, and revolt.

The heritage of the Renaissance had lingered on, sterilizing art and taste with external canons, ever more and more divorced from a life to which elegance and comfort were congenial aims, but which was wholly incapable of the creative grandeur it drove itself to idolize.

The consciousness that in the art of the Middle Ages there was something worth more than antiquarian interest or indulgent patronage was stirring fitfully in the eighteenth century. The revival of old forgotten ballads, the passionate nostalgia of Chatterton, the fervent revolt of Blake, the romance of Coleridge and Keats,—all were symptoms of an impulse having many sources, and taking many forms in literature, art and architecture, to seek behind the imposing Renaissance what for the time it had obscured or crushed. This quest of rediscovery was no antiquarian movement; it sprang from men's consciousness that something was lacking in themselves and in their expression of themselves, something which accepted traditions no longer satisfied; and, as always, they turned to the past of the world to take up lost threads, to seek and find, in things that forgotten men had made and thought and written, refreshment in the present and encouragement for the future. It

# The Art of Botticelli

was a stimulus all the more genial and productive because there was no danger of the modern world becoming enslaved to medieval conceptions and habits of mind, now irrevocably removed from us.

Another element in this reaction from Renaissance traditions must not be ignored; and this is the difference in mental character between the North and South of Europe. Northern nations had acquiesced in the authority of ideals congenial to a race like the Italians, but in such measure as they had failed to make those ideals truly their own and to fuse them with their native instincts and traditions, they felt a need to shake off what remained external.

What was it which sapped the inner life of the Renaissance and brought it, for all the splendour of its various achievements, to sterility?

It was this.

The Italians of the fifteenth century saw the antique world as in a vision; a vision seen by glimpses, clouded but ineffably bright. They saw a world where men moved as gods, with all their powers harmoniously developed and active, possessed by a conception of humanity in which no one side of its energies was stunted and depressed in order to exalt another, in which an exquisite balance of intellect and emotion was attained. And this conception of radiant human completeness was ensphered in the symbolic beauty of the perfect body.

But from what a different world were they themselves sprung! A world, where the body was a prison to be endured, where the intellect was fettered, where the senses were to be subdued, where suffering was exalted, where to be out of harmony with this world was the pledge of glory in another.

What wonder that the vision of blithe, complete, self-confident humanity dazzled, troubled, and intoxicated? The apparition of an antique marble, dug up from the soil which for centuries had hidden it away from sight, all the more appealing in its youthful fairness of form because Time had mutilated it, seemed like some-

# Significance for Modern Art

thing in themselves which the world had maimed and neglected, which they had lost and now recovered.

They saw the vision, but they saw it from afar; they saw it from the outside. They were not Greeks, they could not see with Greek eyes. They did not understand what went to make those radiant forms.

For behind that creation which made the antique sculpture so wonderful lay no easy culture of gratified senses, but the severity of discipline, the ardour of worship, the claims of sacrifice. It was no glorification of the sublime powers of individual personality that inspired the sculptors of those serene athletic naked figures, but a merging of personality in the type ideally fitted to serve the exacting needs of the state. It was an ideal of the community, to which, in Sparta at all events, the unfit were ruthlessly sacrificed. It was a religion, of which the races and the games were the ritual. And it was this religious inspiration, this sense of sacredness in the body, which the Renaissance inevitably missed.

But it was not only through the beautiful bright fragments of old marbles that Greece allured her votaries. Equally potent was the spell of literature. Never were the classics studied with such absorbed devotion as in the Florence of the fifteenth century. And as that enchanting world of Hellas opened more and more of its treasures to view, its magnificent poetry and its exalted philosophy, the craving to bring all this recovered experience of humanity into a true and living relation with the ideals and beliefs of the day became more urgent. Just as the popular imagination of the Middle Ages had sought to establish some kind of continuity with the lost greatness of Greece and Rome, and had made of Virgil and of the ancient Sibyls prophets of the coming of Christendom, so now when the antique world was emerging into clear light from fabulous confusion and distortion, it seemed to many minds that a reconciliation must be made between Greek philosophy and Christian dogma, and they sought in Plato and Plotinus for the fusing secret.

## The Art of Botticelli

But that irruption of the classic world in its glory was too sudden and overpowering to be assimilated in the hearts of men, or to be taken into their whole nature. Their intellect was intoxicated, but the less conscious part of their nature, steeped in quite alien habits of thought, remained untouched. The rites and the external authority of Christendom persisted, while for the spirit of Christianity was substituted a passionate and indiscriminate veneration for antiquity. Popes became pagan as never Greeks had been; for the paganism of the Renaissance ignored the real religion of the Greeks; it paid homage to Christ and to Apollo with a like hollowness and externality. So in this world divided and at strife within itself, lacking a real centre to its aspirations, arose that towering spirit of personal ambition, greedy of beauty, athirst for knowledge, lusting for boundless power, which makes that age seem as portentously indifferent to morality as our own age seems portentously indifferent to beauty.

The Renaissance by its intellectual one-sidedness failed to grasp and stir the common heart; it failed to ally itself with what was deepest in humanity; and hence its relative barrenness. It caused the religious art of Italy to become rhetorical, and it did not make pagan themes religious.

Botticelli was a child of the Renaissance. But he was not wholly of it. He lived on into the sixteenth century, and already before his death his art was demoded. The mighty powers of Leonardo and Michelangelo were already transforming the whole aspect of Florentine painting, and Botticelli was left behind. Far from attempting to assimilate the new manner, indeed, he appears in his later works to be rather harking backward; he discards more and more the naturalism of his own generation, the naturalism which he had shown in earlier achievements he had all the power, if little of the inclination, to master; and his art becomes more and more an expression of the spirit and its emotions.

It is easy to dismiss this temper of Botticelli's later paintings as the reaction of an ageing man, too old and inelastic to alter the

## Significance for Modern Art

habits of his mind and methods and to adapt himself to quickly changing times.

But it is just this reaction of a single soul from the dominant tendencies of the world about it which makes Botticelli so interesting, and still more the character of this reaction, the significance of the form which it took. It is not a thing to be explained merely in terms of technique; it lies much deeper.

That sense of displacement or loss which seemed to Pater to haunt the figures of Botticelli's painting, 'the wistfulness of exiles, conscious of a passion and energy greater than any known issue of them explains,' is it not really a reflection of something in the painter's inner nature, which was never wholly at home in the world in which he found himself?

Ardent, restless, and irrepressible, we see him caught in the stream that carried his contemporaries along so smoothly, and then halting and returning; never quite one of the modern movement, yet never quite able or willing to turn his back on it. The modern spirit and the medieval meet in him. He was at once the friend of Lorenzo de' Medici and the follower of Savonarola.

And we too, in so far as we desire to find in our art as in our lives a true and full expression of our whole natures, we too are conscious of strife and trouble and conflict within ourselves, in face of a universe discovered to be so vast and unimaginably complex: in us too is a sense of loss, and with that sense a thirst to recover what we have lost, to hope and to re-create.

Of all his generation in Florence Botticelli was the one artist in whom the Greek world of myth and legend stirred a chord akin to the devotional. The very incompleteness of his knowledge saved him from a fond fidelity to external aspects; but in any case we may believe he would have been saved from that by the innate poetic sincerity of his nature. The forms in which he imagined the divinities of Greece were not the braced yet rounded proportions of antique sculpture, with their balance and serenity, but the forms he found among the youth of his own Tuscany, long-limbed, large-

## The Art of Botticelli

jointed, a little lean, with a beauty of character rather than of type, and with faces in which sweetness mingles with a kind of trouble of unrealized emotion.

Of all the array of divine and half-divine beings that people the Greek myths, it is Persephone whom he should have painted; the Maiden, rapt from the flowers of Sicily to dwell in the underworld, and returning to the earth and to the arms of her great Mother, with what joy in the almost forgotten sunlight warming and thrilling her, yet also with what strangeness of new knowledge, the difference bought by acquaintance with the world of pain and longing! Indeed it is with an aspect like what we imagine of Persephone's return that Botticelli's Venus comes to earth out of the seas. Maiden and innocent, yet with knowledge in her eyes of the things that suffer and are not satisfied, she comes, fugitive rather than triumphant, as to shelter. She is the spirit of Beauty, rapt from the flowers and sunny vales of Greece, who has dwelt through the Dark Ages away from lovely companionship, away from youth, and now with the reawakening of the world again emerges to Italian air, shyly and half-afraid. In the 'Spring,' too, she reappears, how grave and with what pensive eyes! as if aware of the pain that comes with birth and of the sorrow that is entwined with human rapture. Not otherwise has Botticelli painted his Madonnas. 'Reanimate Greek' we may say of him; but by no means pagan, in the customary connotation of the word. Again, his Venus and his Flora in their garden-close, planted round with glowing orange-trees, tread grass that is all starred with the field flowers of Tuscany, painted with the delicate intimacy and love that medieval artists spent so lavishly on the coloured borders of their manuscripts. With all his kindling to that breath of beauty from the antique world, then so new and strange, Botticelli has no thought of abandoning his natural inheritance of the Middle Ages.

These, it may be said, are fanciful interpretations. But, if we take the 'Spring' and the 'Venus' in the presumed sense in which they were conceived by the painter, is it not significant that he

### THE BIRTH OF VENUS

*Uffizi, Florence*



## Significance for Modern Art

should so dwell on myth that embodies the primal energies and central mysteries of life, and so spiritualize his theme that it seems in his hands to belong to no different world from the cycle of Christian story?

But the persons of classic myth and legend, who in Botticelli's imagination were so young and had so fresh a grace, were soon to become, as the Renaissance ripened, how trite and frosty! With familiarity they grew remote; passion became pedantry, and the letter overcame the spirit.

I find no understanding in the view that Botticelli was a natural pagan who turned Christian under the influence of Savonarola.

Savonarola was not the fanatic Puritan he has been sometimes portrayed. Hear his own words:

'In what does beauty exist? In colour? No. In form? No. Beauty is born of the correspondences of parts and colours... This as regards composite things; the beauty of simple things is in their light... Behold, God is light; he is beauty itself. Thus the beauty of men and women is the greater and more perfect, the more resemblance it hath to primary beauty.

'What then is this beauty? It is a quality resulting from the proportion and correspondence of the members and parts of the body. Thou dost not call a woman beautiful on account of her beautiful nose and beautiful hands, but when all is in harmony. What is the source of this beauty? It comes from the soul.'

This assuredly is not the language of a Puritan, of one who distrusts the senses as evil; it is not the language of one insensible to beauty; it is the language of one who is not only impressible by the senses, but has a real understanding of art. The Puritan is suspicious of art, because art is of necessity sensuous, and in a work of art he sees only what is represented, just as he would regard it in actual life; he is incapable of that response to rhythmic beauty of relation by which the representation even of grossness may be carried away from the world of fact into the world of idea.

Doubtless, like all reformers, Savonarola was deluded by the

## The Art of Botticelli

idea of edification; he desired too much to press art into the service of morality and religion, a desire that always defeats its own end. In this he was like Plato; Plato of whom the Florentine scholars and pedants talked so abundantly, and with so little understanding.

Again, when Savonarola criticizes the painters of Florence for taking well-known and sometimes notorious women as models for saints, and setting portraits of these fair ladies in frescoes and altar pieces, splendidly apparelled, and when he tells them that the Virgin Mary was not dressed in this manner but went simply clothed and veiled 'like a poor woman who is pained if her face be seen,' is not the criticism, from the point of view of art, a just one?

The reproof may well have been directed against painters like Ghirlandaio, whose fondness for introducing recognized portraits of Florentine ladies into sacred scenes no doubt contributed to his great popularity. But how grievously this element of parade mars the conception of the theme, and even the execution of it! For no painter could act thus who was really possessed by his subject. He remains outside it, and we too, the spectators, remain outside it. These introduced portraits are not there for the purposes of the picture but for the purpose of pleasing patrons and the world. Their very figures, detached and distracting, chill and harden and hamper the design.

Savonarola perhaps was too much an Italian to have appreciated, could he have seen it, the art of Rembrandt. But the paintings and etchings by Rembrandt of the Gospel scenes, with their utter reality of imagination, their utter possession by the subject in hand, irresistibly recur to one who reads the Friar's words. In them, through all the homeliness of presentment, is that spiritual beauty and that deep sincerity which he desired.

But mark in what way Savonarola's teaching actually took effect. The master who most completely fell under his influence was Fra Bartolommeo. It is true that, as Mr. Horne points out,

## Significance for Modern Art

the earlier works of Fra Bartolommeo show a strong reaction from the tendencies reproved by the Friar in painters like Ghirlandaio. Instead of portraits doing duty for Madonnas and Magdalens we find grave and gracious types, and instead of the gorgeous costume of the ladies of the day, we find a 'grand and generalized' cast of drapery. And the example so set persists with equal strength in Andrea del Sarto and in Raphael.

But if we ask what sort of religious art Savonarola's words call up, do we find it realized in the art of Fra Bartolommeo? The Friar, it may be, would have approved the modesty and decorum of it. But that ardent spiritual beauty, partaking of the divine radiance of light, how little of this appears in Fra Bartolommeo's painting, in which we find so much of the staid virtues, and so much of the uninspiring correctness of academic art, and in which the ideals of classicism seem, to our eyes, more dominant than any religious aspiration.

There was another, and a far greater, who in his youth sat under Savonarola and pondered his burning speech. Michelangelo was not hampered by any tenets of the Friar; he pursued his own way and his own faith in art. But in Savonarola he recognized a sincerity and a capacity for indignation with the world's wrong akin to his own nature. As against the world of the dilettanti, the pedants, the sensualists, the hypocrites, the despots, then in power, he was on Savonarola's side. And he alone had the Titan strength to take the elements of an art developing in the direction of material splendour, controlled by scientific study, devotion to antiquity, and other extraneous aims, and make them expressive, in sublime pictorial and plastic language, of the troubled soaring spirit of mankind.

And what of Botticelli? Of that Titanic power he was incapable. But his instinct and his gift in art were far different. He too listened to Savonarola, but was not of his party. Only after the Friar had suffered death did he throw in his lot with his followers. What Botticelli's actual religious opinions were, we

## The Art of Botticelli

do not know. He may not have been orthodox; Fra Bartolommeo may have been a more religious man, in the conventional acceptance of the term. But what we do know, what we know from the living testimony of his art, is that Botticelli had in a singular degree, in an infinitely greater degree than Fra Bartolommeo, the imagination for spiritual things, the genius for expressing them.

But it was not Savonarola who taught him this. It is present in his art from the beginning. Even when, for the moment, he seems almost to identify himself with the naturalism of his generation, the flame of it is still visible in his work; and, as we shall see when we come to consider his career in detail, it burns with brighter intensity as he goes on, till in some of his latest creations the extreme passion of his spirit passes over into a kind of feverish exhaustion.

Botticelli painted nudes, which Savonarola condemned. He held his art free for pagan as for Christian themes. But the same fervency of the spirit breathes in all his painting. He, too, like Michelangelo, responded to the burning sincerity in Savonarola's nature, careless, I imagine, whether the Friar approved of his art or not, though after the Friar's execution a deeper tinge of mysticism certainly pervades it; and, as with Michelangelo again, the intimate study of Dante profoundly penetrated his life and intensified his own ideals.

It is this power of spirituality, not only felt in the man, but expressed with the felicity of genius in his work, which specially arrests and attracts us in Botticelli. It is this which is of import to us, now and to-day. Spirituality in art, speaking through sensuous form and colour: how rare a thing this is, how singularly rare, in European painting!

Even that spirituality which we discern in Botticelli is, by the material influences of his day and the temper of the art whose language he was trained to use, restrained and often baulked of free expression. And the art of the late Renaissance, and especially its ecclesiastical art, seems wholly to have forgotten any language

### *THE DEATH OF ST. IGNATIUS AND THE FINDING OF CHRIST'S NAME WRITTEN ON HIS HEART*

*Academy, Florence*



## Significance for Modern Art

but that of rhetoric. The soul of Europe as reflected in subsequent painting seems ignorant of any need to express more than the momentary glow of living, joy in the world as it is, consciousness of ease and power, or the fascination of a mode, with now and then some stormier glimpse of heroic conflict, or the vista of brooding reverie.

For the Renaissance, by its want of inner soul, helped to create, by reaction from itself, the antagonistic spirit which hardened into Puritanism: two rivers have run side by side and never met. The spirituality which might have clothed itself in the gracious forms and hues of art and found in beauty its natural mode of speech, withdrew as to a naked prison-house; it brooded over itself within bare walls, and became harsh and unlovely, starved of air and the sun's sweetness, and warped by its own pride. Art is the natural language of imagination; but Puritanism murdered imagination, and, making an idolatry of the letter more corrupting because more insidious than any image-worship of its abhorrence, sent beauty into exile and degraded art.

Alas, that this should have been! For had there not been this disastrous divorce between the life of the senses and the life of the spirit, how much completer would modern art have been as an expression of the European mind? Religion, science, art, each of these has been a separate thing so long: we have nothing of that wholeness and harmony which distinguishes the great period of Greece.

In our own country the long reign of Puritanism left art without the sustenance of those ideas which had most power and vitality in the best minds of the nation. While literature responded to those ideas, to each wave of inspiring thought, painting and sculpture remained inert, an appanage of the drawing-rooms of the rich. Think of our poets of the beginning of the last century, and then of our painters!

So it was that the advent of the commercial spirit in all its dull insensitiveness and arrogant stupidity found no strength in art to

## The Art of Botticelli

resist it, as it settled blighting on our cities and made hideous our daily existence.

The revolt of Morris and Ruskin, their passionate and splendid effort, is familiar history, part of our present lives, part also of our future. No doubt Morris idealized the Middle Ages, as Ruskin idealized the early Florentine and Venetian painters. And here I will note a point that is apt to be overlooked. When the old idols of earlier taste, the Carracci and Guido and Domenichino, were overthrown, and the long despised masters of the fifteenth century came again to be admired, there was a general tendency to be dazzled by the discovery. It was supposed that all ideal art before Raphael was sincere and earnest in its endeavour, and all after Raphael insincere. But this we begin to see was in great part a fallacy. Ruskin, in his Edinburgh lectures, speaks of Benozzo Gozzoli and Ghirlandaio in the same breath as Fra Angelico, as if animated by the same spirit. But the charm of Quattrocento art, its superior freshness and ingenuousness, must not blind us to the fact that it could be fundamentally as inadequate to themes it professed to interpret as the art of polished Eclectics of the seventeenth century. If not so worldly, it was more enslaved by routine. Its superior attractiveness lies not so much in greater depth or more fervent sincerity, though something of these qualities were reflected into it from the earlier traditions which it still followed, as in the fact that the fifteenth century painters had not yet acquired the callousness which mastery of the instrument of painting is apt to give; they were still endeavouring and exploring; and this continual spur of effort gave them an earnestness which did not necessarily belong to their natural temper. Few, indeed, in any age are the choice spirits capable of bringing a sincere and serious imagination to subjects of high import. The specific character of tempera-painting also counts for a good deal in determining the tendencies of the early painters, just as its quality of clear, cool, radiant colour refreshes our eyes after the darkened oil pictures of later times, and seems of itself to typify a kind of ethereal unworldliness.

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Yet, after all, these are but minor considerations. What Ruskin and what Morris strove for was the recovery of that continuity in the growth of the European mind which the Renaissance had interrupted; just as the Renaissance itself was an effort towards the recovery of a continuity which the Dark Ages had interrupted. These returns of the human spirit are bound always to have their side of weakness and failure; medievalism and classicism are alike a paralysing idolatry. But in essentials they are no mere faltering by the way or fallacious harking-back. Their real import is the instinct which tells the world that in pushing forward in one direction it has lost something in another; something of price, something that it needs, something that it must turn back to seek and recover.

These returns, therefore, like that 'return to Nature' which is always haunting our civilization and our art, mean, so far as they are valuable and needful, a return to ourselves.

There are always those who cry that to be honestly ourselves we should accept the tendencies of our time, that we are the products of our age and should reflect its current ideas and nothing more. The voice of experience rejects this shallowness. We are made up not only of what circumstances force upon us, but of wants, desires, rebellions; and it is these which are the most vital and motive parts of ourselves, it is these which have won all mankind's victories.

We cannot discard the past; we cannot throw away our heritage, but we must remould it in the fire of our own necessities, we must make it new and our own.

The religious inspiration, once so fruitful in the Middle Ages, and the secular spirit derived from the Renaissance have become divorced in art as in life. What is needed now is the fusion of one imaginative effort that shall make art again a single language expressing the whole modern man, the depth of his spiritual desire as well as the changing lights and colours of his material existence.

Botticelli, standing where he does in a time when the animating spirit of the Renaissance was yet fluid and fresh; Botticelli, in

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whom the Greek world, by virtue of his imaginative power, was indeed 're-born'; Botticelli, who recovered from the Greek world a charm which he fused in his own nature and made part of his own creations, a real and living continuity; Botticelli comes to have for us, now and here, a peculiar significance.

## II

**B**UT interesting to us as Botticelli is as a type, a representative spirit in the history of the human mind, how, it may be asked, can his art, as art, have any relation to our own to-day?

We are not fifteenth-century Florentines; our painters look at the world in a wholly different way, they choose different subjects, they use a different medium. What possible use can there be in attempting to reproduce a past state of things and an obsolete technique? To reproduce, no. But that is not the question. The study of Botticelli's art has, notwithstanding, lessons for us still, even from the painter's point of view, though the modern artist who should find genuine inspiration from his art would no doubt produce work that on the surface would not resemble it remotely.

This statement needs explanation; and the explanation must be rather long, since to make my meaning clear I must traverse (briefly and hurriedly) the whole field of European painting.

How loftily we pity the medieval intellect, imprisoned in conceptions derived from a misunderstood Aristotle and the syllogisms of the schoolmen!

But our own age bids fair to rival the Middle Ages in this respect, that it is fettered with Darwinian formula, misunderstood and misapplied, and is ready to think of everything in vague terms of evolution and survival of the fittest.

Observe how the fashion is to summarize the course of European painting. We start with the early Sienese and with Giotto and his followers. They are reckoned as 'primitives,' because they had not mastered the whole art of representing material things on a flat

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surface. Masaccio marks an 'advance,' because he brought this art a long step further; Uccello and Piero della Francesca apply the science of perspective to painting—another step; Pollaiuolo and Signorelli bring the study of anatomy into art; Leonardo the mastery of light and shade: and so on.

We must have 'progress' at all costs. Now it is true that art must be always changing, with perpetual decay and growth, if it is to live. For art is an expression of man's relation to the world, a relation that needs continual readjustment. But to conceive of the 'development' of art as a progress in which each stage is a supersession of the last, a progress towards some definitely realizable end, is to walk into a mental prison.

There is no end to art, till humanity comes to an end. The end implied in the view of those who like to talk of the painter's art advancing, is simply the illusive reproduction on a flat surface of a given scene. For what are represented as the stages of advance are successive stages of mastery over the means of producing that illusion; perspective, foreshortening, atmosphere, effects of light, etc. But if we regard the painter's art, not as a branch of the study of nature, but as an expression of the spirit of man, we shall rather be inclined to think that at each of these stages it has thrown a faculty away; at least the gain is never unaccompanied by loss.

For the more imitative an art becomes of external things the less expressive it becomes. We make apologies for Giotto, as a primitive, a stammerer. But if a painter of to-day were to set out to paint the themes that Giotto painted, the Angels of the Resurrection, say, or the Death of St. Francis or those Passions of the Arena Chapel at Padua, how miserably would the complete instrument of which he is so proud, the mastery of atmosphere and all its varied effects on form and colour, fail him! He is so well equipped that he is like one of those medieval warriors whom we see in Uccello's battle-pieces, who fought for a long day and never received nor gained a wound and to whom nothing happened unless he chanced to fall, when his armour forbade him to rise.

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There are certain themes which can only be adequately expressed by a method of bold sacrifice and emphasis such as Giotto used. And how inept to talk of 'putting back the clock' in such a case! Let us rid ourselves of this obsession of an 'evolution' which only brings us up against Nature like a blind wall. The painters who talk incessantly of Nature really seem as if they thought their work was to be presented to Nature for judgment and approval, as if humanity had no claim on it. But Nature is unmoved by a thousand masterpieces, and cares nothing whether she be mirrored on our canvases faithfully or not.

There are two main streams of tradition in modern painting. The one derives from Florence, the other from Venice. These two streams have been refreshed from other sources, but the association with these two Italian centres is broadly true.

In Florentine art an intellectual element is always present. The great Florentines are always dominated by their interest in construction; they aim at creative design. And into the service of this aim they press all the faculties of the mind. The influence of religious ideas and poetic conceptions, of patriot ambition, of scientific discovery, of constructive theory, continually stimulates to new efforts and expands the horizon. Or, to put it in another way, we find in Florence the determination to make art expressive of the whole energies and powers of man; each several art related to the other; architecture, sculpture, painting, and every form of decoration harmonized as parts of a single magnificent language. Art was thus in a true sense public, and no mere secluded luxury of the rich; a possibility only to be realized in a city where, as in Florence, culture prevailed to an extraordinary degree.

Hence the many-sidedness of the typical Florentine master, so splendidly announced in the well-known letters sent by Leonardo to Lodovico Sforza of Milan, in which he enumerates his manifold and marvellous qualifications.

The old trite distinction between the Florentine and Venetian

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schools as a distinction between genius for form and genius for colour, as if there were no great colourists in Florence and no masters of design in Venice, is but a superficial statement of the case. Mr. Ricketts has pointed out that the charm of Venetian art is rather 'the rendering of the appearance of things according to a specially emotional view of them; or a specially tenacious hold upon their outer aspect, by which their local characteristics of colour, relief, and tone become intensified and heightened.' In a Venetian masterpiece 'the eye is delighted and soothed, even in the absence of beautiful colours, by the scale of tones, the variety in the textures of the pigment, and above all by the contrast and harmony and proportion between the masses of light and shade.' Without the intellectual energy and curiosity of the Florentines, but with a strong hold on material appearances, the Venetians tended to make painting a special art, depending on emotional vision of appearances.

Let us follow first the Florentines. Taking the nude human form as the most expressive symbol of the sublime faculties of man, they study the laws of its structure and movement. They build up heroic compositions, animated by some grand or grandiose conception, in the manner of architecture, and often itself part of a great architectural scheme. In such painting, expressive of large ideas, or epic in intention, it was inevitable that accident and appearance, and the personal emotion these evoke, should count for almost nothing; representation was subordinated to invention, and the element of local texture and colour, with the effect of light on these, was reduced to mere suggestion.

But such a conception of art could only thrive where the spirit of the people supporting it was adequate to its high need.

With the transference of this conception from Florence to Rome, from the city which demanded the David of Michelangelo as the expression of its own ardent and free spirit, to the city of Popes demanding their own glorification, the inner sustenance failed. Kings might commission great painters to carry out large works of

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national import, but the animating spirit and the motive power were different.

After the brief magnificent achievement of Raphael, this type of art becomes a kind of hollow shell. Academic art begins, and painters begin to talk of the grand style and the ideal just when they have no longer anything corresponding to those conceptions in their hearts.

We all know how Reynolds held up the grand style of heroic and ideal painting as the supreme model, and ranked the 'Venetian' type, which he himself followed, on a lower plane. This has in our time been blamed as a kind of hypocrisy, a lip-service to the conventional aims of a worn-out tradition.

Yet, granted equal success in either type, is not the art which has a public character and embodies the spirit of a nation or a race, an art in which each individual, however humble, feels that he has a share, a thing more desirable of attainment than the art which expresses the personal moods of single natures however finely gifted? Not that these two conceptions need be in antagonism. The greatest natures are typical, they stand for a race or for humanity itself; and whether their art is personal or impersonal in nominal character, the result will be the same.

Venice had public art of a kind, but it was impressed with the oligarchical character of the State: it tended to be decorative and scenic, rather than the counterpart of an ideal. The State rather than the nation was glorified. And Venetian art rose to greatness through the personalities and achievements of a few marvellously endowed men rather than by community of imaginative intellect.

It was in the idyll and in portraiture that Venetian art made fruitful types and models; it started painting on the research for atmosphere, light and colour effects, and all the beauty of appearances which creates a response in our more intimate emotions.

And it is to this aim that modern painting, in spite of the enlarging efforts of certain great and splendid natures, like Rubens in his way and Rembrandt in his far different way, who have

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embodied in themselves a glowing and immense humanity, it is to this more private conception of art that modern painting has inevitably tended.

With the decay of public art for which, since the day of Florence in her prime, no set of external conditions has provided natural and propitious soil, the private patron becomes more and more influential.

And the influence of the private patron is visible in the steady narrowing of the painter's range, in the reflection of the patron's mundane interests and vanity; till in our times portraiture, landscape and genre are all that painters thrive on. The common conception of art is of a luxury for the rich, and a speculation for the dealer and collector.

A virtue has been made of this necessity. No one upholds the 'grand style' any longer. The power of academies is overthrown. But in the place of the old tyranny, which prescribed history-painting for the ambitious, a new tyranny has been established. A new tyranny; and in the name of sincerity.

No painter can be sincerely interested except in what he sees. He must observe, not imagine. That has been the new dogma, the new cry.

It meant simply the substitution of one academic intolerance for another.

The mere rendering of the facts of vision seems a tame and uninspiring conclusion to the high history of European art.

But let us be just to the upholders of this view.

They would maintain that the rendering of the facts of vision is just what has been neglected by former ages, and that in this, because of that neglect, lie the hope and promise of to-morrow. For, it is argued, we have looked at things for every other purpose except for the pure sake of seeing.

It is by experience and through the sense of touch that we inform ourselves about the solidity, shape and texture of objects, and their relation in space to one another. But our senses, unconsciously to

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ourselves, become so coördinated that most people, without taking thought, assume for practical purposes that the tangible world and the visible world are the same thing, though they are in reality quite different and never coincide. And as it is for practical purposes that men and women, not painters, use their sight, each of us has his vision inevitably dyed with associations and suggestions implicated in his own habits, interests and pursuits.

Thus in the same landscape the farmer will see land good for this crop or that, fertile or barren; the speculator will see eligible plots for building or prospective golf-links; the geologist will see interesting formations of strata; the tramp a weary distance to his next lodging; the school-boy a happy hunting-ground for bird's nests; and so on.

None of them, however, really sees anything of the kind; they see patches of green and brown in various tones, melting into greys and blues; everything else is supplied by experience and association.

Simple vision is in fact, one of the most difficult things in the world to achieve, and totally impossible as a habit. For it is with the tangible world that we do our daily business.

This being so, it may be argued, what is more peculiarly the province of the painter, with his special gift of sensitive eye, than to reveal to the unseeing world the beauty of the realities of vision?

It is very difficult to empty the mind of all acquired associations and simply see. But just as by repeating a word one may empty it of meaning and reduce it to mere sound, so by a certain isolation and absorption of the sense of sight one may reduce—or almost reduce—the tangible object to the merely visible. And the gain is a wonderful enhancing of sensation.

I look for instance at an old wall, patched with moss and lichen, and I suspend my faculties, save that of sight, till I seem in a half-dream. The old wall transfigures itself to the absorbed eye; the cold roughness of the stones becomes a surface of miraculously delicate tints, the colour of the furred cushions of moss glows with a thrilling vividness that gives new meaning and value to trite names

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like green and gold. A 'freshness and a glory' take the place of what was common and familiar. And then—a cart comes along the road, I must turn my head and stand aside; I resume my practical eyesight, and the old wall has receded into its ordinary self, nothing more than the boundary of a dusty road.

There is no doubt a certain hypnotic effect in this isolation of the sense of sight and emptying of the mind; for along with that enhancement of sensation there comes also a kind of doubt of materials, a feeling of strangeness and dream. It was such moments of intense contemplation that caused Wordsworth to put out his hand and make sure if the tree he was looking at was really there, a solid and substantial thing. And it is just in this sense of strangeness, of a revelation through the familiar, that the value to art consists.

But this opening of the eyes and discovery of wonder, what is it but the universal prerogative of the artist and the poet? It is not confined to the sense of sight alone, it belongs to the artist's superior innocence and sensitiveness of fibre. He will bring this freshness and wonder to everything in nature and in humanity; it is part of his feeling, not only his seeing.

The value of painting which renders the impressions of pure seeing is not its truth to the experience of the isolated sense of sight, but the shock of strangeness and beauty it gives to men habituated to the merely practical use of their eyes. It is the communication of the painter's emotion and joy. So, too, the poet refreshes the senses of men accustomed to use language for practical purposes by making familiar words sound new and strange.

But does the poet use words as mere sound, emptied of all meaning? No. Nor does the painter, in spite of impressionist dogma, look on the world as mere patches and smudges of tones and colours.

The late R. A. M. Stevenson who preached the gospel of impressionism with much fervour and conviction, and who is to be praised for his logic and candour, wrote of that chief disturber of

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impression, the knowledge that things exist. The whole aim of the modern painter, according to him and his school, is to recreate the eye of childhood, which 'receives from a field of sight an impression of the values of colour and the forces of definition utterly unadulterated by knowledge of distance, depth, shape, utility, and the commercial, religious, or sexual importance of objects.' Again 'the modern painter should concern himself very much about what seems, and scarcely at all about what is.'

This, as I say, is exactly parallel to demanding that the poet should use words purely for their sound, and in composing a poem should try to recreate the ear of childhood, which receives from words the impressions of sounds without any disturbing or adulterating element of meaning. The poet certainly will be carried by his instinct away from the stale, tired phrase of common speech; he will value and cherish every word for its special quality of sound, as people using language for practical purposes never do; but woe to him if he thinks of sound alone, for he will never rise above the third rate if he does. To make the sound enhance the meaning and the meaning enhance the sound is his aim: and it is so with the painter also in his use of his materials. The vital character, the organic structure and the significance of the things he paints will not be suppressed and thought away; rather will they be enhanced and intensified through the painter's gift of vision.

The impressionist method has the virtue that it stimulates us to moods of intimate feeling lying below the surface of our everyday consciousness; it is an escape from the ordinary routine vision. It recreates the sense of wonder. But it does not follow that it is the only method by which that sense of wonder can be recreated.

Take for instance a June field of flowers. What miracles of beauty are there! To stop and contemplate but a handbreadth of that teeming surface is to be filled with a sense of life's infinity, of the inexhaustibleness of beauty. But whatever emotion the impressionist painter may be moved with at such a sight, his dogmas prescribe that (to quote R. A. M. Stevenson again) 'twigs, stones, slates, grass,

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leaves, can only be suggested.' He receives a general impression of light and various colour, and this he gives us. But the sense of delicate, endlessly varied forms, and of their growing and springing, the sense of a myriad separate, tremulous creatures shooting and opening their leaves and petals to the sun, as if singing for joy in a thousand blended notes which we feel that we must hear if our senses were but less gross; the *life* of the flowers and the grass, what they mean to our imaginative understanding; all this he puts aside as beyond the powers even of Pre-Raphaelite 'niggling.'

But there are more ways than one of approaching such a theme. And it is just the gift of art that it can turn its own limitations into glorious powers. The painter who is not paralysed by theory will care less about rendering the truth of his eye's experience than about stimulating the spectator to feel what he has felt. By identifying himself with the genius of the nature he contemplates he will make reality expressive of his own mind and his own joy. He knows that he cannot say everything; he must stop short, but what he says must send the spectator's mind with it into the endlessness of life. He must kindle imagination to see in a few flowers and plants, single and separate in their exquisite shapes, yet growing, shining, quivering, as in chorus, the unmeasured glory and extravagant abundance of the sweet, small creatures of the spring earth. And no impressionist has done this as Fra Angelico can do it.

The impressionists pour scorn on the Pre-Raphaelite method, as if one method alone had salvation in it. Yet with the English Pre-Raphaelites the virtue was that they, too, did away with the dullness of everyday, practical eyesight. In Millais' 'Ophelia' we see with heightened senses; it is like 'the glory and the freshness of a dream.'

The odd thing is that modern Pre-Raphaelite and Impressionist alike appealed to scientific truth. While each claimed that his mode of vision was sternly true to fact, the emotional value of their vision was in each case its intensity and its strangeness to the ordinary habit-dulled eye.

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In the history of these and other modern movements we note the increasing tendency to become enslaved to doctrinaire theory. A single method is proclaimed the only right one, and all others are warred on with an almost theological bitterness.

Let us try to regain a little freedom.

We owe many delightful pictures to the impressionists, as to the Pre-Raphaelites. The weakness of both movements lay in the theory behind them. Each attempted to import a scientific sanction. Each claimed 'truth'; truth to reality, or truth to appearances. But either method and conception of picture-making in the hands of men who are without imaginative depth and intensity of nature becomes a joyless record. It follows that what really counted in the production of the pictures we admire was not the conscious theory but the imaginative gift and emotional sensitiveness of the individual artists.

The impressionist theory was particularly narrowing. The painter is conceived of as a receiver of impressions; a receiver of impressions through an eyesight as much as possible purified from all associations. The direct and unsophisticated record of a momentary impression on the senses is conceived of as the true end of painting. Let us not condemn this type of painting; there is room for it, as for other types. With the painter seeing is a kind of feeling, a kind of thinking; and from the momentary impression which he communicates to us comes a glow and heightening of the senses, vibrating through depths of our consciousness. Yet even here it is what the master has felt that has power over us, and it is by his manner of handling his materials more than by the accuracy of his record that he touches us and brings beauty home to our minds.

But if we admit felicity in this type of painting, let us hasten to overthrow and trample on the insane pretension that this is the only type of picture that should be painted, and that anything else is 'insincere.'

A miserable emasculation of art appears when the impressionist doctrinaire reveals his position. For consider how his theory binds

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his hands. The creative designer, free to take all things seen or imagined as material for the expression of the spirit of man, is superseded by the slave of the sensitive retina, a passive receiver of impressions. He is to abjure the world of ideas, the world of history, the great faiths and legends of mankind; he is debarred from using the bold and stimulating conventions that the masters of the past have made expressive; his interests are starved and his faculties fettered for the sake of a purist theory. It is just as if poets were condemned to write nothing but tiny lyrics of personal emotion, with the sense as much as possible submerged in sound. And this in fact is not far from being the theory of Edgar Poe.

A formulated theory seems always to cramp and paralyse or at least to warp production. We have had far too many theories, too many 'movements'; or rather we have made too much of them.

The success of impressionism was due not only to the gifts of those who practised it, it won prestige from the fact that it was supposed to be the latest stage in the evolution of painting. Half-understood Darwinian notions being in the air, it was made easy for people to look back along the course of European art and envisage it all as leading up to the final achievement of naturalism, the rendering of the facts of pure vision. But when we look at art as art, and not as something else, we find that in the nineteenth century the greater masters were not on this line at all. New explorations in the science of painting coloured their art, no doubt, but these were not their main business. It is ridiculous to place Monet on a level with Puvis de Chavannes; yet Monet and his group 'had the cry'; they were the advanced movement, and it was widely supposed that the future of painting could only be on the path they struck out. It was forgotten how small and comparatively insignificant their province was; they were held to be at the centre.

Nothing could better illustrate the hypnotic effect of scientific analogies.

Even those who realised how constricted an aim they wished to impose on the painter felt bound to be logical, and made the tacit

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assumption that the themes of the historic art of Europe were so much dead matter, that faith and legend alike were going to interest no more; they even pretended that the older masters had never really wanted to paint the pictures they actually painted, but were compelled by external demand to produce 'insincere' and 'commercial' works of religious or national import instead of being free, like the enfranchised artist of to-day, to paint impressions of the eyesight and nothing else.

Such a view needs no combatting. Let us be grateful to those great men of modern times who, in spite of an adverse tide of current opinion and in spite of untoward and discouraging circumstances, have had strength to express a larger and more masculine and more human conception of art. For they are helping us to-day.

We have seen how with the dominance of that tradition of art which derives more or less from typical phases of Venetian painting, the aims and the scope of the artist have become more and more limited. Painting has become divorced from the other arts; no longer part of a great language expressing the whole spirit of a people, it has become a private thing, a personal expression corresponding to the personal taste and temperament of private patrons; and in these latest years an attempt has been made to separate it more and more from life.

But the signs of healthful reaction from painters' pedantry are everywhere at hand. The efforts of William Morris, the achievements of Puvis de Chavannes, of Alfred Stevens, of Watts, are bearing fruit. We begin to think that a public art may again be possible; we begin to realise that till we strive to create beauty in our lives and surroundings, and to regain the spirit of community in art, the personal achievements of a few fine talents will not redeem us from general joylessness and the curse of apathy.

At this very time an attempt is being made in England to carry out a scheme long cherished and advocated many years ago by Watts, the scheme of providing young painters with opportunity for mural painting and decoration on a large scale.

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The scheme may prove unsuccessful. But no one can doubt the benefit of such training and experience for the young artists themselves, whether their work be thought worthy of perpetuation or not. At any rate the support given, the hope raised, are symptoms not to be ignored.

When such work as this is set on foot and the problems involved in mural composition are faced, the total inadequacy of a conception of painting as the rendering of the facts of vision becomes apparent. That type of painting will continue, and rightly; but the effort to narrow down all modern painting to that type will fail. And it will be a great gain if painters can, by having to consider their work in relation to architecture, recover something of the sense of the unity of art, too long lost sight of.

So we are brought back to reconsider the achievements of Florence and the Florentine conception of painting. Would that we might be shamed into recovering something of the public virtue of magnificence, which the Florentines understood and which we ignore. Private splendour and public meanness are, at least in England, the lamentable distinction of our time. When we get a genius we waste him.

Among the Florentines stands Botticelli. But it is not only because he is a Florentine that we turn to him to-day. For Botticelli has among the masters of Florence a position by himself. In some ways he represents or revolts from the dominant Florentine tradition; not indeed in his general conception of art and of the relation of painting to the other arts, but in his personal tendencies and method of expression.

Botticelli is famed for his singular power of line. It is this which, as an obvious trait, sets him apart from the painters of his time and from the majority of European painters.

Modern painting, under the domination of naturalism, has tended to reject line as an obsolete, primitive means of representation. But no means, no instrument in art is obsolete if it be an instrument capable of expressing what we can express in no other way so well.

# Significance for Modern Art

It has been discovered that there are no outlines in nature. Surely an excellent reason for having outlines in art!

Blake, of whose affinity to Botticelli I shall say more when I come to discuss the drawings illustrating the *Divina Commedia*, exclaims, 'The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art. . . Leave out the line, and you leave out life itself: all is chaos again.' There is the precision of the true visionary.

That a man with 'a craving for the spiritual should choose painting or sculpture, the most material, the most tied to representation of the arts seems indeed a non-sense.' So wrote R. A. M. Stevenson. To whom it is sufficient answer that what he pretends to be impossible has been triumphantly done; nor is there any reason why it should not be done again. Who that has contemplated some of the masterpieces of the early Buddhist art in China or Japan, whether painting or sculpture, does not acknowledge that spiritual things have there been made visible and real in a way and with a power which no other of the arts could rival? And though such triumphs have been rarer in Europe, with our more complex conventions and our heavier grasp on materials, still in Europe, too, painting and sculpture have been made the true and congenial expression of spiritual things.

The Gothic cathedrals, even more material than statue or picture, at once admonish us of this. In painting, Blake is an example. Botticelli is another. It is true that Blake worked in conscious and violent reaction from the kind of art enthroned and applauded in his day, though unconsciously he took more from the art of his time than he knew, and his isolation as well as his own impatience of nature prevented him from attaining the full felicity that might have been his. And it is true that Botticelli, trained in a great school, imbibed the teaching of that school and never wholly cast it off, the rebellion of his instincts against its tendencies being rather a strong undercurrent than a proclaimed antagonism. But each of them, in

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his own way, had the visionary gift, the gift of seeing and visibly expressing spiritual things. And in each of them the instinct was to work in line, like the great painters of the Far East.

In Botticelli's painting we see this instinct becoming stronger as time goes on. In the Dante drawings, especially the drawings for the Purgatory and the Paradise, line becomes his sole and perfect instrument.

With line goes movement.

Suppose a painter sets himself to paint a mountain brook, with its leap and dance and broken hurry. The impressionist will give the gloom and sparkle, the general aspect of the scene : but his patches of delicately related tones will give us little or nothing of its movement. To give the sense of movement in the water, so that it comes home to our imagination, the painter must emphasise its continuity : and his instinct will prompt him to express this by fluid, sinuous lines, which if untrue to actual appearance are truer to imagination.

It is the same with the movement of human figures. We cannot represent movement on a flat surface, we can only represent a moment of it. But we can suggest movement to the imagination, not as an arrested impression, but as a living persistence ; and to do this we must resort to emphasis of line.

No one in European art has more imagination for rhythmical movement than Botticelli. No one, except Blake, can so easily persuade us of the actuality of forms that float on the air, of their own buoyancy. Trained to study structure and mass and relief, Botticelli cares nothing for the representation of these for their own sake. His force is spent in making his draughtsmanship expressive of the emotions of the spirit within the form ; and his instinct leads him more and more to a linear rather than a plastic rendering.

Again we note how rare a type this is among the painters of Europe. Movement cannot be drawn by copying posed models. Yet the study of posed models has been the constant preoccupation and chief training of painters ever since the early Renaissance. I cannot but think this manner of education a paralysing influence.

### THE ANNUNCIATION

*Uffizi, Florence*



## Significance for Modern Art

No doubt this tendency towards a static character of art has its roots in mental habits.

The pagan view of life prompts to the passionate assertion of human power. An immense and almost desperate desire to build a monument of his hands that shall defy time and death, and eternalize something of himself upon the earth, haunts the man for whom all else but earth and life in the sun is a vague and miserable dream. Not the eternal movement of the world, of which human life, itself perpetually changing, is a part, but the will to resist that movement and to stamp upon materials the image of that will, is the theme of pagan art.

Not all pre-Christian art is pagan in this sense. But this passion for earthly endurance, and for symbols the most massive and concrete of human strength and pride, inspires or infects how much of the monumental art of Egypt and Assyria! And if in Greece art becomes more pliant, gracious, and tender, yet the refining sense of a beauty in human order and harmonious existence has not abolished the fundamental conception of an art embodying the self-dependent powers of man in their perfection.

Rome, with its conviction of law, its more material conception of order, created symbols the most massive and august of the spirit in man that rules, obeys, and conquers.

Then the medieval Church opened, beyond earth, its vision of Heaven and Hell. Even in that vast scheme of the universe all was fixed, defined, ordained. Earth was the centre of the high drama of man's destiny, and round earth the sun and planets moved.

Yet the conception of art was wholly changed, with the acceptance of this earth as transitory, and of the unseen world as enduring. The spirit of man was no longer at home in the world; and he created in stone the symbols of his longing; pillars of upward-rushing lines; stone fretted almost into immateriality; spires that seemed to soar.

The life that is brief and beautiful in flowers and birds, the beauty of the flame that appears and is gone, the beauty of water that is for

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ever passing ; this new beauty of the fugitive and fragile came to interweave itself with all that is human. The appeal of this beauty, discovering new emotions in men's hearts, finds its clearest voice in the joyous and tender words of Francis of Assisi. But soon it pervades the art of painter and sculptor, moving them to prolong the fluid lines of their forms, to lift adoring and ecstatic figures into air.

Then came the Renaissance with its paganising touch.

The saints took on the strength and the calm of classic statues. Princes and prelates willed monuments to their glory ; the sense of sublime power in man returned in symbols of force and splendour.

The flowers, the wonder and variety of leaf and blossom, that had lent so naturally the favour and freshness of their springing lines and scattered colours to the borders of medieval missals and to the foregrounds of the earlier painters, withered away ; and in their place was the formul acanthus decorating some sedate pilaster. What a paralysis has classic ornament, with its meagre forms and dry symmetries, proved on European thoughts of decoration ! Used by artists of a congenial austerity, the motives have been put to a fine use ; but the cold residue of that tradition, how sterile, how utterly inexpressive of anything we want, enjoy, or hope for it is !

We rebel now against that tradition, but it has been too long in our blood, and efforts for freedom result mostly in barbarous vagaries—witness L'Art Nouveau. The time is not come yet, but it will come, when decoration will cease to be a kind of geometry, a filling of space for the sake of filling a space, but will be an overflow of our own thoughts and susceptibilities, no longer external to ourselves, no longer separated from what we express in painting or statue, but belonging to the same world of human expression.

The system of posed models, which has its counterpart in what may be called a stagnant type of decoration, will perhaps go too. Most of the real masters have rebelled against it : and recently the system of the French teacher Lecoq de Boisbaudran, with its stress on memory-training and the observation of figures in natural movement, has by its success attracted wide attention.

## Significance for Modern Art

To-day too even those trained in the narrowness of impressionist doctrine have found the inadequacy of its formulas, and with a violent reaction comes the cry for line and rhythm.

Here, once again, we find the art of Botticelli significant for us, and in the vicissitudes of time resuming a kind of contemporary relation to ourselves. Or let us say, he appears in the character of a prophet ; and, as is the wont of prophets, with warning as well as encouragement in his voice.

For the corrupting weakness of our modern 'movements' is their quite fallacious perversion of ideal into method. How many painters turn eagerly to anything that seems to promise a short cut to mastery in art ! And there is no short cut, and never will be.

How flat and in the end how nauseating have the inspiring battle-cries become, one after another ! Once it was the Grand Style which the ambitious youth was to learn by rote and be saved. Then it was Nature he was to sit down before, and truth to any fact would sanction all he did. Or again he was exhorted to sincerity ; and to be sincere to his own senses and emotions, however starved or warped or ineffectual, was to carry him to victory. The theory of rhythm doubtless is fated to be used and abused in the old way. Yet though the word be repeated into insignificance, the idea has come to recognition and the leaven of it will work. For the idea belongs to the root-conception of art, and claims no sanction from the antique or from the methods of science.

Very different are the conditions for those trained in the conceptions of yesterday and accustomed to preoccupation with visual appearances, and especially with landscape impressions, from the conditions in which Botticelli worked, bred as he was in a great school of figure-design and trained to apply the principles of design to all manner of materials. But above all we must recognise that Botticelli's gift of rhythmical line and movement was inseparable from the fibre of his imaginative nature, and incommunicable. It is not a method, an external thing, for any man of parts to pick up or acquire by taking pains. It is a secret that must be inborn if it is to come to fruition.

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It is a great thing to get back to rhythmical design and to have that conception rooted in our minds instead of idolising nature's facts or appearances. But it no more suffices to say to the multitude of painters of to-day 'Get Rhythm, and you will all be artists,' than to say to the multitude of writers 'Take to verse, and you will all be poets.'

The theory of recent painting, the cult of the empty mind, and the effort to suppress 'the knowledge that things exist,' have left their traces even on those who react most violently against them; the works of the latest movement, laudably endeavouring to present in pictorial terms energies rather than appearances, suffer in their turn from a superficial apprehension of those energies; they reflect inadequate conceptions, the hasty fever of the journalist more than the poet's lasting fire: and the up-to-date is always out-of-date.

Yet the quickening is here: and great hopes may come to fruit with time. The future of art seems wider than ever.

## III

PATER says of Botticelli: 'He is before all things a poetical painter, blending the charm of story and sentiment, the medium of the art of poetry, with the charm of line and colour, the medium of abstract painting.' This is true, no doubt, in substance, but how strangely and perversely expressed! How can story and sentiment be said to be the medium of the art of poetry, or the medium of any art at all? If line and colour be the medium of abstract painting, we must say that rhythm and imagery of language are the medium of abstract poetry. Story and sentiment are merely the stuff and material common to both arts. But there is no such thing as abstract painting or abstract poetry. In another of Pater's essays, the famous essay on the School of Giorgione, there is the same curiously perverse conception of the poetical as opposed to the pictorial art. 'Poetry, again, works with words addressed in the first instance to the mere intelligence. . . But the ideal types of poetry are those in which this distinction [between matter and form] is reduced to its *minimum*; so that lyrical poetry, precisely because in it we are least able to detach the matter from the form, without a deduction of something from that matter itself, is, at least artistically, the highest and most complete form of poetry.'

The whole purport and burden of Pater's argument in this essay is the necessity of the fusion, in a perfect work of art, of the matter and the form. With that argument we shall all agree. To insist on this necessity was a most salutary corrective, at the time when the essay was written, to the popular criticism of art in England when the 'Subject' was so apt to be treated as something

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quite independent from its expression. Popular painting indeed lent itself generously to this delusion: the painters first thought of some story or sentiment of the kind which makes a pathetic or humorous appeal in a newspaper or magazine article and then threw it into some sort of pictorial form. They knew well enough the great public's limitations. Children are often far more susceptible to the charm of beautiful colour and even of beautiful design than their teachers or than they themselves grow to be after they have been 'educated.' They will understand and be delighted by a summary expressiveness of drawing, where their elders will be puzzled and demand a superficial likeness of aspect. And the reason is that what is called education is 'addressed to the mere intelligence.'

Children are taught to be sensitive to errors in grammar and in fact. No one teaches them to be sensitive to errors in harmony and proportion, except in so far as these enter into specialized lessons. Yet harmony and proportion belong to life more intimately than knowledge. They are the principle of courtesy and dignity in behaviour. Knowledge itself is without these a mere accumulation of facts. With the ideas of harmony and proportion as a living well-spring in the mind, not applied from without like a footrule but a part of our mental energy, we should be as intolerant of the mean and pretentious in our conduct, our manners, our ceremonies, our buildings, our rooms, our furniture, our thoughts, our desires, as we are of a solecism in speech, or the infraction of a custom which may have lost all its meaning and relation to living ideas, or the ignorance of a fact that to one man's business may be important and to another man useless and insignificant. Then, though we had no pictures or statues, we should have art in our lives.

The truth is we are not an educated people; we are only instructed. That is why art has come to be a kind of excrescence, instead of a thing inbred, a function of our nature.

Now many people would express what I have been urging by saying that our education is too 'literary.' And this word is currently

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used by writers about art, when they criticize pictures in which matter and form are not fused, in which an appeal is made to the mere intelligence. The word, it is true, is convenient, both because of the want of a single word to express accurately what is meant and because it is always easier to speak loosely than to speak precisely and to refrain from thinking than to think. But the use of this word implies a wholly false antithesis. And just because this way of thinking and writing about works of art derives from certain phrases in that essay of Pater's on the School of Giorgione, an essay, so admirable in its gist, by one of the finest and most fastidious of English critics, I will not apologize for delaying a moment to consider the matter a little more closely.

If there is one thing certain about poetry it is that it is not addressed to the mere intelligence. Pater, it is true, does not say so much as this. He says it 'works with words addressed in the first instance to the mere intelligence.' The meaning of this is a little ambiguous. We are not sure if it is meant that the poet's words are addressed in the first instance to the mere intelligence, or that he is obliged to work with words which, because they are used in ordinary speech as a means of communication, must necessarily be apprehended as sense before they are apprehended as music.

The implication is that the painter works in a different way: he works with line and colour which are not addressed to the mere intelligence. But the simple truth is that line and colour are addressed to the mere intelligence just as much, or as little, as the rhythm of words in poetry. If I draw a horizontal line across a piece of paper and colour the lower part of the space thus divided with a tint of green, and draw a circle above the line and colour it red, and put a wash of pale blue across the upper space, I am using a language, I am making a statement; I am saying 'The sun is rising over green fields.' This statement is addressed to the mere intelligence, no less than if said in words. A dumb man, or one trying to convey his meaning to a foreigner who does not understand his language, will communicate what he wants to say by just such means.

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Now to this rudimentary statement in line and colour, we can add other lines and colours. We can convey the information that a stream runs through the meadow, that there are willows on its banks and kingcups at its edges; that a mist hangs over the earth, and the sun is dispersing the mist; we can tell what season of the year it is and if there is a breeze from what quarter it is blowing. Having made all these statements, we shall have produced, provided we have a reasonable amount of accomplishment, a painting which will look quite at home in an average modern exhibition and which will please the ordinary person. Yet this also is something which is addressed to mere intelligence, and it is by his mere intelligence that the ordinary person will criticize it. If the appearances we have given do not accord with the facts as he knows them, he will find fault accordingly; but he will not find fault with the aim of the picture.

But, it will be objected, you are presupposing a very commonplace painting. A good painter will convey all these facts, make all these statements, on his canvas, but he will also convey to you the feelings aroused in him by the beauty of the melting mist and of the light piercing through it, the beauty of the willow leaves trembling in the air, the freshness of the dewy grass, the transparency of the upper sky. He will also have chosen the place and the hour, and the point of view; he will have contrived that the lines of the trees and the stream and the horizon arrange themselves pleasantly to the eye. And all this is what makes his picture a work of art.

Yes, but in what respect does such a picture differ from a description by a good writer? The medium is quite different, of course; the writer cannot make his statements with the same immediacy and precision of effect as the painter, though he can convey more in less direct ways. But he too emphasizes, selects, suppresses. The methods are different, but parallel. The relation of matter to form is in either case the same. In either case it might be hard to prove that the work was not addressed in the first instance to the mere intelligence; that the first act of the spectator's or

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reader's mind was not an act of recognition of natural facts and appearances. But if it is true of the one case, it is true of the other.

But now let us suppose that a great artist makes a sketch of such a scene; Claude, let us say, or Rembrandt. He will very likely suppress all colour, that we may not be distracted by mere superficial and local appearances, and that our imagination may be free. Just a few strokes, a few blots of sepia wash: but by spacing and the subtleties of emphasis the essence of the things seen will be there, the freshness of the air, the solidity of the earth, the movement of the water, the infinity of the sky; and all fused into a relation of tones and lines, so that the first shock of effect on the spectator is one of emotion. His intelligence is in abeyance; he feels as if something had been discovered in himself and projected in vision before him.

How far is this from what is called 'the literary element' in painting! But if we turn to literature, what do we find? What is the method of the poet, who works, we are told, in words addressed in the first instance to the mere intelligence?

There comes into my mind a line of Wordsworth's:

The winds come to me from the fields of sleep.

What does the mere intelligence make of that? Nonsense, probably.

But then it is not addressed to mere intelligence. It does not describe, it evokes. The truth is, the poet does not use language in the same way or for the same purpose as men use it in ordinary speech or in ordinary plain prose. He thinks in images, and his thought cannot express itself except through rhythm. You can no more give the effect of a poem by putting what you imagine to be the stuff or essence of it in other words than you can give the effect of a picture by writing about it. Its essence lies in its final shape.

I purposely chose for illustration the simplest of landscape themes, because such a subject is supposed to be furthest removed from the 'literary' in art, quite innocent and uncorrupted, purely pictorial.

Yet, as we have seen, if by 'literary' is meant 'addressed to the

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mere intelligence,' it is quite possible to paint a picture of such a subject which is entirely 'literary.'

Every one sees that in such a case the word is preposterous and without meaning. Yet when critics use this phrase, in most cases it will be found that the appeal to mere intelligence is what they have in their minds.

I have tried to show that this test is equally applicable to poetry and to painting. What Pater was emphasizing was the sensuous side of painting, just as Milton insisted that poetry should be simple, sensuous, and passionate. When poets become abstract, instead of thinking in images, they are apt to appeal to mere intelligence, and then we get just the same fault that Pater was attacking in painters. So too the allegorical figures which have been common enough in European painting are put down to a literary inspiration. Yet are they any more successful in literature; as when an eighteenth-century poet hails and describes Freedom, or Virtue, or Anger, or Ambition, and hopes to animate his lines by the magic of a capital letter?

The truth is that Pater's criticism is based on a principle which applies to all the arts, and, more, to life itself. To do a thing is infinitely more eloquent than to talk about it or to preach it. So in the drama a dramatist shows his weakness when he writes lines, however beautiful, where an act or a gesture not only suffices but tells what he wants to say with far greater force than words. The aim of the artist with a sense of the genius of his particular art is to strike direct at our emotion, or rather at something primitive in us which lies deeper than any specialized emotion or act of understanding and fuses our faculties of reception in a single imaginative shock. So it is in painting. Just as a poet says things, not talks about them, the painter utters things in line, tone, colour, spacing.

Ruskin brings his celebrated description of Tintoret's Crucifixion to a climax by noting that somewhere in the background an ass is eating palm-leaves. Of whatever value this is in our appreciation of the picture, it is not brought home to us through the language of design; it is not part of our direct memory of the picture, and we

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are more conscious of it when we are away from the picture than when the picture is before us. It is apprehended through our intelligence, not through our senses.

If I seem to be rather pedantically protesting against a misuse of terms, it is because writers who have followed Pater have been obsessed by this unhappy word and have tried to make a complete divorce between the interests of literature and the interests of painting.

But literature, in the broad sense of the word, how large a part that is of our lives! I do not mean merely the reading of books, but familiarity with the experience of the human race, the great figures of its heroes and martyrs, its saints and sinners, its struggles and despairs; the world of history and legend; the sense we have of the continuity of life, and of all that has made us what we are.

It is true that it is not only from literary or oral tradition that we can gain this experience, for men have written their stories and their dreams in plastic and pictorial forms also. But wonderfully as statue or picture can vivify for us what we have read, were we left with these alone in a world that had lost its memory, how maimed and incomplete would be our experience!

There are those who write as if painting had been enslaved to literature, forced to translate legend and poem and history into graphic terms, and claim that now painting should break free. But let us rather think of mankind as cherishing and handing down a great fund of common experience which men of imagination have cast, on the one hand, into literary, and on the other into plastic and pictorial form. It is that common fund of experience which keeps all the arts in touch with life, the life of the race, and at the same time in touch with each other. To separate, therefore, the interests of painting from the interests of literature is to cut it off from a great part of life.

And indeed if all the experience gained from reading or oral tradition be counted as matter foreign to the real purpose of a picture, a kind of adulteration which the true painter will eschew as far as possible, must we not say the same of the experience which we each

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PLATE V

of us get from life? Is not that in the same case? For we cannot disentangle the one from the other.

The feelings which grown men and women have, and recognize the signs of in others, the recognition of human character in its grandeur and in its vileness, the intuitions of joy or sorrow, all that life inscribes on form and feature, the sense of drama in the relations between human beings, the sense of isolation and community—all this must be ruled out by a theory which insists that painting is concerned with pure seeing and nothing else. All this was indeed roundly declared by Whistler to be irrelevant 'claptrap.'

But let us firmly maintain our position: the appeal is not to any abstract theory or dogma, it is to the mature man, the man of fine senses, of unprejudiced eyesight, with the gift of feeling form and colour in their harmonies and relations, but also the man of human experience, not the new-born child. We will not abdicate humanity in order to be artists.

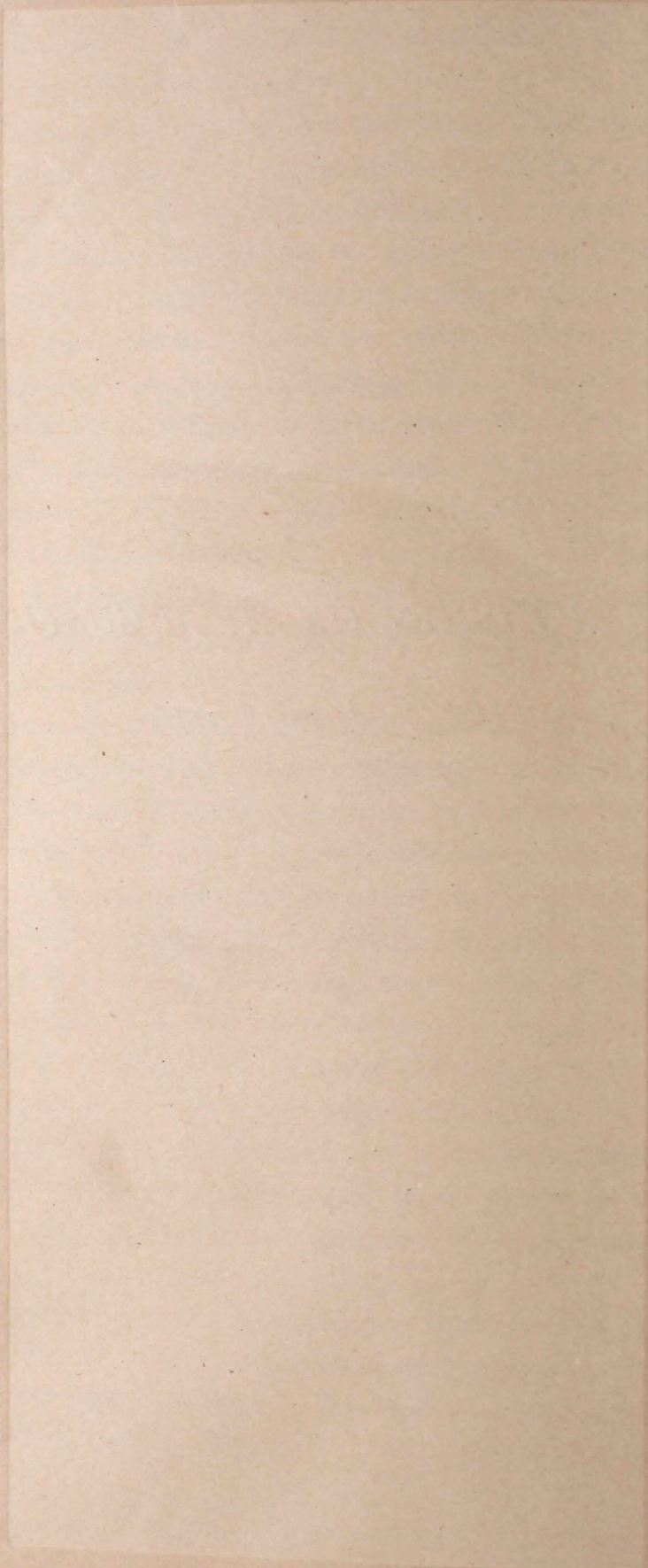
All that emotional human experience of which I speak can be, by the artist of adequate power, expressed through the language of design, fused into form and line and colour. It is this fusion which Pater wrote of as the ideal condition in art. But writers who have followed Pater have perverted this ideal of fusion into an ideal of emptiness. They have been misled by the analogy of music, and by Pater's contention that 'All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music'; and they have interpreted this saying as an expression of the theory that perfection lies not in the perfect melting of matter into form but in the emptying of matter from form. Not fusion but attenuation has been proclaimed the principle, as if the loftiest achievement of art were an arabesque devoid of ulterior meaning.

This is, in fact, the theoretic position of Whistler, who set a fashion by using musical terms for the titles of his pictures.

The same attenuation and emptying from the form of all significant elements has been proclaimed an ideal aim, as we have seen, by impressionists who invoked the authority of science and the facts of vision as their guiding principle.

## *A VISION OF ST. AUGUSTINE*

*Academy, Florence*



## Significance for Modern Art

Whistler, at least, invoked the authority of art. In this case too the doctrine was salutary, so far as it insisted that pictures should be seen and felt rather than considered and reasoned upon by intelligence. But, though we rightly regard pattern and harmony as the essential elements in a painting, it by no means follows that therefore all significance, all human interest, is 'claptrap.'

If it be so, why introduce human figures at all with all their distracting associations? As Mr. MacColl wittily observed, if Whistler's portrait of his mother is nothing but an arrangement in black and silver, if it be an impertinence to regard it as anything else, the coal-scuttle would have been a better subject. Whistler would perhaps have replied that with human forms you get more satisfying patterns. True, but the reason is that pattern is itself expressive: you cannot wholly empty it of meaning.

There is no such thing as abstract painting or abstract poetry. About music my ignorance forbids me to speak; but so far as concerns the relation of matter to form, I maintain that poetry and painting are in the same case. You cannot make an abstraction of the pattern or the rhythm.

Pattern and rhythm are both expressive.

We are always in danger of falling into unreality when we talk of pure decoration, or when we insist overmuch on such a distinction as Mr. Berenson has made, convenient as the distinction may be for purposes of comparison, between the decorative and the illustrative artist. We talk of decoration as filling a space in a manner satisfying to the eye, and leave the matter so, as if it were something external to ourselves, having nothing to do with our minds and emotions.

But on the contrary it is by pattern, rhythmical design, that painting is most eloquent to us. A pattern can be mean; a pattern can be noble. Look at the effect of a wall-paper in a room. Simply by lines and colours and the relation of these to each other and to the space of the wall, by proportion or disproportion, you can make the sensitive inmate feel mad or merry, calm or melancholy,

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worldly or spiritual. You can put his thoughts into tune with running water and budding boughs and free horizons, or you can oppress them with all the jars and wrongs of a world out of joint; you can lift him up, or cast him down, you can dungeon or enlarge him.

I said that pattern is expressive. Does a straight line mean the same to you as a flowing line? One is dead, the other is alive. Does scarlet mean the same to you as grey? Had you no associations with either colour, had you never seen the red of sunrise or the grey of twilight, the red of young lips and the grey of withered things, these colours would affect you in their sharply separate ways, excite or soothe, stimulate or depress. And so with spaces and with tones of dark and light.

These are the elements of pictorial language, a language whose extraordinary power lies just in its play upon emotions and thoughts that lie below the surface of our daily lives and ordinary selves, at the roots of our being. Just so does the poet use the rhythms of speech.

Instead then of being merely an arrangement pleasing to the eye, from which all human meaning and emotion have been abstracted, pattern has in germ the power to affect all our sources of emotion and to attune us to the meaning of life; it is, in fact, a living germ and not a dead abstraction. It is only because it affects us in ways so obscure to ourselves, and so much more strongly than we are conscious of, that this is not universally recognized.

Those who talk as if the ideal art had no content and were pure decoration, as it is termed, approach the question from the wrong end, or rather turn their backs on it. They want art to denude and starve itself.

But even if this were desirable, it cannot be done. If decoration were quite 'pure,' that is, entirely inexpressive, it would be dead; and we have no use for dead art, having no relation to humanity.

Rather let art embrace its material whole-heartedly, instead of shrinking from it in fear or shame or scorn. For the finest pattern, the finest decoration, is to be found not in arrangements of lines

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and colours intended to decorate a space and nothing more, but in the mature paintings of creative artists.

I wish there were other words to use than pattern and decoration: for these words have not the associations I desire to call up.

But using pattern in the sense not of a mechanical repetition but of a painter's rhythmical design, I would compare it to a quick and hungry flame, which without fuel burns out and dies down. And the fuel is the representative matter which the painter fuses in its heat. The more powerful and glowing the rhythmical force in the painter's nature, the more matter will he be able to fuse into his design. In painters of the second and lower ranks there is always some unfused insoluble matter left; and it is this which is addressed to the mere intelligence. But it is astonishing what a wealth of material the greatest painters of all have been able to take up and melt and make part of their own nature and give out in pictorial rhythm. In a masterpiece of Titian, for example, there are wonders of living pattern beyond the conception of any pattern designer.

And here I will say that I entirely dissent from Pater's conclusion—to return once more to the essay on 'The School of Giorgione'—that the lyric is 'the highest and most complete form of poetry' and the type of painting that corresponds to the lyric the highest and most complete form of pictorial art. On the contrary, the richer, the more complex and more significant the material fused in the form, the greater and more splendid the work of art, the higher and completer the triumph of the artist. I will not admit that any lyric is more perfect in its fusion of the elements it contains than the 'Agamemnon,' or any painting of an impression than the 'Bacchus and Ariadne.' More than this; the best works in a slight kind have been produced for the most part, not by those who have limited themselves to such forms, but by those who brought to these the rich experience gained upon more complex themes.

We are so made that we need resistance and difficulty to exalt us to our finest efforts, to expand and refine our powers.

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What endless variety of beauty in rhythmical movement appears when a wind blows over a cornfield, and the resisting yet complying stalks bend and sway and recover!

The weaver of arabesques, avoiding all that is significant in form, meets with no resisting element and soon becomes tame and flaccid and empty. The poet who is occupied only with the beauty of sound, and neglects the meaning of words, falls soon into thin, poor melodies. Significance nourishes pattern, gives nerve to the movement of design, forces invention into finer and finer form.

We have only to glance at the successive phases of painting in Europe to realize how intimately bound up is design in all its detail with the ideas that each painter or school of painters has sought to express. The relation of space and figures, the proportion of the figures themselves, the preponderant stress on relief, mass, colour, line, tone, on foreground or distance, on stillness or movement,—all these change in subtle and inevitable obedience to the dominating character of mental attitude or emotional mood.

Painters are fond of reproaching critics and the public with talking about the subject of a work of art and neglecting its essence, the design. Yet design involves expression, and expression implies a subject. The real question is always the relation of these to each other.

I think no one will dissent from Pater's statement that Botticelli was a poetical painter, and even before all things a poetical painter. But when we say that, what precisely do we mean by poetical? Obviously we do not mean merely that he chose subjects having an inherent poetry in themselves, for this he did in common with many another to whom we should not dream of applying such an epithet. Themes like the Adoration of the Magi or the Birth of Venus are themes full of inherent poetry, but they can be handled and have been handled often enough in a dull, external, unilluminated way. We mean something more than this.

Let us make a comparison, and take a concrete example. Let

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us take the Coronation of the Virgin by Botticelli in the Academy at Florence, and the Coronation of the Virgin by Velazquez in the Prado at Madrid.

I foresee that it will be objected at once that the comparison is unfair, since the picture by Velazquez is one of that great master's failures; at least to me it is a failure, despite all that can be said for it. It will be said, why not take Velazquez at his happiest and in his most distinctive vein? In *Las Meninas*, for instance, slight as the subject is, merely a moment in the more intimate life of a grave and artificial court reflected with no adventitious grace or ornament, with no infusion of emotion, does not the painter's instinct for seeing pictorial design in the materials given to his eye, and something magical and exquisite in his vision of it and in his handling, cause us to feel a kind of enchantment, and appeal to the same springs in us which poetry in its own different way evokes? Is not this the true painter's poetry? Pater seems to argue thus in his essay on the School of Giorgione, dwelling on the Venetians' clear apprehension of the essential limitations of the pictorial art and on Giorgione's 'subordination of mere subject to pictorial design.' And there will be many to-day, especially painters, who will see in what is called the poetical element in Botticelli merely matter for suspicion, a tendency to acquire merit by illegitimate means, such as the pure and upright painter should eschew.

I would be the last to disparage in any way the extraordinary charm and distinction of such a picture as *Las Meninas*, or to despise, as some cravers for idealism despise, the beauty of the genre and idyll-painting of Giorgione's followers, of Chardin, of Vermeer and Terborch, and of later masters. But in Botticelli's case at any rate I would deny that his poetry is something added and irrelevant to his merits as a painter—something 'literary,' in the jargon I would like to explode—I think it belongs to the pictorial essence of his art.

Why is Velazquez' Coronation of the Virgin a failure, or let us say a comparative failure? It is by no means without dignity; it is not rhetorical, it is not insincere. Velazquez, with his grave seemli-

## The Art of Botticelli

ness, has no trace of the affected sentimentality which revolts in most Italian seventeenth-century religious paintings of this kind. Is it because the types are not ideal, remind us too much of personages whom we might meet in ordinary life? This explanation might tempt us, did we not know of paintings which communicate intense religious emotion where the types, regarded in themselves, are even common and ugly.

Let us turn to Botticelli's Coronation. It is not one of his masterpieces, it is true. It does not make its impression as a whole; for it is not a single subject. The four massive figures of the Fathers of the Church, demanded by the painter's commission, intrude too powerfully on our vision. But if we fix our eyes on the upper part, which alone depicts the subject of Velazquez' picture, into what a different world from this are we transported! We are lifted up into a golden air, a mystery of radiant light, fragrant with the flowers that fall from the young hands of angels; and a choir of angels floating with joined hands in a ring move in their airy dance about the beatified Virgin in this moment of her supreme glorification, and carry us with them, dematerialized into thoughts of joy.

To the young generation of contemporary Florentines this picture, with its use of gold and its harking back to the Giottesque traditions, seemed no doubt old-fashioned. But for felicity in the treatment of its subject the painter makes, on the contrary, too much not too little concession to the new mode, the new mastery in representation of the solid material world. The pictorial methods of the Sienese masters, of Duccio or Sassetta, were really the methods aptest for discovering to us the visions of heaven. From the standpoint of one who is free from the irrelevant bias of historical perspective, what seems the technical mastery of Velazquez is, as applied to the purpose in question, mere lumber, which if it is not antiquated ought to be antiquated.

But Botticelli, if he does not here show perfect mastery of the pictorial language of religious emotion, shows signally and unsurpassably his mastery of pictorial poetry. He shows it in the

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invention of a pictorial device, the dance of quiring angels, which by its mere rhythm of lines and harmoniously related forms and colours would, even if the subject of the painting had no meaning for us, stir us like music or the rhythm of noble language and carry us away from the associations of this world's impeded struggle to a world cleansed of all but the beauty of light, where we move as birds in the air with the ecstasy of freedom, yet feel we are part of the great order of the living world, like the planets in their motion.

Whereas, of Velazquez' picture we note the dignity and the good arrangement, and remain what we were.

In drama 'the language of prose is gesture, the language of poetry is the dance.' I quote from Mr. Gordon Craig. This is the thought which we must follow up if we would seize the essential character of the poetic element in the various arts.

There are many things in the world of painting which we call by association poetical; dreamy landscapes, solemn colours inducing reverie, shapes and scenes remote from the actual.

But the mind of the creative poet is above all things fluid, not merely sensitive and receptive; it identifies itself with the energies which inform and impel the tide of life, it does not stand motionless and seek to arrest them. The impulse which sets the poet singing is a stir of those energies felt within himself; he finds within himself the irresistible rhythm of life, and as he utters it his words go dancing, like the waves of light through the atmosphere.

A painter then who blends with his pictorial gift the poetic nature will instinctively seek to express by line and colour not so much a still exaltation of mood or the depth of enchanted reverie as the rhythms of movement which the uses, necessities, and obstacles of daily existence, as we see it, curb, impede, and dislocate, but which are naturally and directly expressed in the limbs of a child or an animal, flowing out of the abundance of its joy in life for life's mere sake.

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A painter, to be master of the pictorial expression of rhythmic movement, must have imaginative vision. Observation alone will not help him. No array of posed models will enable him to paint forms dancing on the earth, much less on air. It is something incommunicable that must be born within himself. And this is the vision which the poet has and which he instinctively embodies in the moving rhythm of song.

The difference between poetry and painting is not that they are each concerned with a different order of themes mutually exclusive, but that, as we were taught long ago, painting is in the main concerned with the aspect of life, and poetry with its movement. But just as there are poets who lean to the pictorial, there are painters who lean to the poetical side; and it is, I repeat, in their instinct for expressing or suggesting the movement of life that we shall find the right clue to this poetic nature, rather than in any vague sentiment or beauty of atmosphere.

Some may think there is more of the poetical in Velazquez than in Rubens, just as they may think the same of Pater's prose as compared with Byron's verse. But fine taste and very delicate perceptions are not necessarily poetical; rhythmic energy may exist without them.

I intend to consider some of the greater and more characteristic works of Botticelli in the light of what has been said before. That is, to consider them from the point of view of expressive design; not inquiring first how they illustrate their subject and next what appeal they make as decorative compositions in line and colour, apart from their subject, but seeking to find in what measure they succeed or fail in expressing through pictorial language the imaginative ideas which animated the painter as he painted.

But first, since it is of real interest to watch the master's intuitive gift and special predilections working out through all his acquired training and accomplishment, I will give some account of Botticelli's career and of his known works in their order. This account will inevitably be little more than a summary of the conclusions set forth

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so amply, with all the available evidence, in Mr. Horne's elaborate and masterly work, to which every one who wishes to study the subject in detail must refer, though I should add that one or two discoveries relating to Botticelli have come to light since that work was printed, or while it was in the press; and these will be noted in their place.

*MADONNA AND CHILD*

*Poldi-Pezzoli Museum, Milan*



## BOTTICELLI'S LIFE

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## Botticelli's Life

### I

THE father of Botticelli was a Florentine tanner, Mariano Filipepi. By his wife Smeralda, Mariano had eight children, the youngest but one of these being Sandro. As time went on, Mariano's affairs prospered less. In 1457, at the age of sixty-five, he found himself able to make but little by his trade. But his eldest son Giovanni had thriven in his calling as a broker and had become the main support of the family. This Giovanni had been nicknamed Botticello or Tubby; and as the Italians readily prefer to call a man by a name that is found to hit off some prominent token of character, habit or appearance, rather than merge him with his family in a name that is merely inherited and insignificant or strikes the sense as incongruous with the person, the nickname usurped the surname; and Sandro, who was brought up by this elder brother more than by his own father, came to be known as Sandro di Botticello, and later in life as Sandro Botticelli, as if his proper family name of Filipepi had been forgotten.

In 1457 Sandro is recorded as being thirteen, at school, and in delicate health. He was born therefore in 1444, not as Vasari says about 1437, nor, as modern authorities have believed, about 1447. The fixing of the dates of Sandro's birth and the incidents of his early life depend on the declarations of householders to the tax-collectors, documents still preserved. In declarations, made at

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various times, Mariano Filipepi records the state of his affairs and the ages of his children. His accounts are not consistent; but Mr. Horne, by a comparison and critical examination of all the available evidence, has shown that the declaration of 1457, made really by Giovanni in his father's name, has the strongest claim to accuracy.

Mariano's second son Antonio, some nine years younger than Giovanni, followed the craft of a 'battiloro' or beater of gold leaf. Gold was used by painters not only for the frames of their pictures but in the actual backgrounds of gold 'such as the early Tuscan art prefers,' so conspicuous in the altarpieces of Fra Angelico. The custom was soon to go out with the growth of the new realism of method which transformed the whole practice of Florentine art during Botticelli's own lifetime; but in the mid fifteenth century there was still a great demand for the aid of the gold-beater's craft. Between the beaters of gold leaf and the painters there was therefore an intimate connection: and if, as Mr. Horne thinks very possible, Sandro was placed first with his brother Antonio to learn his craft, we can easily discern the foundation of truth in Vasari's statement that Botticelli, from working with a goldsmith, came into contact with painters, and having a natural turn for drawing became enamoured of the painter's art, and resolved himself to become a painter.

Vasari was often inaccurate in his facts: these indeed are rarely preserved in their accuracy by hearsay tradition. But the impress that a man's character leaves on his contemporaries is a thing less likely to be falsified by recollection. Sandro, says Vasari, speaking of the painter's boyhood, was always restless, 'sempre inquieto.' Although he readily learned whatever he had a mind to, he was nevertheless always restless. It may be fanciful to lay an emphasis on the word in this particular connection; yet this restlessness of the quick-minded boy seems part of the enduring character of the man, seems to infect and pervade the character of his whole art. To represent movement, energy and passion of the soul as expressed

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in the movements of the body, this comes to be more and more a preoccupation of his mind and a distinguishing quality of his painting.

The Florentine youth who was intended for a painter was commonly taken from school, where he received the elements of education, and placed in a master's workshop at the age of thirteen or fourteen, if not earlier. In or about 1458, then, Sandro would have been placed with the master chosen to train him, Fra Filippo Lippi.

In 1459 Fra Filippo was commissioned to paint a series of frescoes in the church of San Francesco at Prato; a work which was protracted by many delays till 1464 or longer. At Prato presumably the young Botticelli learnt the methods and practice of his art, in the assistance of his master.

Fra Filippo died in 1469, while he was at work on the frescoes which he was painting at Spoleto. On his death-bed he left his young son, the child of his amour with Lucrezia Buti, then some twelve years old, to the charge of Fra Diamante his assistant. But Fra Diamante betrayed his trust; apparently he found the boy a burden, and handed him over to Botticelli, now himself established as a painter on his own account. This was before 1472, when it is recorded that Botticelli was a member of the Guild of St. Luke and that Filippino was his pupil.

Only a few works of the preceding years survive; but enough to show that while Botticelli inherited much of a technical character in his art from Fra Filippo, he was deeply impressed by another Florentine master of a very different character, Antonio Pollaiuolo.

It has been generally assumed that the Fortitude, one of Sandro's earliest surviving works—it was finished in 1470—was painted by him as assistant of the Pollaiuoli brothers, Antonio and Piero. The panel is one of a series of the seven Virtues painted for the hall of the Mercanzia in Florence, and on the suppression of the Mercanzia in the eighteenth century, brought to the Uffizi gallery, where they now are. Documents, however, discovered in 1903,

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PLATE VII

after the pages of Mr Horne's book dealing with this subject were in print, show that Botticelli gained the commission for this one panel out of the seven as an independent and rival painter, and through the intervention of his patron, Tommaso Soderini. The general commission had been given to Piero Pollaiuolo. On the back of the 'Charity' is a design of the same subject drawn in charcoal on the wood of the panel; and this design is certainly by Antonio; but the inferior execution of the paintings, with their stiff tameness and lack of life, must be put down to the feeble Piero, whatever share his brother may have had in the work by providing drawings or supervising. Botticelli in the Fortitude adopts the same scheme of the throned figure in its niche as in the rest of the series; but his panel is far superior in vitality of presentment.

Whatever his personal relations with the Pollaiuoli may have been, it is clear that Antonio's energetic drawing and mastery of structure stimulated him at this time to emulation. Fra Filippo was just dead; from him Sandro had learned ease in expressing gracious flow and motion in the design of drapery, and in colouring; what he now sought was to inform his art with a more strenuous research into nature, to acquire the language of relief and mass, to express weight and force through the muscular movements of the body; to fuse his own sweetness and delicate ornateness of invention, natural and acquired, with the energy and vehemence which were also part of his nature and which Antonio, best of the masters of Florence, could teach him how to express.

The two influences, each evoking Botticelli's own latent powers, are visible in another painting of about the same time, possibly a little earlier. This is the oblong panel of the Adoration of the Magi, now in the National Gallery. Here the young painter succeeds in crowding together a great number of figures into an animated composition; and, especially in the throng of men and horses at the left of the design, there is great activity and vigour, with movement of contrasted forms. A similar dramatic sense is to be found in the two small pictures of Holofernes discovered dead in

### *PORTRAIT OF A MAN HOLDING A MEDAL*

*Uffizi, Florence*



## Botticelli's Life

his tent and Judith returning to Bethulia ; but in both cases there is a peculiar quality of emotion which belongs to Sandro himself.

To this group of early paintings must be added the bust portrait of a man with a cap over a mane of hair holding up to the spectator with both hands a medal of Cosimo de' Medici. This portrait, now in the Uffizi, was first recognized as Botticelli's work by Morelli. Here Sandro is seen working in the spirit of the Pollaiuoli. The suavity of Lippi's manner is exchanged for a nervous strength of definition, emphasizing the bony structure of head and hands beneath the flesh.

But in all these early pictures the essential originality and power of the artist are plainly visible ; and in the next succeeding group of paintings this originality and power become still more clearly disengaged, though we see him always alert to such stimulus from without as was congenial to his own temper and ambition.

In 1472, as we have seen, Botticelli was with other painters entered as a member of the Guild of St. Luke, which had fallen into decay and neglect, but in that year seems to have been reorganized and revived.

During the next year he was employed upon the St. Sebastian, now in the Berlin Gallery and formerly in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, for which it was originally painted. At about the same time Antonio Pollaiuolo was engaged on the great altarpiece of the Martyrdom of St. Sebastian which is now in the National Gallery. The two pictures are conceived in a wholly different mood ; yet one cannot doubt that here Pollaiuolo was, on the technical side, in the expression of anatomical structure, Botticelli's master.

No sooner was this painting finished, than Botticelli was invited to Pisa. For five years Benozzo Gozzoli had been working on the vast scheme of frescoes decorating the walls of the Campo Santo. But as there was still a great space to be covered, and as the authorities were anxious to have the completion of the work in sight, Botticelli, now obviously a master of distinguished reputation, was sent for to join in the undertaking. The proposal, however,

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came in the end to nothing. It was decided that Botticelli should first carry out, as a specimen of his style and skill, a picture, not in the Campo Santo itself but in a chapel of the Cathedral. Sandro began this picture, an Assumption of the Virgin, but never finished it; either because, as Vasari says, he was dissatisfied with it, or, as Mr. Horne conjectures, because the Pisans, accustomed to the now old-fashioned style of Benozzo, disliked Botticelli's unfamiliar manner, impregnated with the aims of the modern movement of ideas in Florence. The unfinished Assumption was destroyed towards the end of the sixteenth century. In any case, Botticelli's never-commissioned frescoes, if they had been carried out, would, we may be sure, have accorded ill with the ingenuous charm of Benozzo's decorative genre. Nor can we regret that the painter returned so speedily to Florence, instead of lingering in the provincial atmosphere of Pisa.

Perhaps a little earlier than this Pisan excursion was painted the beautiful Madonna and Child with an Angel which a few years ago passed from the collection of Prince Chigi to that of Mrs. Gardner in Boston. In this panel the types are not yet of the special character we recognize as Botticelli's own; but his peculiar originality is manifested in the symbolic conception of the subject and in its deeply felt spirituality.

On his return to Florence, Botticelli resumed work, and received fresh commissions for religious paintings. One of these, executed, according to Mr. Horne, about 1476, was the circular Adoration of the Magi in the National Gallery. In the English private collection from which it was bought, this picture bore Botticelli's name, but when hung in the national collection it was rechristened Filippino Lippi, probably to justify the label with Filippino's name attached to the small oblong Adoration, already mentioned, which had been acquired some twenty years earlier. Only the other day these two pictures have been at last officially restored to their rightful author. Botticelli's signal power of infusing freshness and significance into traditional themes by his gift of imaginative

### *THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI, WITH PORTRAITS OF THE MEDICI*

*Uffizi, Florence*



## Botticelli's Life

invention is nowhere more conspicuous than in this wonderful design. We can measure his immense advance by comparing it with the oblong Adoration of some ten years before. His originality and success in treating this particular subject seem to have been recognized, for he was called upon to paint it several times yet again.

Of almost the same date as this last picture is that other Adoration, now in the Uffizi Gallery, in which certain of the Medici family are portrayed in the guise of the Mages.

The portrait of a man holding a medal of Cosimo de' Medici has already been noticed. Mr. Horne inclines to recognize in that portrait the features of Giovanni, the younger son of Cosimo and the patron of Fra Filippo ; and Giovanni is also represented as one of the Mages in this Adoration. Botticelli no doubt shared in the patronage of the house of Medici bestowed so liberally on the artists of the day. But the commission for this new Adoration was not directly given by one of the family, but, as Mr. Horne's researches have shown, by one Giovanni Lami, who desired apparently to find favour with the Medici by having this picture painted. Mr. Horne shows, too, that it was originally placed on the end wall of the church of Santa Maria Novella, and on the right hand side of the central door as you enter. Its place is now occupied by the Trinity of Masaccio, removed thither from its original position in the left aisle during the nineteenth century.

This Adoration marks a definite point in Botticelli's career. It is as if it had been undertaken and carried out as a challenge to those contemporaries who, like Ghirlandaio, were preoccupied with mastery of the art of representation. Botticelli here forgoes the vein of fantasy and the mood of exalted fervour which were his own peculiar qualities, he subdues his invention to portray the more firmly and closely ; he rivals Ghirlandaio in masculine dignity of portraiture, he surpasses him in the sense of life as in beauty of composition and of colour, and adds his own subtler sense of character, movement, and feeling.

## The Art of Botticelli

What impressed the artists and critics of contemporary Florence in this work was just that which most appealed to them and of which they were such excellent judges; its thorough mastery of workmanship and construction. It was 'exceedingly well done.' The fame of this picture seems to have carried Botticelli's name over Italy.

But this type of painting, noble as it is in its contained power, its controlled emotion, and relatively simple design, was not of a character to satisfy Botticelli's inmost nature, with its restlessness and its superabundant lyrical energy ever welling forth in fancy and invention.

And one at least of his patrons, now one of the Medici themselves, discerned, probably from personal intercourse with the painter, what special gifts of imagination were his, and commissioned a work in which he could be more free to follow out his own poetic vein than in the traditional subjects demanded by the Church. This was the famous 'Primavera.' It is again to Mr. Horne's research and acumen that we owe the establishment of the real identity of this patron. He has been presumed to be Lorenzo the Magnificent himself. But Mr. Horne shows that the Primavera and the Birth of Venus never belonged to Lorenzo the Magnificent. They were painted for another Lorenzo of the Medici family, the son of Pierfrancesco, who was nephew of Cosimo de' Medici. This Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco was born in 1463. His father died in 1476, leaving a great fortune to him and his younger brother; and in 1477 Lorenzo bought the villa of Castello, outside Florence, for which Botticelli's two famous allegories were painted. Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici was then but a youth of fourteen when he bought the villa, and but little older apparently when he commissioned the Primavera for its decoration. This might seem improbable did we not know in what an atmosphere of art and letters the well-born youth of the day were bred, and the infectious fever of humanism which pervaded Florence. Before he was twenty, Politian dedicated one of his works to Lorenzo and in his

## Botticelli's Life

dedication implored him not to delay longer the publication of his own poems. Later, Lorenzo was to commission Botticelli with a work very specially congenial to him, the illustrations to the Divine Comedy. We may be sure therefore that in this youth of great fortune and fine taste Botticelli had found one who genuinely appreciated his gifts.

The Primavera was on a larger scale than anything hitherto attempted by the artist; and to that larger scale he adapts his manner of designing. Like the Adoration with the Medici portraits, this picture is less involved and unquiet, broader and simpler in the main lines of its composition than is Botticelli's wont. It reveals him as a master of original design and expressive drawing, but also for the first time in his fullness as an imaginative creator.

The Birth of Venus, which it is natural to associate with the Spring, and which was also painted for Castello, belongs in Mr. Horne's judgment to a later date.

## Botticelli's Life

### II

**B**OTTICELLI'S next commission was of a singularly different character.

Ever since 1434, when Cosimo de' Medici was recalled from exile, and the power of the Albizzi, with the oligarchical rule which they represented, was destroyed, the house of Medici had enjoyed an absolute authority in Florence. Astutely preserving the name and the forms of liberty, and relying on their old prestige as champions of the political rights of the people, they behaved outwardly as public-spirited citizens, busy in commerce, lavish in their encouragement of learning, art, and literature, but were none the less unscrupulous in the strict retention of essential power.

Cosimo died in 1464, when Botticelli was twenty years old. His brother Piero followed him five years later; and power remained in the hands of Piero's sons, Lorenzo and Giuliano. But in spite of seeming security there were not wanting elements of discord, unrest, and dissatisfaction within the Republic; and among certain eminent families there was a growing jealousy and impatience of the veiled usurpation of the Medici.

The devoted act and splendid crime by which, on the Christmas morning of 1476, Girolamo Olgiati and his two comrades, noble youths of Milan, had rid that city of the debauched and violent despot, Galeazzo Sforza, though they paid the price in blood and torture, may have kindled by example the conception of a similar desperate enterprise, if undertaken from far different motives, which a little more than a year later was to shake Florence into tumult.

The Pazzi were an old and famous Florentine house, con-

spicuous for their wealth and influence, and from their power obnoxious to the Medicean rule. The Medici had even made use of legislation to exclude the most prominent among the Pazzi from political authority. One of the Pazzi, Francesco, in anger and disgust quitted Florence for Rome. There he found an ally in his hatred, and a formidable ally, the Pope.

Sixtus IV., who some six years later was to die in a fit of rage at hearing of the conclusion of a peace which baulked his hopes of aggrandizing a nephew by the conquest of Ferrara, Sixtus IV. wished for nothing better than to destroy the Medici and to get the Republic into his power.

The blessing of the Pope on the enterprise having been secured, a conspiracy was entered upon for ridding Florence of the two Medici brothers. The head of the house of Pazzi, Jacopo, joined the plot with Francesco Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa, and others, malcontents and exiles, whom they had drawn to their side.

The opportunity finally chosen by the conspirators was the celebration of High Mass in the Cathedral on the 26th of April, 1478, when both Lorenzo and Giuliano were to be present. The soldier Montesecco, deputed to do the murder, discovered scruples of conscience at shedding blood in church; two priests were found more accommodating. On the morning, mass had already begun, but though Lorenzo was there, Giuliano had not yet appeared. He was fetched therefore by his murderers, Francesco de' Pazzi and one Bandini; and as he knelt at the altar he was struck down by both at once. At the same moment the two priests fell upon Lorenzo, who escaped however into the sacristy with but a slight wound. Meanwhile the Archbishop of Pisa and his friends sought to gain the Palace of the Signory by pretending a message from the Pope, but were instantly suspected; the doors were closed, the guard called to arms, and the great bell rung. The city by this was in uproar: the plot had failed.

That same night Francesco de' Pazzi, naked and wounded, the Archbishop of Pisa, and some twenty others were hanged at the

## The Art of Botticelli

windows of the Palace of the Signory or other public buildings. On the two following days many more of the conspirators were also hanged, including Jacopo de' Pazzi, who had fled but had been taken outside the city.

It was an old custom in Florence to paint the figures of condemned traitors and outlaws on the front of some public building. In 1434 when the Albizzi fell and were banished on the return of Cosimo de' Medici, it was Andrea dal Castagno who had been ordered to paint their effigies on the Palace of the Podestà. Now it was Botticelli who was commissioned to paint the hanged bodies of the chiefs of the Pazzi conspiracy. The frescoes were painted on the front of the Bargello. But they were not to remain there for long. In 1494, when Piero de' Medici, Lorenzo's weak and faithless son, fled from Florence, and those who had been exiled by the Medici returned, followed by the King of France and his army, the frescoes of Botticelli, together with those earlier ones of Castagno, were destroyed.

How far would our conception of Botticelli, the painter of wistful Madonnas, be altered and coloured if we had still before our eyes in the daylight of Florence those effigies of violently slain men, stark in their helplessness and contortion? When the noose had been put round the Archbishop Salviati's neck and he fell, he bit in his agony the body of Francesco de' Pazzi which hung already dead beside him; and his teeth remained in it when he died.

We need not suppose that Botticelli would have mitigated or disguised the horribleness of the reality. These frescoes could not have been all horror, far from it; for they were painted by a man of serious and profound imagination; but that they portrayed with the utmost force the power of vengeance and the pity of death, the revelation of difference in nature, the naked soul wrung out of the body of each one of those hanged ones, the rigour of struggle ended, and the weight of lifelessness in the limbs,—who can doubt it of a painter so dramatic in conception? Rembrandt, the most human of painters, would not, I think, have shrunk from such a task, had

### ST. AUGUSTINE

*Church of Ognisanti, Florence*



## Botticelli's Life

it been given him. Leonardo, we know, made a drawing—it is in the Bonnat collection—of the dead body of Bandini, the murderer of Giuliano de' Medici, who had escaped to Constantinople but was handed back to the Florentines by the Sultan, and who, a year and eight months after the execution of his companions, was hanged above their painted effigies.

This sudden glimpse into the external history of the time is necessary not only for realization of background, but for comprehension of Botticelli's actual life and art. It shows him us as the servant of the Medici house, chosen out from among the Florentine masters as specially capable of recording their swift and terrible vengeance on their enemies by his gift of masculine and vehement draughtsmanship.

But this grim commission concluded, the painter returns tranquilly to his altarpieces.

Not that the impress of this enforced study of death and violent reality left him unchanged. In the work which appears to be the next in date surviving, the fresco of St. Augustine in the church of Ognisanti, there is an unwonted severity of conception, strongly contrasting with the little picture of the same saint writing in his happy cell, done many years after and now in the Uffizi.

In 1478 the plague had broken out in Florence, and continued for two years or more, ravaging the city. The Hospital to which all who were stricken by the disease were taken was in the close neighbourhood of the dwelling of the Filipepi family. During 1476 the hardly credible number of twenty thousand people is said to have died in this hospital.

Something of the tragic apprehension of life, so reiterated in the daily circumstances of the streets, with their burden of dead borne to burial continually, seems to have passed into the painter's vision of Augustine. The features of the saint are written upon with intensity of experience, as of one who has felt the sorrows and sinfulness of the world in his own; and his eyes have the pain of intense thought under the drawn brows. By a certain bony

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hardness and austerity in the forms, and an angular emphasis in the design, we are reminded of Andrea dal Castagno, whose frescoes of the outlawed Albizzi must have been Botticelli's exemplar in his own paintings of the hanged Pazzi conspirators, doubtless deeply studied.

In this work for the church of Ognisanti Botticelli was associated with Domenico Ghirlandaio, who painted a St. Jerome on the opposite wall of the church. The two masters were at this time the most prominent and popular painters in Florence, and rivals in the esteem of their contemporaries, though Botticelli's superiority in depth and power of imagination is signally apparent even in these frescoes of single figures where his inventive faculty and sense of movement could have no scope.

The two were again to be rivals and associates in the great undertaking which, early in 1481, called both from Florence to Rome.

Just before Botticelli's departure, a return was made by Mariano Filipepi to the tax-collector on the occasion of a new tax.

After the failure of the Pazzi plot, the Pope at first disavowed his complicity, but soon found pretexts to declare his real attitude. The Florentines, refusing to banish Lorenzo de' Medici, were punished by an Interdict, and soon found themselves engaged in open war with the joint forces of the Pope and the King of Naples. Lorenzo at the end of 1479 made a sudden voyage to Naples, and concluded a peace with the king; but the Pope was still pursuing his aims, and the Duke of Calabria, his nephew, seemed threatening to occupy and overrun all Tuscany, when in the summer of 1480 the news that Otranto had been taken by the Turks recalled the states of Italy from their mutual feuds and intrigues to arm against a common foe. Florence sought to be reconciled with the Pope, and sent an embassy to Rome. Formal submission was made; the Interdict was solemnly removed; and the Florentines engaged to provide and maintain fifteen galleys for the war against the Turk. Hence the tax

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levied upon the citizens at the beginning of 1481, mentioned above.

Botticelli's father, we learn from this return, was now eighty-six and past work. His eldest brother Giovanni had also retired from business; and his mother was now dead. He himself is described as working in the house 'when he chooses.' Particulars are also given of the numerous other members of the family, who all lived together in one house or group of houses. From other documents we learn that Botticelli had at this time three assistants whom, probably, he took with him to Rome.

The undertaking which summoned the painter from his native city was the scheme of decoration for the newly completed Sistine Chapel, which now occupied the Pope. Always intriguing to enlarge the Papal dominions, Sixtus was even more possessed with the design of making Rome itself magnificent. Vast schemes of rebuilding were in progress; houses were being pulled down, streets widened; splendid new churches and palaces were rising on every side.

The chapel in the Vatican which bears his name is, however, the monument that is most closely associated with the memory of this Pontiff. It was the work of a Florentine architect; and the decoration of its walls was to be entrusted chiefly, though not entirely, to Florentine painters. The desire to procure the finest masters of the day for his cherished scheme may indeed have been one of the causes which persuaded Sixtus to a reconciliation with his enemies.

The altarpiece of the Adoration of the Magi with portraits of the Medici had, more than any other of Botticelli's works, made him famous and carried his name to Rome.

It is a testimony to his position and renown among Italian masters of the day that he was, as it appears, appointed as controller and overseer of the chosen group of painters, which included Ghirlandaio, Piero di Cosimo, Cosimo Rosselli, Perugino, Pintoricchio, and Piero della Gatta of Arezzo.

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The commission was given for a series of frescoes with stories from the Old and New Testaments, and for a series of portraits of the Popes above them. Botticelli seems to have had the chief share, with Ghirlandaio, in designing the portraits of the Popes, which were carried out mainly by assistants. The three large frescoes which he undertook had for subject, The Story of Moses (Moses slaying the Egyptian, and his Trials in the Land of Midian), The Temptation of Christ (with the purification of a leper), and The Destruction of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Full of splendid passages and dramatic invention, these frescoes lack the simplicity and grandeur in total effect which monumental wall-painting requires. The manner of composition, by which many episodes are woven together in the one design, and the principal figures repeated several times, necessitated an involved multiplicity of elements. We feel that Botticelli's powers as a painter are here at their ripest, his energy of thought and passion at their fullest, but we also feel that these are not employed upon subjects capable of drawing them out in a spontaneous and felicitous way.

Besides the Sistine frescoes Botticelli is recorded to have executed while in Rome at least one altarpiece. This was yet another Adoration of the Magi; and Mr. Horne suggests that this work may be identified with the picture now at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. The greater spaciousness of the composition and its symmetrical design, tranquillizing the effect of fervent emotion seen in the individual figures, would seem certainly a natural consequence of the painter's recent occupation with the problems of fresco-painting on a large scale.

According to Vasari, Botticelli greatly increased his fame by his work in the Sistine Chapel, and received handsome payment from the Pope; but, by careless management, spent it all in a short time. On the completion of the frescoes he returned to Florence with Ghirlandaio and Perugino, and was at home by August 1482.

During his sojourn in Rome, in the autumn of 1481, the famous

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edition of Dante's Divine Comedy by Cristoforo Landino appeared in Florence. In this book were a certain number, varying in most copies, of engravings printed from copperplates in illustration of the Inferno. These engravings were made from designs by Botticelli, who appears to have prepared illustrations to the Inferno from the first to the nineteenth canto and then to have broken off his work. Perhaps Mr. Horne is right in concluding that the Sistine commission and the journey to Rome were the chief cause of the interruption of this scheme and of the experimental character of the illustrations in Landino's edition, while difficulties of printing also contributed to it. Vasari indeed says that it was after his return from Rome that Botticelli wasted his time over the study of Dante, illustrating the Inferno and having the illustrations engraved. But while the reference to the engravings can refer to nothing but Landino's edition, Vasari's general statement is accounted for by the great series of drawings, made in illustration of the complete poem of Dante, which was not begun till after this time and which no doubt, with the study it involved, engrossed much of the painter's energies during the later years of his life and distracted him from other labours. This is the first record we have both of Botticelli's connection with the Florentine engravers and of that devotion to the great poet of Florence, which left so profound a trace upon the spirit of his art.

Meanwhile the painter's return with fresh honours to his own city brought him immediate new commissions. For some reason the work of decorating a hall in the Palazzo Vecchio in association with Ghirlandaio, contracted for in October 1482, was not carried out, though Ghirlandaio's part was performed and is still preserved. A more important work, undertaken soon after this, was executed but has unfortunately perished. This was the decoration in fresco of the Spedaletto, a villa near Volterra belonging to Lorenzo the Magnificent, by whom the commission was given. In this scheme Botticelli was associated with Filippino Lippi, Perugino and Ghirlandaio; these four being now the chief masters working in

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Florence, now that the Pollaiuoli were in Rome, Verrocchio in Venice and Leonardo da Vinci in Milan.

A document discovered in the archives at Milan by Herr Müller-Walde alludes to the frescoes painted at the Spedaletto and to the distinction won by them for the painters. This document is of the greatest interest as giving the competent and representative criticism of a contemporary. The Duke of Milan, apparently, desired an account of the principal Florentine painters with a view to employing them himself: and a confidential agent sent him a brief report upon the four whom we have just named.

Botticelli is placed first, and is described as a most excellent painter 'in tavola et in muro; le cose sue hano aria virile et sono cum optima ragione, et integra proportione.'

Filippino is described as Botticelli's best pupil. 'His works have more sweetness, but I think less art.'

Perugino is 'an eminent master, especially of fresco; his works have an angelical air of the greatest sweetness.'

Ghirlandaio 'is a good master on panel, and even better in wall-painting; his works have a good air, and he is an expeditious man, who gets much work done.'

This is the business-like report of a man of business; but so far as it goes his criticism is sound and just, even though the qualities which he praises in Botticelli's art, the masculine look of his figures, the justness and sense of proportion in his design, are not the qualities which seem to us to be the source of his distinctive power and special excellence. Certainly the criticism of Filippino's art, as compared with that of Botticelli, is fundamentally true.

At the end of his report the agent mentions that all four masters had been employed on the frescoes of the Spedaletto. Though these frescoes have perished, we know that the subjects of them were taken from classic mythology. Had they survived, we should have had a series of frescoes perhaps rivalling in importance the series executed for the Pope in the Sistine Chapel, and in any case

### *MADONNA, SAINTS AND ANGELS: ALTARPIECE OF SAN BARNABA*

*Academy, Florence*



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of extraordinary interest for comparison of the rival painters' achievements in profane as in sacred themes.

For the chronology of Botticelli's works at this period we have little documentary evidence. But certain paintings can safely be assigned to the years 1480-1490. Possibly even earlier than the journey to Rome was executed the most popular and celebrated of the master's religious pictures, the tondo of the Magnificat now in the Uffizi, which shows Botticelli's 'optima ragione' in the felicitous disposition of the figures within the circular panel, a form for which he seems to have had a particular predilection. It is much repainted.

The picture which in Mr. Horne's judgment most nearly approaches the Sistine frescoes, and may be presumed therefore to have been painted soon after the return to Florence, is the great altarpiece made for the church of San Barnaba and now in the Florence Academy; an elaborate work, very brilliant in colouring, but too static in character to bring out the most original and inspired qualities in the painter's genius. Of the seven 'predella' pictures, three are lost; but the four remaining are delightful little panels, especially the Vision of Augustine by the seashore.

One of the few pictures of this period for which we have a certain date is the altarpiece of the Madonna with St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, painted in 1485 for the church of Santo Spirito and now in the Berlin Gallery.

Here, as to a less degree in the San Barnaba 'Madonna and Saints' the artist, cramped by ecclesiastical prescription of subject and with nothing of dramatic motive to inspire him, puts less of his essential genius into his work. Nor is there opportunity for that portraiture of masculine character so conspicuous in the earlier altarpiece of the Adoration of the Magi. But in some other works of these years his own peculiar gifts are seen at freer play.

There is, for instance, that delightful frank portrait of a youth, doubtless some one of the pupils in his workshop, which is in the National Gallery; and there is the beautiful Mars and Venus, in the

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same gallery, where Botticelli gives himself again to classic myth; perhaps, as Mr. Eric Maclagan has pointed out to me, and as has been suggested independently by a foreign critic, taking his motive from a late poet, Reposianus, who writes of Mars sleeping in a favourite grove, and Venus watching him, and Cupid playing with the armour of the god. With this may be grouped the still more lovely, the incomparable Birth of Venus, painted, as we have already seen, for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici's villa of Castello. For beauty and originality both of conception and of design this is Botticelli's masterpiece; it has a simplicity and spaciousness which he attains in a like degree nowhere else, and in none other of his works do we feel the essence of his peculiar gifts communicated so freshly and directly, with power and joy.

For the same patron, and not, as has been supposed, for Lorenzo the Magnificent, was also painted the Pallas and the Centaur, which for long hung ignored and unnoticed in a dark corridor of the Pitti Palace, but was recognized in 1895 by an English amateur, and has since become one of Botticelli's most famous works. In earlier years Sandro had painted another Pallas for Lorenzo the Magnificent; but this is lost. The existing picture, notable for its largeness of style and sense of mass, has a symbolic meaning. The Centaur stands for the spirit of savage lawlessness and riot which the disorder of the times, with their incessant petty wars between state and state, had bred so bold; and Pallas, the goddess of wisdom and the arts, incarnate in the rule of the Medici, who had often taken her image for their emblem, aweing the wild Centaur by her calm power and majesty, takes him by the hair to tame him. The picture may be presumed to celebrate the peace enjoyed by Florence during the last years of Lorenzo's life.

Other allegorical compositions occupied the painter during the years 1485-90; and these also were not discovered till late in the nineteenth century. In a villa in the suburbs of Florence, belonging to the Lemmi family, traces of painting were noticed under the whitewash covering the walls of a room. The whitewash was

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removed in the autumn of 1873, and it was found that the whole room had been decorated with frescoes. Great part of these had perished; but the paintings on two of the walls were more or less preserved. These two are now in the Louvre, where they confront the visitor as he ascends the great staircase of the gallery. The frescoes celebrate the marriage of Lorenzo Tornabuoni and Giovanna, a young lady of the Albizzi family; a lady famed for her grace and beauty, as her husband was for his love of letters and distinguished nature. The marriage, which took place in June 1486, was an occasion of splendour and festivity, though the bride was to die in childbed before two years were over, and in less than ten years more Lorenzo Tornabuoni was arrested on a charge of conspiracy and executed.

In these frescoes Lorenzo is painted with the seven Liberal Arts, and his bride with Venus and the Graces. These compositions stand somewhat apart among the surviving works of Botticelli. Much damaged as they are, they are among his finest creations.

Had we all the lost paintings of the master restored to us, we could surround his major works with many a piece of exquisite decoration, filled with his inventive fancy, which he and his pupils were called upon to provide for the sumptuous furniture of Florentine houses; panels to adorn bed, wardrobe or coffer; banners, devices, and tapestries.

Among such are the four panels with small figures, illustrating the story of Nastagio degli Onesti in Boccaccio's Decameron, the same story which Watts made the subject of his huge early wall-painting now in the Tate Gallery. These four panels, once all in the Leyland collection in London, are now dispersed, three being now in France, and the fourth in America. The coats of arms which occur in two of the panels show that these panels were painted to commemorate the marriage of one of the Pucci with a lady of the Bini family. According to Mr. Horne, the marriage is that which took place in 1483 between Giannozzo Pucci and Lucrezia Bini; and he points out that the fourth panel, representing the marriage-feast of the

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Nastagio of the novel, pictures for us in all essentials—as a contemporary description testifies—the manner in which the wedding festivities of a great Florentine house of the day were celebrated.

Though invented by the master, these compositions were carried out by his assistants, as was the case with many works sent out by Botticelli at this busy period of his career, even sometimes when the commission was an important one.

An altarpiece, for instance, which illustrates this co-operation of master and pupils is the Annunciation now in the Uffizi. Mr. Horne's researches have established the date, 1489-90, at which this altarpiece was painted for the chapel of the Cestello at Florence; but the picture itself was removed in the eighteenth century and was lost sight of till 1872, when it was discovered and brought to the Uffizi, where it still retains its original frame. Impressed with the peculiar character of Botticelli's conceptions, this picture disappoints by its comparatively tame execution and lifeless colouring; the fire and glow of the master's genius appear as through an obscuring veil or glass. Documents record that it was commissioned from Botticelli and accepted as his work, yet obviously it was carried out by pupils.

The workshop of one who was now the painter most in demand of all the Florentines of the day was kept busy indeed with commissions, both secular and ecclesiastical. The great number of school-pieces, penetrated to a more or less degree with Botticelli's peculiar spirit and imitative of his mannerisms of design, testify to the influence of his workshop and the activity of his pupils. How far, in particular cases, he himself collaborated; whether he took part in the actual painting, or supplied the cartoon for others to work from, or merely provided a sketch; is a question not always easy to determine. But where the master's own hand has executed as well as designed, the result is usually recognizable enough.

Among the capital works of this ripe period of Botticelli's genius, the years between the return from Rome and the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent in 1492, are some religious paintings

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which have not yet been mentioned; works which complement the beautiful inventions in the way of Pagan myth or allegorical composition, like the 'Mars and Venus' and the 'Birth of Venus' or the frescoes of the Villa Lemmi.

The 'Madonna of the Pomegranate,' the Uffizi's rival tondo to the 'Magnificat,' is the prototype of those many school Madonnas with wistful, pensive faces which more than the productions of the master's own hand have created the popular conception of his art. But here it is the master himself who, with all that undercurrent of pathos and sentiment, shows a masculine power of delineation and an intensity of expression quite beyond his followers' reach, and has grouped the angels round the Virgin and Child with extraordinary simplicity in mastery of the circular composition.

Later than this, and near the end of the period, is the Coronation of the Virgin now in the Florence Academy, painted between 1488 and 1490 for the church of San Marco. This great altarpiece seems in part to have been executed by assistants, though the predella pictures are entirely by the master's hand. When we remember that about this very time Leonardo was painting his Madonna among the Rocks in Milan, we realize how little Botticelli had been influenced by the new manner of unifying a composition by expressive light and shade, and mastery of atmospheric effect, the new manner which was so soon to triumph in the hands of the younger generation of artists. Indeed, Botticelli here seems wilfully to be more archaic than was his wont. Yet with all the hampering circumstance of set subject and traditional representation he has achieved in the dance of floating angels in the upper part of the picture, an invention which for sheer felicity and loveliness is unsurpassed of its kind in the religious painting of Europe, even by himself. The little predella paintings which formed part of the altarpiece also show his genius at their finest.

Mr. Horne assigns to a date a little later than this Coronation of the Virgin, the small picture of the Last Communion of St. Jerome, until recently in the Farinola collection in Florence. Of

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Medici before his absolution could be given. He was to have a firm faith in God's mercy. Lorenzo had it. He was to cause his ill-gotten wealth to be restored to those from whom it was taken. This was harder; yet Lorenzo painfully submitted. Last, he must restore liberty to Florence. It was too much. Lorenzo turned his back on his confessor as he lay in his bed; and Savonarola left him unabsolved. Whether true or not to fact, the story is true to character.

Lorenzo's successor was his son Piero, young, handsome, a great tennis-player, a fine horseman, headstrong in his pleasures, arrogant and heedless in his manners, nothing of a statesman, neglectful of indispensable affairs. His weak and violent nature could foresee nothing clearly, nor grapple firmly with the crisis when it came. He made enemies, and was never forgiven. And as his vices and incompetence declared themselves increasingly, the power of Savonarola grew apace. He became the voice of Florence, the conscience of Italy, defying the Pope himself.

The death of Lorenzo the Magnificent was a disaster to the artists of Florence. To him Botticelli had owed a number of important commissions, both public and private, such as the painting of the Pazzi conspirators and the decorations of the Spedaletto at Volterra. Henceforth he received no great commissions from the State.

The younger Lorenzo, the son of Pierfrancesco de' Medici, for whom he had painted the Primavera and the Birth of Venus, was still his patron; but the troubles and dissensions of the next few years made difficult times alike for patron and painter.

It was for this Lorenzo that Botticelli made the great series of drawings in illustration of Dante, which must rank with his principal works and in which perhaps more than in any other he liberates and communicates to us the inner spirit of his genius. How long these drawings occupied the artist, we do not know. But Vasari's account of the immense time he 'wasted' over the study of Dante, and the intimate knowledge and comprehension of

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the poet which he shows in his work, point to Botticelli's having been possessed by Dante, in whose poetry he found something intensely congenial to his nature, for a period of years. The engravings which he designed for Landino's edition of 1481 shows indeed that he had long been a student of the poet and had conceived the idea of illustrating the whole Divine Comedy. That project was interrupted and broken off at the time of his journey to Rome by important works in painting. And now, probably not long after the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, he took up the scheme again, and this time on a much larger and more elaborate scale.

But this series, too, was destined not to be completed. The cause of its interruption and abandonment is conjectured by Mr. Horne, with great probability, to have been the breaking off of friendly relations with the younger Lorenzo de' Medici. But to explain the events which led up to this we must turn again to the history of Florence and her troubles.

By 1494 Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco was already at odds with his cousin Piero. Lorenzo and his brother Giovanni were jealous of the elder branch of the Medici family and schemed for power. Piero was equally jealous of them. In April of this year the two brothers were arrested and imprisoned, first in the Bargello, then each in his own villa. In the autumn they escaped and joined the King of France, near Milan. For Italy was invaded. The prophecy of Savonarola in a sermon in the Duomo which by its perfervid passion and intensity had made the hair of Pico della Mirandola stand on end as he listened, had come true.

The splendour of Italian civilization, the riches, the arts, the learning of Italy were now the wonder and envy of Europe. To the nations of Northern Europe, half barbarous in comparison, Italy seemed a glorious spoil. And in this year chance offered a fair opportunity for the spoiler. In January Ferdinand, King of Naples, died. Charles VIII. of France seized the occasion of his death to assert his claim to the Kingdom of Naples, as heir of René of Anjou.

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The Duke of Milan, to serve his own ends, allied himself with the French king; whereupon Piero de' Medici abandoned the friendship with France, which his father had constantly fostered in the commercial interests of Florence, and took sides with Naples. The Pope, at first on the other side, had been bought over by Naples for a good round sum. Charles then banished the Florentine merchants from his dominions.

It was of intriguing with the French king in opposition to Piero that Lorenzo and Giovanni were accused in April 1494. They certainly joined him in the autumn. And the people of Florence were on their side, and favourably disposed to Charles VIII., whom Savonarola proclaimed as 'the new Cyrus,' the instrument of Heaven, come to scourge Italy for her good. The French with their disciplined army advanced into Tuscany. The king might have arrived as a friend; he might have been crushed or beaten back as an enemy before arriving in Florence, for his own incompetence placed him in a dangerous situation. But Piero de' Medici succeeded at once in irritating him and, by disgraceful cessions, in enraging the Florentines. He went out to meet Charles, returned to Florence, and the next day was ignominiously driven out. It was then that Lorenzo and Giovanni and other exiles returned, the frescoes both of Castagno and of Botticelli representing the Albizzi and the Pazzi conspirators were effaced.

Through this year of apprehensions and commotions Botticelli lived his life in turbulent Florence; his brain filled with the visions of Dante, while with his eyes he saw the French with their regiments of Swiss and outlandish Scots invade the city, chalking the houses where they were to quarter themselves; the entry of the king over the Ponte Vecchio, and after a few weeks, his departure for Naples. A master of vacillation, faithless as much from want of brains and want of purpose as from want of honesty, Charles soon wore out the patience of the Florentines, while his courtiers looted the palace in which they were entertained as guests. Savonarola alone could control and direct the monarch's watery will; he awed him by force

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of nature, while the friar's conviction of the king's divine mission flattered his vanity; and it was Savonarola who, when Florence could endure the French no longer, commanded Charles to go.

From now till his death in 1498 Savonarola dominates the history of Florence. From Vasari's pages we should gather that Botticelli was one of the friar's devoted adherents; but it seems certain that it was not till after his execution that the painter openly became one of his followers. At the time of the French invasion and afterwards, he was busy with the Dante drawings made for Lorenzo de' Pierfrancesco, who was also giving commissions to other artists, among them the young Michelangelo. There is still preserved a letter, translated in full by Mr. Horne, from Michelangelo in Rome to Lorenzo in Florence. And this letter, that it might not be intercepted by Lorenzo's enemies, was addressed not to the Medici, but to 'Sandro di Botticello'; obviously showing that at this time, July 1496, Botticelli was in the intimate confidence of his patron.

But Lorenzo and his brother were already on the opposite side to Savonarola. In the true tradition of their family they were scheming, under the guise of simple citizens and extravagant espousers of the people's cause, to steal into supreme power and once again to master the republic. Savonarola, the assertor of liberty and hater of despotism, suspected and denounced them; he seems to have thought that Lorenzo was plotting to become tyrant of Florence with the help of Lodovico, Duke of Milan. In 1497, perhaps to escape the consequence of the accusations brought against him by the friar and his followers, Lorenzo retired from Italy. When he returned in 1498, Savonarola had been executed and Botticelli was an avowed companion and adherent of his followers. After this the painter worked no more for his patron; and to the inevitable estrangement between them is due, as Mr. Horne conjectures, the uncompleted state of the series of drawings for Dante.

May it not be that the very study of Dante's great poem, already beginning to be out of touch with the taste of the day—did not

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Pico della Mirandola declare it to be inferior to the poems of Lorenzo the Magnificent—disposed the mind of Botticelli to be more directly susceptible to the teachings of the friar of San Marco?

But there was also another influence in Sandro's own home, which brought him into direct and constant association with the Piagnoni, as Savonarola's followers were called by their enemies.

About the beginning of 1494 his brother Simone, who had gone to Naples as a boy in 1457 and had lived in that city ever since, returned to Florence and took up his abode with Sandro. Simone was an open and ardent adherent of the friar; and the painter's workshop became a meeting-place of his brother's friends and associates. Yet, as we have seen, Sandro, though, like Michelangelo, he greatly admired the force and sincerity of Savonarola's character and was deeply impressed by his sermons, remained in a political sense detached and not of the party till after the friar's death. He did not even, like his brother, sign the petition sent by a number of Florentines to the Pope on the occasion of Savonarola's excommunication.

During these years preceding Savonarola's death, Botticelli was occupied with various works in painting, both sacred and profane in subject, as well as with the Dante drawings. But he was no longer full of commissions, as formerly; partly because these were not so frequent after Lorenzo de' Medici's death, partly because of the endless discussions about the friar and the politics of Florence going on in his workshop, and his own preoccupation with the complexities of the great poem which he was illustrating.

The most notable work in painting of this time is the small panel of the Calumny of Apelles in the Uffizi. For radiance of lucent colour this is unsurpassed among the master's pictures. The pure spaces of shining sky and sea seen beyond the arches of the background relieve the agitation of the vehement figures, which begin to have that character of movement in excess which marks all Botticelli's latest works.

### MADONNA AND ANGELS

*Ambrosiana, Milan*



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The same contrast of agitation and peace appears in the figures and landscape of the small tondo of the Madonna and Child under a canopy, the curtains of which are pulled aside by angels, now in the Ambrosiana at Milan.

Other works of these years are lost ; among them a fresco of St. Francis and some decorative paintings, of unknown character, made for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici at his villa of Castello, the last commission of this old patron.

Among lost works may have been some of the paintings of nude figures, of which Botticelli is said to have painted many for Florentine houses, burnt at the instigation of Savonarola in the Piazza of the Signoria.

The famous ' Burning of the Vanities ' took place on Shrove Tuesday of 1497, and was repeated on the Shrove Tuesday of the following year. Many works of art were burnt on these occasions, but whether anything of Botticelli's was so destroyed is uncertain.

With Lent of 1496 the struggle between Savonarola and the Pope became open and acute. Veiled threats, insidious stratagems, and cajoleries, had been tried in vain ; the sudden offer of a cardinal's hat had only moved the friar to profound indignation ; he became bolder in his denunciations, more fervid in his prophecies. It was now that he enrolled and banded together the children of Florence in the cause of religion ; it was now that he proclaimed Christ King of Florence.

The exaltation in which the followers of Savonarola lived seems to be reflected, or rather communicated, in Botticelli's latest work ; he alone of the painters expressed directly through his art the fervour and agitation of this intense and perilous time. For the friar's two last years were full of political excitement and trouble for Florence. His enemies in the city were continually conspiring against him ; war, famine, and plague brought disaster and almost despair. In May of 1497 Savonarola was excommunicated ; and in the next year after the abortive ' ordeal by fire,' he was arrested, tortured, and put to death.

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It may be that Botticelli's long and familiar connection with the house of the Medici had prevented or delayed his throwing in his lot with the uncompromising denouncer of their attempts to stifle the liberty of Florence : Botticelli, moreover, was an artist before all things, little inclined doubtless to take sides with factions. But whatever disagreement he may possibly have felt with Savonarola's political acts or utterances, he could not but admire the splendid courage of the friar and the force of his transparent sincerity ; he believed in his inspiration. And when the tragedy was completed, he was of those who felt that this was a just man martyred. Amid the tribulations of Italy, her unparalleled corruptions and dissensions, the sermons and writings of Savonarola seemed to inspire the one clue and hope of her redemption ; and Botticelli pondered these, and designed at least one print, though that is now lost, in illustration of the friar's 'Triumph of the Cross.'

Of paintings executed by Botticelli after the death of Savonarola not all are occupied with religious themes. Two are panels from Roman history, the story of Virginia in the Morelli collection at Bergamo, the story of Lucretia in the collection of Mrs. Gardner at Boston. Both are remarkable for their dramatic conception and passionate movement.

But the mood which possessed the master in his latest phase finds more congenial outlet in the little painting of the Nativity, now in the National Gallery. This, as Mr. Horne notes, was the first of Botticelli's works to come to England, having been bought by W. Y. Ottley in Rome at the end of the eighteenth century. On this picture Botticelli wrote an inscription in Greek, difficult to decipher and difficult to elucidate, saying that he painted it at the end of the year 1500 (*i.e.* March 1501, according to the Roman Calendar) 'during the troubles of Italy,' and there follows an application of prophecies in the Apocalypse to the events then occurring or destined to come to pass, probably based on interpretations set forth by Savonarola in his sermons on the Apocalypse, now lost, and especially on his prediction of a renewal of the Church.

## Botticelli's Life

This painting represents the climax of Botticelli's career as a religious painter. It embodies an ecstasy of spiritual emotion, more intense and freer from extraneous elements than any of his earlier works.

That ecstasy is seen as in a kind of prostration and excess of abandonment in the strange, vehement Pietà of which two versions exist, one at Munich, the other in the Poldi-Pezzoli Gallery at Milan. Neither of these has the quality of workmanship which we associate with the master's own hand. Mr. Horne supposes both to be copies from a lost original.

A little later, in all probability, come the three oblong panels of the story of San Zenobio, two of which are in the Mond collection in London, and the third in the Dresden Gallery. In these the mannerisms of the painter's last years are everywhere apparent, and the concentrated effort after vehemently dramatic expression is carried to extreme.

In 1504 Botticelli was appointed with other artists to choose a site for Michelangelo's statue of David, which had just been completed. Many opinions were expressed, most being in favour of a site within the Loggia dei Lanzi. Botticelli seconded the proposal of Cosimo Rosselli that the statue should be placed at the corner of the steps of the Duomo. But after much discussion the question was referred, at the suggestion of Piero di Cosimo, to the sculptor himself, who chose the place by the entrance of the Palazzo Vecchio, where it stood so long.

In his last years Botticelli seems to have become crippled by age and infirmity. We read of him going about the streets of Florence leaning upon two crutches. But let us rather take farewell of him in that council of his peers and associates and disciples, himself the last representative of the old school of painting which still retained its links of affinity with the tradition of Giotto, debating how best his city of Florence should find a setting for the first great masterpiece of her greatest sculptor, the Florentine whose genius was to overshadow the world.

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In May 1510 Sandro Botticelli died, and on the 17th day of that month was buried in the church of Ognisanti.

Of Botticelli's personality we know almost nothing beyond what his work tells us. On the surface, as he appeared to his contemporaries, he was a man noted for quick retort in speech, and fond of practical jesting. He is said to have had devoted friendships; but he was never married, and the love of no woman has been connected with his life. His patron, Soderini, once pressed him to take a wife; whereupon Sandro replied by telling him of a dream. 'I dreamed that I had taken a wife, and the thought of it troubled me so greatly that I awoke; and to avoid falling asleep and dreaming that dream again, I got up and wandered about Florence all night like one mad.' From such anecdotes, and from that well-known paradox about landscape-painting which Leonardo quotes, we get a glimpse of Botticelli's wilful and impetuous manner of speech. But his was a complex nature, with the deepest of it hidden and only finding outlet in his art. The complexity and contradictions of his character may be divined, perhaps, from the portrait of himself which he has introduced into the Adoration of the Magi in the Uffizi. Something of sensuous heaviness seems there at variance with the expression of alert, fastidious intellect.

## THE WORK OF THE MASTER

## The Work of the Master

### I

**B**OTTICELLI was the pupil of Filippo Lippi. In the art of Fra Filippo we still feel something of the atmosphere of the great traditions of religious painting which moulded his youthful aims. Deeply as he felt the spell of Fra Angelico, there is also present in his art a strain that derives from the inspiration of the Sienese masters, with their wonderful gift for translating religious emotion into pictorial expression by means of fluid, fervent line.

But Filippo Lippi was a Florentine and the contemporary of Masaccio. And the main stream of Florentine art was already moving with triumphant force in a very different direction from that of Siena. Giotto with incomparable power had once for all defined its goal. It was to take the material world for its province, not for the sake of reproducing its appearances, but as an instrument for the expression of a great ideal of life and thoughts of life's significance. Common things were to be frankly accepted as part of the complete whole, to which they had their necessary relation. And in this view of art the most expressive instrument and symbol was the human form.

Masaccio came to reinspire with energy and vigour the tamed and exhausted followers of Giotto. The whole temper of the young Renaissance, as it was felt in Florence, conspired towards the view of art as a sort of voyage or adventure of conquest over the material.

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To master the science of art, to explore the structure of things and of the human body, was the overpowering preoccupation.

Fra Filippo, working in this highly stimulated atmosphere, could not help being infected by it. Yet it never wholly possessed him. Scientific ardour, the passion to know, was not his. The naturalism of Florence is seen rather in his acceptance of the frankly human element in his religious paintings, his joy in life as it is. He charms us by the very human touch in his way of expressing what he feels, by something childlike, the spirit of a real child, capable by its great impressionableness of feeling vividly the influence of high emotion, of devotional rapture, and of communicating to others far more than it consciously feels itself; just as the clear sweet voice of a boy bearing aloft into the dimness of a cathedral choir words of exalted meaning, charged with the experience of sad and aspiring humanity, etherealizes all that emotion to the ear, though in almost the same moment the boy himself will be very much on earth, and his thoughts far away or filled with boyish mischief.

The mischievous, captivating naturalness of the children that peep out at us here and there from Fra Filippo's pictures, at the elbow of a sweet Madonna, seem part of his own buoyant, erring, gay, forgivable nature. And, as art, he finds expression for that nature in the choice of forms and faces which, if they have not the grandeur and simplicity of impressive and powerful personalities, if they are not embodiments of any intense and ardent mood, are far away from grossness and equally removed from rhetorical posing. An extraordinary sensitiveness keeps Lippi's art from insincerity, even though he be not profoundly moved himself nor capable of moving us profoundly. With senses tinglingly alive to beauty, he brings to our senses his own ever-fresh delight in the graciousness of human behaviour, as it is shown in the attitudes and movements of the body, the pliancy and softness of youthful forms, the liveliness of the blood in the clear complexion of a cheek, the wave of life in the hair of children, the exquisite lines of a girl's throat and bosom. And these fair creatures of his are set in a world

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equally choice, where we feel the freshness of green leaves and the inviting depth of leafy shadows, the slimness of flower-stalks with the poised flowers upon them drinking light, set off against cool surfaces of rock; paved courts and seats of softly coloured marble seem proper for such gracious presences, whose spotless raiment is powdered with gold.

The general temper of Fra Filippo's art is by nature akin to that of Venice, having so little in it of the intellectual severity and strength that belong to the Florentine mind. Yet by comparison the Venetian temper is more earthly and voluptuous, choosing fuller and more rounded forms, less delicate of feature, and suffused with warmer light. The sensuousness of his art is spiritualized by something partly perhaps his own, partly also due to the working on it of other influences like the radiant example of Fra Angelico. We feel this in his painting through his love of clear and sinuous line, and through his colour. The greys and silvers which foil and enhance his tones of rose and crimson and tender purple gave an ethereal quality to his colour which the Venetians lack.

Browning has put into Lippi's mouth a theory of art and its aim.

You've seen the world—

The beauty and the wonder and the power,  
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
Changes, surprises—and God made it all!  
For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,  
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,  
The mountain round it and the sky above,  
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,  
These are the frame to? What's it all about?  
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,  
Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.  
But why not do as well as say—paint these  
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?  
God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime  
To let a truth slip. Don't object, 'His works  
Are here already; nature is complete;  
Suppose you reproduce her (which you can't)

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There's no advantage ! you must beat her then.'  
For, don't you mark ? we're made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;  
And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that.

This apology for naturalism is not, I think, entirely true to Lippi's spirit, which certainly expresses an ingenuous delight in the beauty of visible things, but also chooses fastidiously among these. The English Pre-Raphaelites, whose creed is more or less aptly expressed in Browning's lines, may well have counted it a crime to 'let a truth slip' ; they were intent on putting in everything they saw ; but such a view would never have occurred to a Florentine of the fifteenth century, even to those 'realists' who were leaving so great a mark on the painting of Florence, and in whose tendencies Fra Filippo himself had little share.

Of this Florentine 'realism' or 'naturalism,' Antonio Pollaiuolo, the other dominant influence on Botticelli's youth, may stand as exemplar. But I suspect these words that end in 'ism.' It is an ending apt to shut down thought and leave our minds in a cage. We talk of the realism of Dante and the realism of Zola ; of the naturalism of Van Eyck and the naturalism of Courbet. What do we mean when we apply such a term to the aim or tendency dominant among the painters of Florence of Botticelli's generation ?

Certainly we do not mean a disinterested acceptance of all the facts of life and an effort to reproduce these, just as they are. Nor do we mean a passive acceptance in the painter of the eye's impressions, and an effort to reproduce these.

It is true that in Ghirlandaio we find symptoms of the tendency which in our own day has led some painters to seek a rivalry with the photograph, rearranging the visual scene a little in the interests of design. But even in Ghirlandaio the Florentine temper and training are strong. With all his matter-of-fact vision of things, he is deeply interested in construction and in ornament. The architect

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and the goldsmith are never wholly lost in the painter. There are occasions, too, when he rises to noble design and attains unaffected pathos.

Ghirlandaio, however, is not at all so typical of the Florentine genius as is Pollaiuolo. In this powerful, limited artist we see the spirit of Florence working towards a further stage in that destined course which began with Giotto. Robust, inquiring, intellectual, that spirit sought an ideal, but it was through the mastery of the material world that this ideal was to be expressed.

Not appearances merely, but the secrets that underlie appearances, the laws that govern them, attracted their curiosity and absorbed their effort. We mark the advance of this intellectual passion during the Quattrocento in passing from the pages of Cennino Cennini to the treatises on painting by Leon Battista Alberti and by Leonardo. Cennini treats of painting as a craft, of the methods and processes of which, as handed down through Giotto and the Gaddi from the Greeks, he is thoroughly master. But how much he takes for granted ! Whereas Alberti and Leonardo inquire into the causes of things, and apply to the practice of art a knowledge learnt from science. Yet even Cennini, at the beginning of the century, betrays the Florentine bent of mind in laying stress on the representation of relief through light and shade, and with Alberti the emphasis on this is still greater ; the painter who expresses his ideas through line is condemned outright.

Now since the painting of figures in action offered the greatest problems to this penetrating curiosity, the interest of Florentine sculptors and painters was inevitably beginning to concentrate on the study of the nude human body. And the first to throw his whole spirit into that study was Antonio Pollaiuolo, who was to become in this sense the master of Signorelli and of Michelangelo.

A restless ambition to master the anatomy of the body and its muscular functions pervades Pollaiuolo's works. And to this cause we must put down his preoccupation with violent scenes and savage

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actions rather than to any theory about life, such as may provoke a modern novelist, in recoil from polite reticences and agreeable evasions, to insist on the ugly and brutal side of humanity. Doubtless Pollaiuolo had the temper of what we call a realist, in that he took actual life as he found it for his province, the real passions and actions of a singularly passionate and active time and race. But what possessed him as an artist was an intense intellectual curiosity, a determination to know and portray the movements of the passionate human body. And how the intensity of his preoccupations limits his art! In his absorbed endeavour to achieve the most vivid possible expression of vehement effort and fierce purpose he seems at times almost blind to everything else in nature. Themes like the labours of Hercules fascinate him; Hercules rushing on the Hydra with his lifted club, or raising Antaeus from the earth to crush the breath out of his body with knotted arms, or shooting his arrows across the torrent at the Centaur Nessus—with what gusto and energy does he attack these themes! Often indeed his effort becomes a kind of desperation and almost defeats its aim; his rushing figures are toppling over in the eagerness of their rage.

Such was the master, eminent, be it remembered, as a sculptor perhaps even more than as painter, competent and able in every branch of design, who left ineffaceable traces on Botticelli's art and deeply impressed his most susceptible years.

Had Botticelli been born in Siena and trained among the Sienese masters, he might have become the greatest of that school, carrying its instinct for beauty of sinuous line to heights of rhythmic invention, inspired by the fervour of ecstasy, not yet known in the art of Europe. But he had the Florentine force and hold on reality as well as the Florentine capacity for ecstatic passion (both are signally seen in Dante), and with all his lyrical impetuosity there was in him a strong dramatic sense. His own aim in art was far different from Pollaiuolo's. He did not, like Pollaiuolo, choose motives of fierce action, and passionate struggle in order to win mastery of the drawing of the nude form, and increase his knowledge of its powers of effort

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and resistance. His aim was to win mastery of expressive drawing of the emotions animating men; to this end he took over all of the science of Pollaiuolo that he could use for his purpose.

Just as Blake in England took over just as much knowledge of the nude form, from Marcantonio's prints or other sources accessible to him, as could give him an instrument for his own ends, having himself no patience for searching first-hand study of the human figure, so Botticelli used the instrument put in his hand by Pollaiuolo. He availed himself of the anatomical studies of the elder master, but made no such studies on his own account.

The difference of aim and temper is very perceptible even in a picture which Botticelli seems to have founded on a picture of the same subject by Antonio. The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian by Pollaiuolo, now in the National Gallery, is famous and familiar. The arrangement, an admired example of pyramidal composition, is such that the saint is raised up, on the tree to which he is bound, almost out of the picture, and our attention is concentrated on the ring of archers shooting or bending down to their bows and exhibiting the muscular movements of the body in a variety of energetic attitudes.

Botticelli in his picture at Berlin represents the martyr in the same attitude, with his hands bound behind him, against a truncated tree. Each painting has a landscape background of vale and stream. But whereas Pollaiuolo carries this background of earth to near the top of the design, in Botticelli's panel it spreads below with a great height of serene sky above. Calm as the sky itself is the figure of the saint, and his face, unmarred by fierce anguish as Pollaiuolo paints it, looks out into distance with eyes that dream. The executioners whom Pollaiuolo makes so busy and prominent are become distant little figures, merged in the fair, calm landscape; they and their power, and the power of death, are past, and we are left in contemplation of the beautiful body, unmarred by the arrows that transfix it, an image of the victory of the soul.

The way in which the elements of the picture—figure, landscape

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and sky, and the relation of these to each other—are made, spontaneously and by no rigid symbolism, to be expressive of its inner, spiritual significance, shows the depth of Botticelli's art even in a design which allowed him little scope for his peculiar gifts. Pollaiuolo's force is spent on external things; and behind all its power and accomplishment his picture is empty.

PLATE XII

### *THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI*

*National Gallery*



## II

**D**IFFICULTIES spur the artist. A sense of resistance in his material, a problem set by conditions of space, an imposed subject ; definite limitations such as these concentrate his powers ; they deepen the channel in which the stream of his energy must run. With all his pride and aversion from concessions, the nature of the artist is essentially accommodating to conditions ; he is a born harmonizer of means to ends. In modern times the artist pays heavily for his unchartered freedom. The lack of real relation between artist and public tends to dissipate his force. Even the imposition of a theme which is not naturally congenial, when faced and worked at, will discover in him the range of his own gift, and by exercise of that gift give him vantage ground for surer effort.

In fifteenth-century Florence no work of art, I imagine, was ever undertaken but as a commission. But these commissions were no private whims of patronage. Church and State alike demanded the treatment of subjects having universal or at least wide appeal, themes near to the heart of human kind. And even private patrons in an age at once of feverish culture and superb emulation chose subjects of a central tenour, rich in possibilities, not starved by pettiness of interest or a provincial mind.

Among artists, too, the spur of emulation was potent ; emulation not only with contemporaries but with their great forerunners. For the great themes of Christian art were to be painted again and again, and the test of the painter's originality was his capacity to come fresh to the theme, to prove what it meant to him, what it could bring out of his nature, what new riches he could evoke from it.

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What more stimulating subject for the painter's art than that which so often was to engage the gift of Botticelli, the Adoration of the Magi? Romance enhancing reality, reality enhancing romance; the homely shed and manger, the ox and ass, the new-born Babe, the lanterns in the winter night, and then the strange incursion of the three mysterious kings from the East with their rich retinue and foreign splendour; stillness and peace in the centre of the curbed, trampling horses and thronging men; even in the externals of the story, what a mine of beauty! And in the spiritual significance of it what profounder call to the artist's powers, if the setting of the story is to become the home of its meaning.

In 1423 Gentile da Fabriano completed the famous, ornate altarpiece of this subject which now hangs in the Florentine Academy. The picture set a tradition of pageant-like treatment which was long followed. In the foreground, on one side, is the stall with the Holy Family; the three kings, in gorgeous attire, are in the centre approaching to adore the Child; and on the other side are retainers with their horses. The background gives glimpses of the long cavalcade, at three moments of its journey, winding over the distant hills.

The earliest of Botticelli's paintings of this subject, perhaps the earliest of all his surviving works, is, as we have seen, the small oblong panel in the National Gallery. The brown varnish which overlies its surface gives an alien hot mellowness to the tone of it which obscures its original bright freshness of colour. Made, no doubt, to decorate a chest or other piece of furniture, the shape of it determined of necessity the painter's design to a large extent.

Following tradition, Botticelli makes of the picture a procession coming from the left and arrested at the right of the composition before the stall where sits the Mother with the Child upon her lap, to whom the three kings do homage as they arrive.

The scene is an upland at the base of mountain cliffs, and fragments of shattered architecture mingle with the rocks. The pillared remains of some portico support the wooden roof of the

## The Work of the Master

stall, and leaning against one of these pillars against the empty gloom of the interior stands Joseph, wrapt in thought. Contrasted with this impression of thought and solitude, at the other side of the composition is the tumultuous richly-attired retinue of the Magi streaming through a narrow gorge of the hills and still pressing on behind, farther than the eye sees; they throng, jostle, urge or check their horses, even striking at one another in their eagerness and excitement; and the more to heighten the sense of multitude and pressure the painter has constricted all these many moving figures within the sheer stony walls of the gorge. Between these admirably contrasted glimpses of the world's irruption with its infinite movement, passion and splendour, and, opposite to it, the infinite recesses and solitudes of the spirit, should be the wonder of the meeting. But great as is the skill with which Botticelli has filled his panel and connected his groups of many figures, this central part shows a certain faltering and lack of grasp in the conception. These standing forms in ample robes are too detached and philosophic; or if meant to be so, from dramatic motive, their character is not enough emphasized. We feel that the space has been filled with figures, too much for the sake of filling it. I could wish for more empty space about the adoring kings. We have to look closely at the picture before we catch the main clue to its complexities. But when we do look closer and take in its intimate beauties, we feel so sharply and keenly the delicacy and truth of the emotion portrayed in certain of these figures, especially that of the youthful Magi doffing his jewelled cap as he kneels, that we forget all faults.

A few years afterwards Botticelli paints the same subject, this time in a 'tondo'; and as this picture also is in the National Gallery we can readily compare them.

Here, all is changed. Instead of the old processional arrangement necessitating a discursive, quasi-narrative composition, all is focussed on the centre where the Madonna sits, and on her lap the Child receives the homage of the Magi.

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The circular form presents uncommon difficulties to the painter, yet by its very difficulties attracts. In a picture of the Adoration, now at Richmond in the collection of Sir Frederick Cook, a picture which doubtless Botticelli had in his mind, Fra Filippo Lippi had used the circular form, though he had preserved the traditional arrangement.

The scene is viewed as if from a height in the old manner of what might be called natural perspective, as opposed to the new scientific manner which has since prevailed in Europe. In the centre of the picture is the stall with gorgeous pea-fowl on its thatched roof, and before it sits the Virgin with the Child adored by the Magi, whose retinue comes thronging down under a ruined archway, while the awakened villagers come out to watch and wonder. This procession winds down from the left. Above the stall rises a rocky hill, and at the right, forming another curving line along the circular boundary of the picture, streams another procession over the upland, past a dark coppice and down the steep street below, where the inhabitants stand at their doors gazing up at the wondrous apparition of the Star. Nothing in the picture is so imaginatively invented as this endless troop of figures appearing out of the night, across the hills, with the strange illumination from heaven upon their faces.

This lively, peopled composition, rich in incident and fancy, has much of the charm and delightfulness of the Frate's art; and it is woven together with easy skill. But when we pass to Botticelli's tondo, we feel at once how far the pupil has here outstripped the master. And not only in the intensity of dramatic feeling whereby the painter identifies himself with the acts and emotions of the persons he portrays, but also in the architecture of the picture, in design. Nor are these separate excellences; the design itself is made expressive of the imaginative idea.

Botticelli, in discarding the traditional arrangement, has made all focus on the centre of the circular panel. But this device has obvious drawbacks. For in the first place an equal distribution of

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space offends by the suggestion of mechanical arrangement; and secondly, if our attention is wholly occupied by the centre of the circular form, we shall feel in imagination brought up and arrested, baulked of that sense of the infinite, of a flowing out as well as of a flowing in, which is part of the life-blood of a picture that has a spiritual theme. How does Botticelli meet the problem?

First, he divides the circle into two unequal parts, the greater part below being earth, the lesser part above being heaven. The lower part tells mainly dark, the upper part mainly light. The space and stillness of the upper part contrasts with the richly involved movement of the lower. Then, to connect and unite these two divisions of the panel, the painter has invented a ruined building, of which the pillars and round arches alone remain. The building towers up beyond the borders of the picture. The central part of it is seen in perspective from below, so that above the Mother and Child appear two round arches, the more distant one enclosing pure and empty sky. This repetition of diminished circles within the circular frame is of immense value in the design by boldly emphasizing its peculiar form, while it enhances the spiritual mood in which it is conceived by leading us up and on to an outlet on distance and infinity. At the same time the tall pillars with their severe lines correct what might be too relaxed in a system of arc and curve; the wooden pediment of the stall relieves with its straight lines the effect of the repeated round arches, yet heightens their value by contrast. The figure of a man, seen at full length, standing at the foot of one of the further pillars gives naturally and with wonderful effect a sense of height in the pillars and a sense of distance in the receding planes. Broken piers of masonry on either side interrupt the procession of figures streaming up from left and right, which else might show too like segments of the circle. On one of these piers a peacock with long flat tail enforces by its dark tone the silvery light horizon. Beyond is a watered valley with a little wood of dense trees and tall towers of a city of northern aspect, perhaps adopted, for its romance of foreign character, from some

Flemish picture. Pouring up the slope from either side come the numerous retinue of the Magi, with horses and blown trumpets: and the movement of these many forms is again interrupted and enhanced by two blocks of stone in the foreground, answering the square shapes of the architecture above and contrasting their straight edges with the curve of the round frame.

All this is invented with original felicity; and the art of it is characteristically Florentine, trusting to no inspiration from accidental appearances, but relying on pictorial structure responsive to the mind's thought.

Yet here again, as in the earlier Adoration, something is wanting to complete success. If we look at any single figure or group in the throng of the followers of the Magi, we are charmed; what a virile grace in the carriage of the heads, what glowing colour, what animated movement! But in the relation of these converging groups to the central group of the picture there is a felt hiatus; something breaks the continuity at once of mood and of design; figures detach themselves, unconcerned or self-absorbed, and we are distracted with them. Perhaps we should not feel this, if the method of painting had been different; I mean if the figures were not so individually detached in variegated colour against dark ground. Either the suppression of salient relief, with more emphasis on the arabesque of lines, or the bold use of light and shade as a means of connecting the masses, might have unified the composition of these figures. But Botticelli compromises, and a certain hardness and disconnectedness results.

When next the master attacks this subject, it is in the famous picture which contains the portraits of the Medici. If we regard this work simply as colour and design, we must count it as one of its author's finest works. The simplicity of the masses, the dignity, grace, and vigour of the heads and figures, the completeness of mastery shown in every detail, the animated repose, the beauty of the colouring, the quality of the handling, all evoke our delighted admiration. Botticelli never showed his consummate craftsmanship

## THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI: TONDO

*National Gallery*



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more nobly. Yet in interior beauty this work falls short of the tondo we have been describing. The introduction of the portraits of the Medici diverts the interest and brings the conception to a lower plane. For though their introduction is managed with singular tact and felicity, and with none of that air of worldly intrusion which strikes one at once in Ghirlandaio's frescoes, we seem rather to be assisting at some ecclesiastical rite, performed by princely participants, with a humility that has in it something also of condescension, than contemplating the mystery of a world-event. There is no compelling convergence toward the Child in the centre, but on either side are groups of figures erect and detached, emphasized by the uprights of the broken wall and the supporting posts of the shed behind them. The whole scene, moreover, is self-enclosed.

Far superior, as a conception of the subject, is the Adoration in the Hermitage Gallery.

Here is the same simplicity of disposition, a little too regular perhaps in its order and symmetry; here is the same reality of presentment, the same grace and dignity in the figures; but how infinite is the gain in the outlets on the world beyond and the serene spaces of sky. We are no longer straitly enclosed in the scene, but partake of a vision of the peopled earth, with this mystery for its centre.

In the midst of a plain is a ruined remnant of stately building, over which a wooden roof has been built as a shelter by the shepherds. The Mother and Child, with Joseph standing beside them, are set under this high roof; and the eye travels beyond them between the vista of square columns, to distances of a valley winding among hills and to the whiteness of clear sky. On either side, in the foreground, approach the retinue of the Magi, dropping on their knees in wondering adoration as they come in sight of the Child, before whom the three Magi are already bending low, the foremost of them about to kiss his foot. From either side too, beyond, come more of the princely retinue, riding or holding the horses from which the riders have dismounted, in the midst of the verdant

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landscape, diversified with tree and hill and pillars of shattered architecture. A single emotion seems to direct and absorb all these moving or kneeling figures.

Nevertheless here too is something missing. The tinge of severity in the design, the calm of the composition, the symmetry of its grouping, seem to betray the passing influence of art not naturally akin to Botticelli's spirit. The picture, we have seen, was probably painted at Rome. In breadth, simplicity and restraint, the painter has gained greatly on that earlier tondo of the National Gallery. But as a piece of original and glowing invention I find that work more really inspired by Botticelli's native genius, more intense and imaginative as a presentment of its theme.

Two other pictures of the Adoration of the Magi by the master are known to us, though one is only known by a poor copy or adaptation, and the other was not only left unfinished but has since been disfigured with over-painting by a weak and completely unsympathetic hand.

Mr. Horne has conjectured that the first of these was a fresco of the subject known to have been carried out but now lost. Since we can judge of the composition only from the later adaptation and from three fragments of a school-copy from the cartoon, now in private hands in England, I will not speak of it further than to refer the reader to Mr. Horne's book and to articles by him in the *Burlington Magazine*, where the adaptation and the fragments are illustrated.<sup>1</sup>

But the second unfinished picture, long hidden in the stores of the Uffizi and now exhibited in the gallery, demands more than a passing mention. For, unfinished and disfigured as it is, it reveals a conception and design which make it in some respects the most remarkable and impressive of Botticelli's repeated treatments of the Adoration.

The conception is different from any we have yet considered.

A desert plain, interrupted by three separate masses of abrupt

<sup>1</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. I. p. 63.

## The Work of the Master

and overhanging rock, confronts us. Were there no human figures in the picture, we should be arrested and moved by the strangeness and remoteness of this solitary landscape. There is no trace of human building, save the small penthouse set up against one of the rock-masses, under which the Holy Family are sheltered. But agitated and tumultuous, pouring in through the breaks in the towering rock, come the three Magi and their followers, an endless throng in three separate streams that hasten out of the distances of the plain, along far river sides, to converge by the guidance of the miraculous star where the new-born Child awaits them.

The interest of this picture is heightened by its obvious relationship to the Adoration of the Magi by Leonardo, also in the Uffizi and also left unfinished.

What is this relationship?

Writers who busy themselves with the history of art are never so happy as in detecting an influence of one master upon another. Absurd importance is given to some petty borrowing of a great man from a lesser. It is indeed of very real interest to note the impressibility and docility of genius, and to see from what unexpected sources it derives nourishment for itself. But the common error is to represent this give-and-take in terms of definite, calculable quantity, an affair of plain addition and subtraction; whereas the truth lies far beyond such crude analysis.

In this case it is a question of two men of genius. Botticelli and Leonardo were known to each other. They may have talked together about their pictures: who knows what thoughts passed between them? In a creative mind, especially when glowing with creative effort, an imponderable hint, the shadow of a momentary suggestion, can act with a power incredible to unimaginative natures.

Some critics have assumed that Botticelli has here taken the conception of his picture from the younger and greater master. There is no abstract reason why he might not have done so, nor would it in the least detract from his originality. The contrary, however, is far likelier. Leonardo certainly on his part had no

## The Art of Botticelli

need to borrow from anyone, though the most original minds commonly borrow the most, since they know what to do with their borrowings. But having to paint an Adoration of the Magi, it would be strange if he did not consider the various pictures of the subject painted by the most imaginative inventor among his older contemporaries, and seek a means to surpass them. Moreover, as Mr. Horne has shown, Leonardo probably began his picture in 1482, after Botticelli had gone to Rome leaving this particular Adoration unfinished.

And, in fact, while both of these paintings betray the same fundamental conception, Leonardo's carries out that conception with much surer completeness of significant effect. In its elements Botticelli's picture, with its astonishing landscape, is possibly more wonderful. But though his multitude of figures is introduced with great mastery, we remain too much with the sense of mere multitude: the chief actors are almost lost in the throng of their followers. Leonardo on the contrary, while impressing our imagination with the sense of vast distance and of men and horses thronging out of the distance, concentrates in his foreground on the leaders of those moving retinues. The Wise Men of the East, no mild grey-beards or pensive scholars, but men of dominating presence filled in every fibre with such a fire of intellectual vitality and the will to know, which possessed Leonardo himself, bend gazing with a kind of passion in their scrutiny on the wonder of the Child for whom the world has waited. All the energy and experience of the world, its resolve to endure, its disillusionment and its undying hope, its pride of intellect and its disbelief in intellect, are inscribed on these strong-featured kings of men with their eagerly thrust-forward faces, as they cast all their experience and their wisdom at the feet of this naked, helpless baby.

In a sense we may say that it is Leonardo who has painted Sandro's masterpiece for him. We have seen Botticelli with his characteristic restlessness, attacking this subject now in one way, now in another, and each time showing a signal originality of

## The Work of the Master

invention and numberless felicities of execution. But he never seems quite to reap the full fruition of his efforts; and Leonardo, stepping in, seizes those motives of the vast landscape, the tumultuous advance of Magi and followers, and their suddenly arrested streams of motion, the stamping of their horses, the energy of active life contrasted with the shadowy stillness where prophecy unfolds its flower; and with instinctive choice and emphasis strikes out the dominant figures in unforgettable significance.

## III

IT is hard, indeed I suppose impossible, for us in our day, when the frontiers of known history and the border-land of myth and legend have been pushed back to so remote an antiquity, it is hard to realize at all fully the kind of conception which an Italian of the Quattrocento had of the previous history of the world.

The bright vision of historic Greece was only beginning to emerge through the mists of medieval ignorance. The real Alexander was hidden behind the fantastic and immensely less impressive hero of fabulous romances; the tale of Troy was not known through Homer, but through late compilations and accretions to the story. And while mythical and historic personages of Greece and Rome were accepted on equal terms, both alike were mingled with the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, and venerated for their common standing in antiquity.

The Picture-Chronicle of Finiguerra,<sup>1</sup> now in the British Museum, shows us in a vivid way the accepted ideas about the world's history which popular education reflected. In these drawings the threads of biblical and classic story are woven together in a bright confusion of times and events. Orpheus and Joshua, Gideon and Hercules, Theseus and Jephthah, make a band of heroes; Numa and Isaiah stand side by side; Zoroaster, Prometheus, Inachus and Pharaoh—an inconsequent company—are pictured on a single page; Julius Caesar contemplates the city of Florence

<sup>1</sup>The entire book of drawings, which was once in the possession of Ruskin, has been published in facsimile and edited by Sir Sidney Colvin, to whom is due the identification of their author with Maso Finiguerra.

## SPRING

*Academy, Florence*



## The Work of the Master

which he has founded ; while the mysterious sibyls appear and reappear, leading events by the hand and bringing on the destined time of Christ. All these figures are pictured in the same sort of imaginary costume, with fantastic headdresses, and with the same ornate architecture and bare landscape as setting to the scene.

Botticelli, the friend of poets and platonists, had doubtless access to a wider realm of thought, in which the history of the world showed something more of its true configuration and perspective.

Yet he betrays no scholar's interest in antiquity. The Greek myths to him were not lore of a buried time that he wished to revive, but part of life itself ; those re-embodied divinities walked his Tuscan hills and trod among the Tuscan flowers. In the world of his imagination they breathed the same air as his Madonnas and his saints.

The famous *Primavera* is the earliest surviving work of Botticelli's in which is incarnated his vision of what poets and scholars had told him of antique myth and legend. We need not inquire what sources he drew from. Probably he was recombining in imagination a group of various motives.

The design of the picture may well have been suggested by some Flemish tapestry. But let us contemplate the work itself and see what thoughts and feelings it evokes, in itself and by pictorial means.

We are taken into a place of green, deep verdure, thick with many-coloured flowers. It is the centre of a little grove of orange-trees, whose stems lift up their dark foliage, like the pillars of some sylvan temple ; and the light of empty sky between them shines far away, as through windows, over the world without. The world and its familiar things seem indeed to be shut out and forgotten in this shrine-like seclusion, where the golden fruits that hang, mixed with small white blossoms, on the trees, shine like soft lamps in the dimness. All this enclosing leafiness, not wild, but ordered, impresses the senses like the enclosing shadow of some sacred and silent building, and prepares us for the enacting of some solemn rite. And

## The Art of Botticelli

such, indeed, is what we see. For strange figures, human and yet superhuman, appearing yet statelier in their presence from the very circumscription of the space, are moving before our eyes within the grove, like celebrants of some mystical dance and festival. Who are these pacing, pausing, or dancing figures, who seem so removed from the world we see and know? Our gaze is attracted to one in the centre, round whose head a myrtle-bush in the grove behind, traced on pale sky, makes, as she stands against it, an aureole of little leaves. She is in the midst, yet apart; something separates her tangibly from the rest; and though not visibly enthroned or dominating, for her eyes are pensive, her hand is raised, and we feel that hers is the genius that moves them unconsciously to do her bidding. With more of mother than of maid in her aspect, she seems to take some deep part in the scene, yet rather with her thoughts pervading it all than sharing in its action. And, in fact, the little winged boy, with the scarf bound about his eyes, and arrow drawn to shoot, who flies above her head, seems the embodied projection of those potent thoughts of hers.

But even while we gaze on this central figure, our eyes are drawn to either side. They follow the movement, attuned as to slow music, of the young limbs of three maidens sinuously turning as they dance together with joined hands lifted or falling. Their diaphanous garments blow softly about them and curve or flutter with their motion, and the fresh flowers spring again from the delicate pressure of their feet. Wholly absorbed they appear, and possessed by the meaning of their dance. But advancing with earthlier presence, lithe and straight as a wand, a keen light in her eyes and a strange half-smile on her lips, comes another form of woman, stepping among the daisies. A coronal of flowers is on her hair, a necklace of flowers in cluster about her throat, a girdle of leaves about her waist; her hands are ready to scatter the flowers in the lap of her dress, that itself is sprinkled with flowers. Beside her comes another maiden, with hair unbound and only some transparent tissue veiling her smooth limbs; but she, from whose mouth issues a stream of

## The Work of the Master

flowers, turns backward in sweet affright, seized from above by the arms of a god who has flown down from the air with a passionate gesture; the gust of his coming bends the boughs and makes the leaves tremble. Apart and aloof on the other side, beyond the dancing figures, stands a shapely youth, one hand on hip, the other reaching up to the golden fruit; a sword is at his side, a winged cap on his curling hair.

We do not need to be learned in classic myth, nor even to recognize the figures presented, to feel not only the charm but the central meaning of this picture. It is as if we were transported to some secret place at the heart of the vernal earth and saw in vision the powers that kindle and send forth into the wintry world the riches of the spring-time.

Let us suppose a painter set to paint the theme of spring. Many a modern has given this title to a picture he has made. Corot has painted a fresh glade of sunny grass, dappled with morning shadows of the trees, and children picking dewy flowers. Millet has painted the flushed blossom of apples in an orchard seen in the rainbow glimpse of a thunder-shower. These are appearances of the spring earth: but Spring itself, the mysterious power of beauty we divine behind those appearances, how shall this be portrayed? Instinctively the poetic faculty in man shapes a myth of the spring's coming; and as long as that faculty remains in the world, so long will each of us who shares it make the myths anew. And why should not a painter share it? Botticelli, with his eminently poetic nature, shapes the myth afresh in his own mind. We feel that he has seen with his own eyes what he has painted in his picture, making all its strangeness real. These figures are no mere transcripts from the actual world, labelled with legendary names: they stand for what they are, and embody their own significance. The impress made on us by the picture itself is not made more powerful by recognition of these figures as Venus and the Graces, and of those as Zephyr and Flora and Mercury. But this is not to say that the impress is solely one of decorative line

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and colour; the impress is of the subject, through its pictorial expression.

If we regarded the design solely from the technical point of view we might criticize it as it would have been criticized by most painters from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. They would have found its figures drily arranged, too much self-occupied in their movements, not woven together into a unity of relations: they are disposed, if one may say so, rather than composed.

But this disposition and half-isolation of group and single figure belong to the artist's inherent conception of the theme. Exuberance, the genius of the teeming, fructified earth, the riot of the spring in sap and in blood; this would be the splendid inspiration of a Rubens. But Botticelli sees in the spring both its passion and its purity, the natural pensiveness as well as the natural blitheness of adolescence, the shyness as well as the ardour. For he has mated in imagination vernal earth with human youth; these forms of his vision are virginal like the flowers on which they tread. Venus is robed sedately, and gentle in her aspect, as Love appears to youth, disguising his terrible powers. And those whom she moves and possesses are, like real young men and maidens, self-engrossed, full of the wonder of their budding nature and of earth flowering about them, ever companions. Only the rushing form of Zephyr tells of tempest and transport to come.

Drily arranged then, as these figures may have seemed to later taste, with its craving for fluent and florid harmonies, they are expressive of the artist's conception; and the taste of our own day, long since sated with pictorial rhetoric, accepts the disposition of them with the more pleasure for the sweet severity of the design, full as it is of subtle graces and lyrical movements.

Could any direct naturalism of treatment press one tithe of this essential significance from the theme? And yet how rich is the picture in fresh nature, how intimate in detail!

Let us turn now to the Birth of Venus.

Again, let us suppose an ignorance in the spectator of the myth.

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He sees before him, in her bare beauty, a maiden form buoyantly standing in a great shell which floats to the shore from a wide water and is about to touch it. Two winged youths with arms about each other come flying near, blowing a wind upon the water which ruffles into little waves and drives the shell on its way. On the shore, by a grove of straight-stemmed orange-trees, a woman in a white gown sprigged with corn-cockles holds up a great robe of purple, blown into curving folds by the breeze, to clothe the maiden when she alights on land. Roses fall through the air and are scattered on the water. Save for the figures the world seems empty of life; the low, receding promontories that edge the water seem asleep; the water stretches far away to the solitary horizon; not a sail is on it, not a cloud in heaven. And for all her sweet humanity of feature, this maiden floating from the sea's solitude to flowering earth appears no mortal. She comes from where no men and women are, and comes as a queen to receive queenly raiment. It is as if some supernatural power had given us, at some clear early dawn, when the world still sleeps, actual vision of the winds, whose breath we only feel by day, and of this divine stranger floating to her strange home on earth, with the air lifting and moving the heavy golden coils of her long tresses. Indeed, no one, however unknown and alien to him the mythic world of Greece, could mistake this for anything but a vision of celestial creatures, seen by one who had the visionary faculty of portraying supernatural motion, the power to float and be buoyed up on air as in a native element. One might rest content with that, with the delighted sense of life's lovely movement, of that slim form magically poised on the wind-blown shell, and the eager rushing of those wings; for it is as if we ourselves were carried on a kind of aerial wave, and felt the rhythm of life run charming through us, unimpeded by the gross circumstance that ties us to earth, unmarred by the sense of time passing and an end coming. Even to us who know the story, the picture seems fuller than the story itself, haunted with mystery yet undiscovered, and with all kinds of morning promises. This is Venus: but we may wonder about her and

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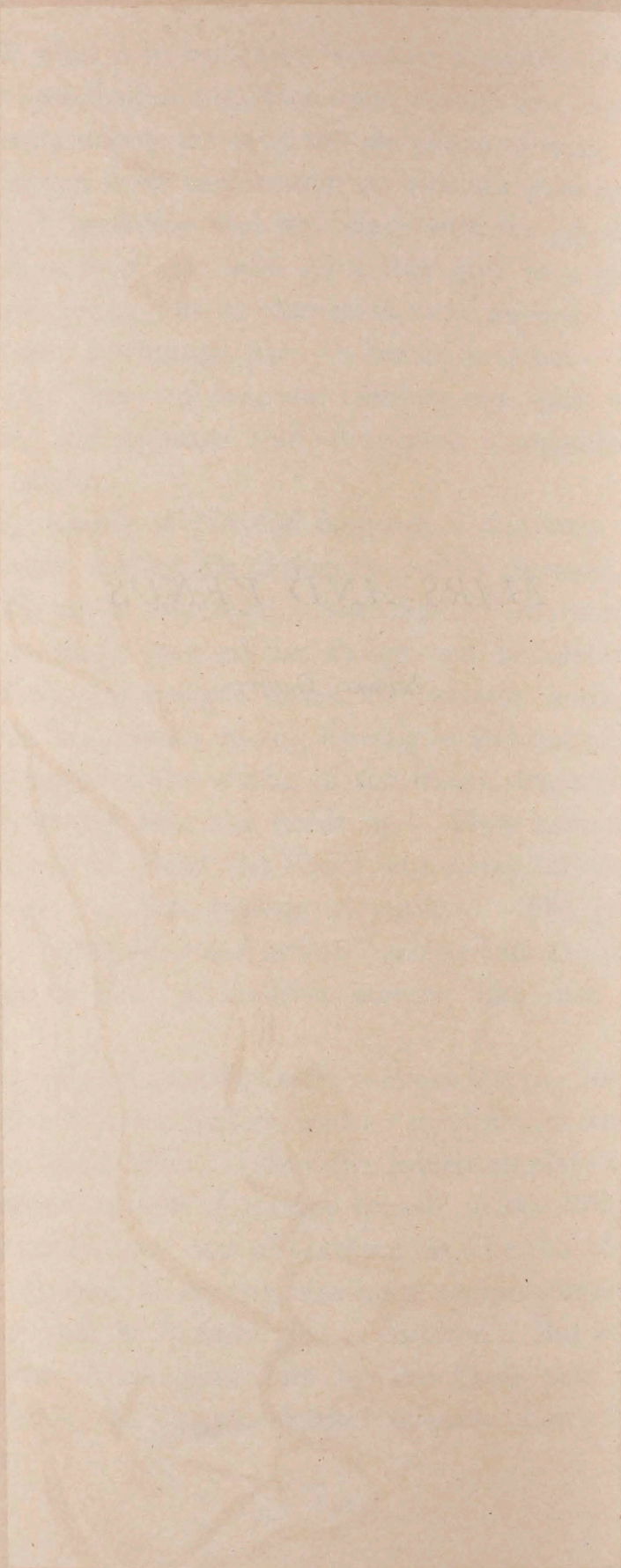
cannot tell what is in her eyes ; whether a sadness of heavenly love feeling by anticipation the bruises and shames and cruelties that she is to undergo among the sons and daughters of men ; or regret for what she comes from and wonder at what she goes to ; or pity for the pain and desolation that she brings with the joy of her beauty ; or mere shyness of the wild spirit that goes to a great state and infinite dominion and to be clothed in royal apparel : for partly she seems a queen in triumph, partly a heavenly victim. Whatever our thoughts may fancy of her, she troubles the spirit as young love troubles it, and appears with the same strangeness out of an unknown world.

In what beauty of pictorial language is this story told ! Botticelli's dramatic instinct has chosen the perfect moment, the meeting-place of the before and after. And then, if we consider, we shall see that no single part of the design can be subtracted without essential loss ; the upright stems, the straight horizon line, how these enrich the sinuous curves, flowing in and out of each other in the supple forms of the winds, in the blown draperies of the Flora and the billowing robe she holds up ! How naturally devised is the clear space all about the Venus, enhancing the virginal mien of her form, with its just pausing movement ! The great curves of the shell's ribs, outward and upward, radiate into the picture ; they, too, suggest a kind of invisible motion, like that of a flower's expansion.

In yet another picture Botticelli portrays Venus ; but the Mars and Venus of the National Gallery is of a very different interest from the masterpiece in the Uffizi. Here the painter employs a playful fancy which reminds us now of antique friezes, where little cupids play with satyr masks, and now of northern art like that of Cranach and Altdorfer, so fond of weaving into more serious subjects a thread of elvish fancy and the sportive glee of children. But while Botticelli translates the theme given him by the Latin poet into his own Tuscan idiom, his larger design removes him from German quaintness.

### MARS AND VENUS

*National Gallery*



## The Work of the Master

Mars lies in a deep sleep, though a nest of hornets is by his head, and Venus, reclined upon her elbow, which rests on a purple cushion, watches him with enigmatic expression. The only action in the picture is that of the little goat-foot satyrs, one of whom has struggled through the tunnel of the war-god's corselet and peeps out laughing roguishly, while another has put the big helmet, wrong side before, on his small head, and tries to run a-tilting with the heavy lance : it would fall, if another did not buoy the big shaft up with both hands ; and yet another blows a conch into the ears of the sleeper, but cannot wake him. Delightful is the rhythm of the three small backs, curved as they stoop, and of the languid lines of the naked limbs of Mars and the draped form of Venus ; delightful the break in the thicket of myrtle trees opening on airy landscape beyond. And that touch of the mysterious in the aloof face of the goddess, whose thoughts are hard to guess, adds a richness to the mood of the picture, giving a foil to the gamesome mischief of the baby-satyrs, so that we feel there is some meaning latent there as in all life's experience, though we may not trouble or desire to search it out.

In all technical mastery this painting is not inferior to the Venus of the Uffizi, perhaps in colouring it is more gracious and attractive. Yet everyone feels the difference ; no one would place this in the same rank with the other. Many painters, and some critics, are fond of asserting that subject is nothing, treatment everything. But experience tells us that subject counts enormously, for subject and design subtly and inevitably respond to each other in all art that is art at all.

Simply as design, the Birth of Venus moves us with its aerial spaces and its delicate movement as this other design could never move us, delightful as it is ; simply by pictorial expression of the theme the Uffizi picture brings us into touch with something primordial, springing from the central roots of life, and exhilarates us with freshness as of the wind that comes to our faces, we know not whence. In this sense the Birth of Venus is religious ;

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it stirs the sense of worship and of mystery. There is nothing coldly pagan and external in it; we feel the truth of the myth, spiritualized in Botticelli's mind as it could only be by those centuries that had passed since the Greek world vanished.

### IV

THE Italians of the Renaissance, with all their adoration of classic art, missed, as I have before pointed out, the spirit which inspired the Greeks in their glorification of the human body. The naked human form was no longer an impersonal type of the perfect citizen consecrated to the service of his city; it was rather a symbol of the sublime potentialities of mankind as crystallized in the individual. The splendour of a single human personality is the recurring theme of Renaissance thought.

Hence, as we might expect, magnificent portraiture. And yet, in Florence at any rate, the portrait is comparatively rare. In the less intellectual atmosphere of Venice it was natural that portraiture should become a prominent theme, as it always has been where rich and aristocratic patrons covet the painter's immortality and find no apter material for his skill than their own fine persons. But in Florence, men of wealth were men of culture, vainer of their learning than of their faces and their dress, and preferred to find choice subjects from the poets, in which the artist's invention could be put to its richest use. Painting, for them, was less a part of sumptuous and stately furniture than the expression of a large imaginative ideal.

Botticelli's finest portraits are to be found not in single panels but in the groups of the Adoration of the Magi, once in Santa Maria Novella. These portraits of the Medici family were, we know, not introduced by order of that family, but commissioned by a Florentine who was an adherent and admirer of their house. Nothing could exceed, for masculine beauty of delineation, firm without hardness,

## The Art of Botticelli

sensitive without softness, the portraiture of the aged Cosimo, and of his son Piero who kneels in the centre of this picture. Here, too, at the extreme right of the design, is Botticelli's portrait of himself. However we may interpret the artist's aspect and features, the portrait speaks for truth.

Truth also, the truth of an absolutely unaffected and direct presentment, marks the portrait of a youth in the National Gallery, probably, as we have seen, one of the master's assistants in his workshop. This little panel, painted, we may suppose, out of affection, was a sort of by-play doubtless in the midst of severer labours. It looks as if painted for pleasure, and the pleasure is communicated to us as we look at the lad's firm featured face, with its squareness of jaw, broad mouth, and frank eyes. We wish that Botticelli had painted more of such portraits.

But the direct portraiture of life, though Botticelli could rival and surpass the avowed masters of portraiture, such as Ghirlandaio, when he chose, did not belong to the root-concerns of his art. This interest led him rather to present imaginative ideas and spiritual types; and so we have the grandly realized St. Augustine, which I have already described in the account of his life and works, and again the portraits of Lorenzo and Giovanna Tornabuoni, not in their actual surroundings but in a mythical setting of wood or garden and in converse with gracious superhuman presences. And again his instinct for preferring life in movement to life in stillness led him away from mere portraiture as much as this attracted and diverted Ghirlandaio even in the representation of action. Even in the early portrait of a young man holding a medal there is visible the aim at something more than mere delineation; it is the presentment of a man as a character in a drama—the drama of existence.

Botticelli, with his gift for portraying movement and passionate action, and for expressing emotion through attitude and gesture, seems eminently fitted to be a dramatic painter. And dramatic he is; though in him the dramatic vein is intimately interwoven with the lyrical. In the picture of the Adoration with the portraits of the

### PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN

*National Gallery*



## The Work of the Master

Medici there is splendid and subtle power of characterization : but in most of his imaginative work the figures are types, and their individual character is seen rather in the emotions they express and embody than in outward difference of feature.

How is a painter to be dramatic ?

We can answer the question best by remembering how largely the dramatist must be pictorial. A drama is a thing to be seen, even more perhaps than to be heard. True, it is a thing which is always in movement, but there are always certain moments in a drama when a pregnant pause seems to gather up what has gone before and to anticipate what is to come. At such moments the visible relations of the actors to each other and of all of them to the surrounding scene should be of immense significance to the eye. The compellingly attractive power of one presence and the repelling power of another ; a single erect spirit among many collapsed and submissive ; the distance dreadfully increasing between two lives that part for ever ; a door closed ; a door letting in the light ; a vast proportion of space making human effort seem small ; of such materials as these, each evoking by visible symbol the answering emotion in ourselves, the spectators, is made the dramatic scene. These are all pictorial means : and though the painter cannot make use of actual movement, he can make us imaginative participators in the scene, so that we feel at the centre of an action which is not an arrest but a continuing, part fulfilment and part prophecy.

Choice of the pictorial moment is, then, the first test of the dramatic painter. But also he must be master of the diverse effect of that moment on the diverse characters engaged. We must feel that in this way and no other would men and women of such nature act and stand. Poor actors substitute for the true gesture something learnt out of a repertory of stock gestures ; the painter with inadequate instinct for the dramatic contents himself with these also, but he is further endangered by the bias of composition which will lead him often to let external necessities of arrangement dictate the attitude and gesture of a figure instead of the inner necessities of its

## The Art of Botticelli

own occupation or emotional import and its dramatic relation to the other figures.

Some would state the problem as the fusion of the decorative and the dramatic aim. But with a painter of dramatic instinct we shall often find that, instead of controlling drama in the interests of decoration, the seizure of some dramatic relation has at the same moment created a pictorial motive in design which no one aiming at decoration would have hit upon. The two motives react on each other.

Again, not only forms with their movement and gesture, but colours can be made expressive of dramatic intention. For whereas the painter who is charged with a lyrical mood will choose his colours in a single key, the dramatic painter will be inventive of contrast and significant difference.

One of Botticelli's earliest works is concerned with an intensely dramatic subject. This is the story of Judith.

The two little panels in the Uffizi were originally set in a single frame, and are dramatic in their very juxtaposition.

In the one the headless body of Holofernes has just been discovered in his tent. The pictorial moment is perfectly chosen. It is the pause of horror, when the group of Assyrians who have burst into the tent stand arrested at the sight before them. Each, forgetful of his companions, shows his emotion in his own way, by attitude, look, or gesture. At the foot of the bed, Bagoas, who has first discovered the deed of Judith and cried the alarm, stands frowning on the body, his face full of revengeful and remorseful thoughts which make him unconsciously lean forward upon the bending sword he grips. But with the others it is astonishment which prevails; they have not yet realized who has done the deed—they see before them the headless trunk of what yesterday was the captain of a huge army, confident and secure of coming triumph—and to them it is a miracle. One youthful warrior gently lifts the coverlet from the naked body and stoops down to gaze upon it; two grey-beards behind him lift or wring their hands, while a

## The Work of the Master

warrior between them hides his face. At the right, beyond, come two men on horseback, thrusting aside the tent folds as they enter. Botticelli was fond, as we have seen in the Adoration pictures, of introducing horses into his crowds; their massive and swelling contours give, as he knew, richness and energy to the lines of movement: and here, though they may be thought to be somewhat awkwardly brought in, their value is to suggest the life of war and action which death has only interrupted for a day. The open space in the midst, letting in the pale morning light on the pallor of the headless corpse, contrasted with the purple and gold of the warriors, gives a glimpse of infinity beyond. Note again how while the bending figures make repeating curves in a downward direction, the folds of the curtain above oppose curves of contrary direction: the effect being to stimulate the sense of drama, so that instead of an impression of grief dejecting, so to speak, the whole design, there is the play of contrary forces, the hint of action to come.

It is true that the painter is not here a complete master of his intentions, his style is not fully formed, his personal qualities not wholly disengaged. He is still under the strong spell of Pollaiuolo's art. The intensity of conception does not penetrate to the whole of the picture; the group in the right background is not adequate to the rest. Yet with all shortcomings the little picture is a wonderful piece of dramatic design.

Sharply contrasting with it is the companion panel of Judith returning to Bethulia. How easy to be rhetorical in such a subject; what a temptation for the painter to lose the heroine in heroics! Certainly Botticelli does not disappoint us in this way. Some may think that his fault is understatement, and may find his Judith too little like a heroine, with her innocent sweet gravity of feature. But the deed to which she has brought her strength with prayer and exaltation of spirit is done; the tensivity of effort is relaxed: she is filled with the message of deliverance she brings and the sign of which, an olive-branch, she carries in her hand; but she is pensive

## The Art of Botticelli

too and grave, as becomes one who has done a sacrificial not a murderous deed ; it is her waiting-woman who hurries her steps, eager to tell the tale, eager to exult with fierce exultation and to show the horrible trophy she carries on her head. It is in the contrast between the two natures that Botticelli shows his dramatic insight. And his instinct has prompted him, against the letter of the story which would have made them climbing the hill to Bethulia, to set his Judith and her handmaid against the distances of a wide valley and the clear morning sky, the more to contrast with the close tent and its dimness where the figures gather and bend round the corpse. The clearness of space and air answer to our sense of peace and deliverance achieved, and ally themselves with the mood of the gracious form of Judith, gloriously clothed in her garments of gladness. Again there is something awkward in the introduction of the stiff cypress at the right. There is immaturity in the whole work : but that perhaps is part of its charm.

By 1481, when Botticelli was called to Rome, he had come to the full maturity of his power, though the special characteristics of his manner were not yet dominant and overwhelming.

In considering the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, we have unfortunately to reckon with the hard conditions imposed by ecclesiastical authority on the painter.

Each of these three frescoes is a 'story,' and a story in several scenes. And if we are to enjoy the paintings, we must accept the conditions laid down and see how far the artist is successful in dealing with those conditions.

In the first fresco of the series Botticelli was to paint the story of Moses. He has chosen seven episodes : and instead of making seven different pictures within a single framework, he has combined them all into a single composition. Such a problem might well tax to the full the Florentine genius for constructive design ; and the way in which the various scenes are woven together into one harmonious whole shows an extraordinary mastery. This is especially to be observed in the manner of planning the landscape foundation of the

### JUDITH'S RETURN

*Uffizi, Florence*



## The Work of the Master

picture. A grove of trees rising in the centre, with a mounded hill beyond, sets back the further slopes on which occur the two scenes of Moses putting off his shoes and of God appearing to him out of the burning bush ; while from behind the hill streams down the procession of Moses and his family returning to Egypt. At the same time there is left on the other side a clear space of sky over a remote hill ; and a single slender tree-stem rising against that empty distance accentuates the solitude toward which Moses is fleeing. This is the scene of his escape from Egypt in the land of Midian. In the foreground is represented the slaying of the Egyptian which caused his flight. And here Botticelli's dramatic vigour is seen at its fullest. The sudden and vehement onslaught of Moses, with his uplifted sword ; the choked cry, the desperate struggle, the agonized fear in the prostrate Egyptian, are intensely realized. Contrasted with this violent action is the idyllic scene in the centre of the foreground, where Moses waters the flocks of the daughters of Reuel by the well in Midian. In yet another scene, among the trees of the grove beyond, he is driving away the shepherds who had interfered with the maidens.

While we cannot help admiring the wonderful mastery of invention which has made these scenes pictorially coherent, no less than the force and beauty shown in the treatment of the several scenes themselves, we must equally regret that the painter was not free to paint them singly. How much more would he have made of the story of the Burning Bush, had he not been compelled to subordinate those two scenes to the more complex scenes requiring many figures!

Botticelli's dramatic quality is seized at once when we compare this fresco with the Call of the Apostles by Ghirlandaio and the Christ giving the Keys to Peter by Perugino in the same chapel. Both of these masters paint rows of standing figures, adequately well arranged ; but neither in the single figures is there anything like the vitality and character which Botticelli embodies in his, nor has the composition anything of the rich and complex flow of rhythms which animates every part of Botticelli's design.

## The Art of Botticelli

Yet it is this very power of expressing dramatic relations that works against the success of a type of painting which must by its essence remain discursive in interest. The instinct in art which makes for drama prompts concentration and intensity: but in large wall-paintings of narrative subject an effect of repose is almost necessary, and we feel that amplitude of atmosphere, large distance and unbroken masses, are well sought for even at the cost of a certain tameness and loss of vivid force. The gentle and ingenuous art of the story-teller is here in place: and the concentration, reality, and movement of the dramatist demand other conditions than are here laid down. Botticelli's passionate art seems like a fiery metal overrunning and bursting the mould into which it has been run.

I will not describe in detail the other two frescoes of the series, since, though they contain magnificent things and exemplify to the full the masculine invention of the painter, they exhibit, even more than the story of Moses, the conflict between the tendencies of his genius and the material limitations cramping it. Neither shows the same felicity as the first fresco in weaving the separate scenes into a coherent composition. And the fresco of the Temptation is marred, from the point of view of pictorial significance, by the overwhelming fullness with which the accessories of what is made the central incident—the healing of a leper—is treated. Did we not know the meaning of the episode, which indeed was lost for centuries and only quite recently re-discovered by Dr. Steinmann, we should interpret quite subordinate figures in the scene as the principal actors in it. What we carry away from these frescoes is chiefly the remembrance of certain most beautiful single figures, like that of the woman carrying faggots in the 'Temptation,' or of splendidly conceived dramatic groups, like the writhing and stricken forms of the men smitten by flames from the censers and overborne by the superhuman authority and gesture of Moses and Aaron.

For an example of Botticelli's dramatic power at his happiest let us rather look at the exquisite small picture of the Last Communion of St. Jerome. The scene is a little hermitage contrived of wattled

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reeds, the sweet cool green of which provides a foil to clear and bright colours in the dress of the figures. The aged saint, his features transfigured by joy in the midst of death, leans forward on his knees to receive the sacrament, his frail body supported by the arms of two monks. The tender solicitude of the monks and the ministrant priest, the last glow of life in the dying saint, the half-detached air of the two acolytes, so carefully holding their heavy candle-sticks upright, all are pictured with such direct and dramatic reality that we feel we are living ourselves through this last scene of life in the little cell, from which on either side two windows lend the eye an escape to the great still air of heaven. Nowhere has Botticelli shown more transparently his profound sincerity and insight,—qualities which remind us of Rembrandt,—though the intimacy of presentation has an Italian comeliness pervading every detail.

Passing from this beautiful panel to the later works in which Botticelli has handled dramatic stories,—I mean the two pictures of Virginia and Lucretia, and the yet later group of scenes from the life of San Zenobio,—we are conscious of a change coming over the temper of his art. It has become more agitated, vehement and intense. That lyrical vein in the painter which I have spoken of as closely related to the dramatic vein in him combines with the drama to give it, especially in the latest works, a kind of rushing eloquence and exaltation, so that we seem almost to hear the actors in the scenes pouring forth their emotion in the beauty of impetuous words.

In each of these paintings Botticelli employs a setting of architecture, as if to heighten by the severity of straight line and angle the tumultuous energy of the human forms.

As in the Sistine frescoes, several incidents are brought into a single composition. Again, one cannot help wishing that we had a separate picture of each. Yet the singular skill with which it is done, and the fearless candour and ingenuousness with which naturalism of presentation is defied and set at nought, are in themselves stimulating; and only pedantry forbids us to enjoy.

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There is something delightful in the simplicity with which a highly artificial manner of presenting the drama is brought off in the *Virginus*. We seem to be within a vast basilica of ornately severe architecture. In the centre of the pavement is a group of men on horseback, angry and excited. It is *Virginus* in the Roman camp telling his story to his comrades, who vow vengeance on the guilty *Appius*. But in the same hall, at the left, *Virginia* is being seized by the slave of *Appius*; again we see her led off, weeping; in the centre, just behind the horsemen, she is led up to *Appius* on his throne within the apse of the basilica, while her father arrived in haste, all armed, pleads to the judge in vain. At the right *Virginus* raises his knife to kill his daughter, whom women rush to rescue, and again we see him mounting his horse, to ride post-haste to the camp.

Here for once the treatment may justly be called literary, since it presents the scenes of a consecutive narrative in a single place and a single moment of time. The limitations of the pictorial art are audaciously exceeded. Yet the method need not be condemned outright.

For with the *Lucretia* the case is different. Here are but three scenes, and each sets off the other. There is contrast, but no confusion. The mode of treatment is managed with great felicity.

Again the setting is architectural. But here we are out-of-doors, in the midst of a great city. On either side is the portico of a great building; in the centre a throng of armed knights with swords drawn run together, summoned by the voice of *Collatinus*, who, standing above them on the plinth of a column surmounted by a statue of *David*, looks down on the self-slain body of his wife with the sword still in her breast. In the background is a great triumphal arch adorned with friezes of battle and heroic story. At the sides we see glimpses of the tragedy which spurs these armed, indignant figures into action. In the portico, at the left, *Tarquin* steps upon the threshold, and in the shadow seizes *Lucretia* with one hand, threatening her with the sword he holds in the other. In the other

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portico at the right, *Lucretia* tottering from an inner room falls into the arms of her horrified women.

The collapse of the expiring form, with prone head and hanging arms, is expressed with uncompromising reality: and no less true is the gesture of helpless horror and shrinking shame in *Lucretia* seized by her ravisher.

The device by which these two moments of tragedy are made visible to us, each as in a sort of glimpse and suggestion, not revealing the whole of what is acted in the darkness of the night, is here used with admirable power and justness. In the story of *Virginia* Botticelli shows his poetic and dramatic faculty by his insistence on the continuity of action, the sureness of consequence, the swiftness of vengeance treading inevitably on the heels of guilt: but in order to present his conception pictorially he has used means so violent that, though arrested and stimulated, we are not satisfied. We do not apprehend the dramatic and the pictorial effect as a single fused impression: the artist narrates too much and overreaches his aim. But here, in the *Lucretia*, while our gaze concentrates on the vehement action set in motion by the deed done, its irrevocableness pictorially brought home to us by the supine, death-stiffened form stretched out in the midst of those agitated figures, we are made conscious of what is burning in the brain of each of them, the vision of the treacherous guest stealing on his victim in the darkness, of her utter shame and refusal to live shamed, of the sword driven by despairing hands into that fair breast, and the blood crying to each one of them for vengeance. The method of presentation is at once pictorial and dramatic, no longer semi-narrative. We might compare the difference between a chronicle-play and a tragedy in Shakespeare's work. Though more than one scene is shown us, the two moments of foregoing action are really made simultaneous with the main scene, because present in the minds of the actors, and at the same time so subordinated to it and divided from it by the device of the architectural setting that they seem rather to be pregnant accessories of the moment than episodes

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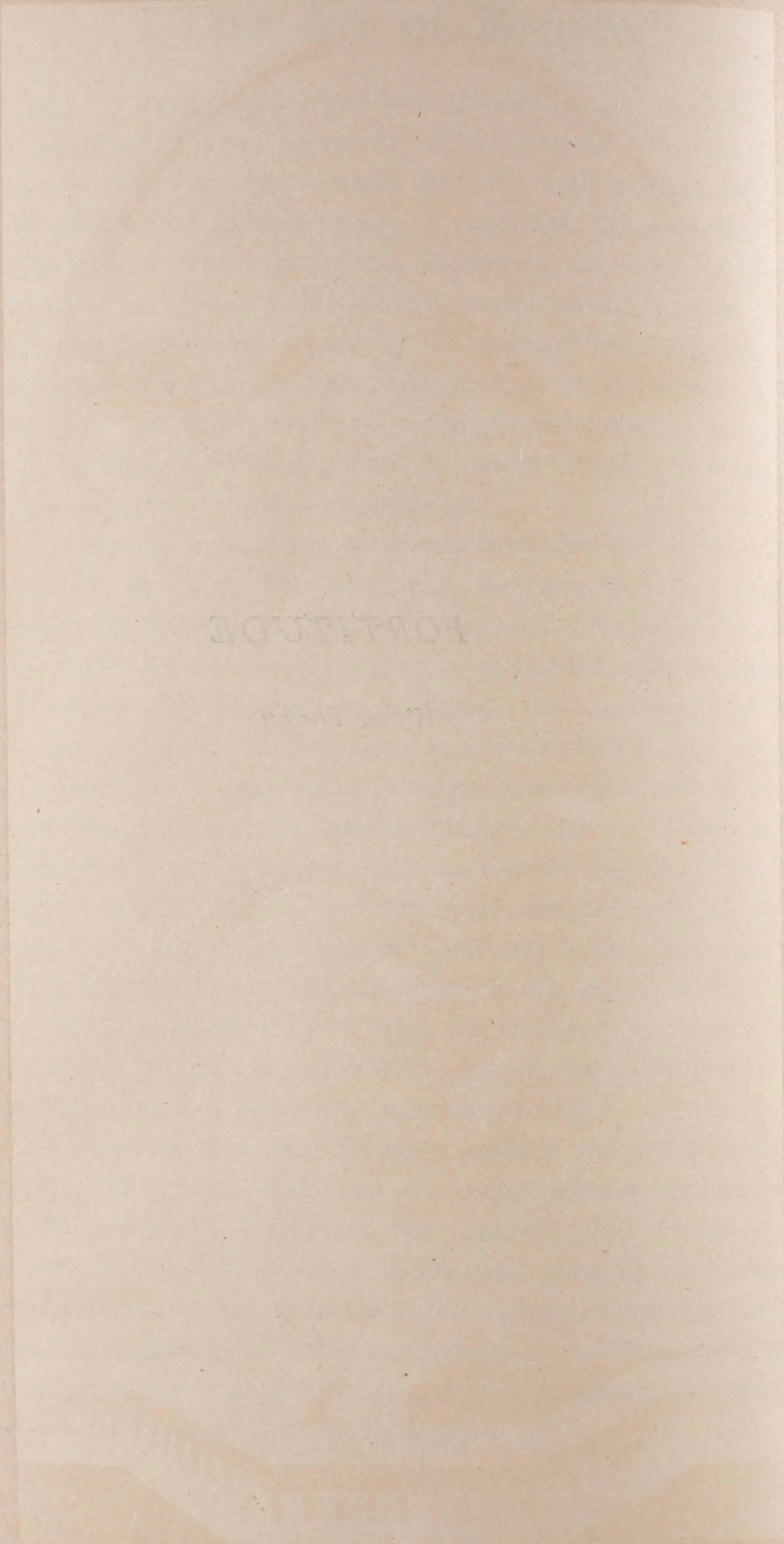
separate in time. And then how splendidly has Botticelli pressed his background into the service of the drama! From a pictorial point of view the many upright lines of stately column and pilaster give value to the animated group of passionate figures, whose swords make lines of various directions, impressing the sense with so many individual energies in action: while, imaginatively, the consciousness of a magnificent city, reared by the strength of a law-giving race, accentuates the outrage done; and had we no knowledge of Rome, we should still receive from this painting a sense of what Rome meant, with its masculine achievements, its power of order, its evocation of heroic acts and summons to emulation.

In the three paintings of stories from the life of San Zenobio Botticelli had a far less interesting subject. For here we have a number of episodes in the life of the saint: his refusal to wed the girl chosen for him by his parents; his baptism and the baptism of his mother; his consecration as bishop; his casting out of devils; his raising (in two different cases) of a dead child to life; and finally his death. The treatment in a single panel of actions unrelated to each other made such a dramatic conception as the Lucretia painting impossible. Yet a painter with an instinct for the dramatic in painting could learn much from these designs: for the dramatic element in the stories is seized upon and brought out with astonishing force. The strong emotions of the actors in these scenes, especially those which deal with the deaths of the two children, the agony of the mothers and the joy of the recovery to life, are portrayed with an extreme of passionate reality.

I would mention here the three predella pictures, with the story of Mary Magdalen, which are now in the collection of Mr. Johnson of Philadelphia. Discovered but recently, they are as yet little known, but show the master in his most glowing vein. The self-abandonment in the character of the sinner and saint appealed to his deepest inspiration; and every element of the designs in which he has figured her dramatic story,—gesture, movement, line and colour,—is fused in one expressive language.

### FORTITUDE

*Uffizi, Florence*



ALLEGORY is, I suppose, one of the devices of pictorial art which a certain school of criticism looks on with disfavour and suspicion as derived from the contaminating influence of literature.

Let us consider the matter without prejudice.

How did allegory arise? What impelled men to use this manner of presenting ideas? The consciousness of powers in the world, whether elemental forces of nature acting without reference to the desires and the happiness of men, or forces equally elemental acting in and through human nature, created in primitive civilizations what we call Myth. And allegory is to myth what philosophy is to religion; belonging to a colder climate of the mind, it is more conscious and reasoned; it is an attempt to give plastic embodiment to abstract qualities rather than elemental forces, but it is sprung from the same instinct as that which inspired the myth-makers. In its more elaborate development allegory takes, like myth, the narrative form. But success in that form is of the rarest: for either we are repelled by unreality in the story, too conscious of the thin disguise it lends, or we forget the hidden meaning in the interest of the story itself. Allegory tends to be a frigid form, because human nature is mixed and incalculable and rarely embodies any single quality, virtue or vice: therefore in proportion as the characters in an allegorical story become humanly alive and warm, they are apt to depart from the significance with which they started. It is a condition of success that the human embodiment should be fused and identified with the quality it stands for. And success is

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oftener attained by the directly opposite method of starting with a concrete character which becomes to us the living incarnation of hate, jealousy, ambition, sloth or the like. Though we do not call this allegory, yet all imaginative presentations of human events have an allegorical or symbolic element in them.

Perhaps one ought to distinguish between allegory and symbolism. Mr. Yeats, I find, sets them in antithesis. Yet it seems to be rather a question of words. I see no reason why we should call all truly imaginative artists and writers 'symbolists,' nor why the name of allegory should be relegated to symbolism which is unsuccessful. If there is a real difference, it is perhaps that we associate allegory with a *moralized* interpretation of life, whereas symbol is wider and belongs to the imaginative realm.

So far, I speak of literature. But the painter or sculptor is more fortunately circumstanced. With him abstractions cannot remain abstract, they are concrete visible forms, already clothed with flesh. What he has to do is to impress these visible forms with the manifest signs of the passion or quality which they embody, signs which we recognize from our experience. Success is rare; but is achieved by Giotto in some at least of that great series in the Arena Chapel. What I would here point out is that the poet who introduces allegorical figures into his verse borrows perforce from the painter's art: he tries to bring before us a lively pictorial image. In fact, I suppose that in this domain literature has borrowed much more from painting than painting from literature.

Whatever we may think about allegory, it is a manner of presenting ideas that will probably persist in art, especially in art of a monumental kind, to which symbolic types are congenial.

One of Botticelli's earliest works is the allegorical figure of Fortitude. As an expression of the idea, one cannot call this successful. It is a model in the dress and with the insignia of the part, but playing the part languidly and with an absent mind. There is no pictorial expression of Fortitude in the design of the figure. Here is a true example of what is called 'literary' in

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painting, though we should be quite wrong in saying that it was 'literary' to attempt such a theme at all.

Let us contrast with this Fortitude an allegorical creation of the master's maturity: the drawing of Abundance in the British Museum.

A woman clothed in soft, thin draperies steps towards us, a breeze blowing against her, so that her fluttering garments, and the ribbons that bind her sleeves, and her loose tresses, float upon the air. In one hand she holds a great cornucopia, which a child on her right helps her to support. By her left hand she leads another child, who, as he steps beside her, turns with half-roguish smile to a little comrade, naked but wearing a kind of wreath; both bear bunches of grapes and fruit. A fourth of these 'putti' follows behind.

The woman with her fantastic dress and her strange smile seems the Flora of the Spring reappearing with some subtle change of aspect. There is less of the sharp intensity of expression that kindles the Flora's eyes and forehead, less of the youthful angularity and straightness in her gait: the Abundance comes bending a little as if to the wind that outlines the shape of her limbs as it blows on her transparent robe; her form is sinuous, though not voluptuous, for she is of the Tuscan type, with bony joints and long proportions.

This drawing, unlike most Italian drawings of the Renaissance, is no mere preparatory study, but though left unfinished was intended to be complete in itself.

Like all true artists, Botticelli has an understanding love of his materials. Here is white paper, a reed pen and bistre; and they woo him to create congenial beauties from them. First sketching lightly the design with gray chalk, he rubs a pinkish colour into the surface of the paper, then draws and models the forms with a fine pen and bistre, and adds shadow with a little bistre wash. The boy who supports the cornucopia, and the great shell itself, are left in the first shadowy outline of chalk: but, as with many works of art, the something unfinished does not detract from our delight in the drawing; we seem to be brought closer to the artist's fresh

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thought, to feel his working mind, and our imagination is left the freer play because of the incompleteness. Indeed, this is one of the most beautiful drawings in the world.

As in the *Fortitude*, Botticelli takes a traditional mode of conception, probably in this case from the antique; but here the idea is merged in expression, and we feel that this is something alive, not a draped and posed abstraction; it has the 'abundance' of living nature.

And perhaps the first thing we should demand of a pictorial allegory is that it should interest us in the same way that life, translated into art, interests us; I mean that we should be interested in the figures presented to us and in their relation to one another.

There is a set of four allegorical pictures by Paul Veronese in the National Gallery; they represent varieties of sexual relationship: Respect; Scorn; Unfaithfulness; and Happy Union.

These are superb pieces of decorative design by a consummate master of decoration. Painters probably will be inclined to accept them as that, and count it a virtue in the master that his allegorical motive has merely served as an excuse for posing his figures within the square frames with so admirable an instinct for spacing and painted them with such fluid breadth of colouring. Yet it is a greater triumph if a painter can use his mastery of design to express what he sets out to express, and does not merely use the given motive as a spring-board from which to leap.

How many allegorical paintings and sculptures are there which affect us solely as compositions in which to admire the composer's skill! Victories, Fames, Philosophies, Arts, Sciences, and Virtues; how cold they leave us! But once in a while we meet a work of this order which touches us quite differently, like an experience, like a thing seen, if only seen in a dream.

Of this kind is the *Pallas and the Centaur* of Botticelli. The very strangeness of it impresses the imagination as something of mysterious and high import.

We see a form, feminine but more than human in stature and

### *PALLAS AND THE CENTAUR*

*Pitti Palace, Florence*



## The Work of the Master

grand calm, laying her hand gently yet with irresistible authority on the head of a Centaur, whose face and gesture express unwilling yet complete submission. The Centaur shrinks back to the stony cliffs, the abrupt ledges of which overhang and jut into the air : but the form of the goddess appears before a sky that is all peace, and erect against it stands the shape of the tall axe she holds so lightly in her hand. Beyond, one sees the glimpse of a still bay, on which a ship rides at anchor. The square and rugged angles of rock and the strong upright of the heavy axe play foil to flowing lines of movement in the gracious form of the Pallas.

We may not care greatly to know that for Florence and the Florentines the goddess typified the rule of the house of Medici, and the Centaur the spirit of faction and violence which that rule, in Lorenzo's hands, had tamed. For what we see appears of far more than local or historic import. The lively image is impressed upon us of the strength and charm of mind, purposing peace not for mere tranquillity's sake, but in the quest of life's beauty and enlargement, and serenely imposing its will, not by anger or force, but by the power of faith and understanding, on the wildness of uncentred passion. Though an invention of the painter's own, it seems like some lost fragment of myth recovered from the Greek world, so living it is in hue and form, so believed in by the painter's heart.

It may be thought that the Centaur is too languid in form, too little an embodiment of savage force and fierceness. Michelangelo, doubtless, would have depicted a sterner struggle of soul ; severer lines and stormier masses. But if there is less of overaweing grandeur in the picture than the conception itself seems capable of, there is nothing of inflation. Botticelli has intentionally made the Centaur comparatively small, in order to bring dominant and majestic before us the advancing stature of the goddess ; and at the same time, by subduing the outline of the savage creature in the rugged contours of rock-masses, he makes him part of the barren wilderness of his lair, impressing us with the background of dull resistance against which Wisdom has to strive. The brute

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ledges of menacing stone oppose themselves to the trenchant edge of Wisdom's weapon.

All in this work of poetic invention is of a piece, and brings its meaning home. It is a triumph of pictorial romance.

In the frescoes of the Villa Lemmi the invention is no less felicitous. A young man received into the company of the Seven Liberal Arts; a young lady, his bride, introduced by Venus to the Graces; the simple mention of these subjects promises something frigid enough. But frigid is the last word that will come to the lips of the spectator who mounts the great staircase of the Louvre and sees those injured but ineffaceably beautiful creations before him.

Here again is the sense of strangeness which belongs to romantic art. It seems indeed rather some page from a concrete story, a romance already existing, than the translation of an allegorical idea. Did we know nothing of the subject, we might, at first blush, and before examining the different emblems characterizing the figures, suppose that some legend or folk-tale had supplied the theme. This young man with the straight formal dress, the red cap on his long hair, and his aspect of the scholar, might seem to be the staid hero of the story led from his home by a mysterious visitant and guide through the mazes of a wood, to be brought into the presence of these sibylline figures seated in circle among the trees, and to be challenged, Œdipus-like, by the chief among them with some dark and momentous riddle. It seems a kind of disillusion to be told that this is Grammar introducing the young bridegroom, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, to Phronesis and her sister arts, Music, Rhetoric, Astrology, Arithmetic, and the rest. So far does the picture transcend the letter of its theme.

And yet, ought we not rather to blame ourselves and our own inadequate conceptions? For why should not the Liberal Arts be fascinating, and the approach to them a pathway of romance? Pedantry and dullness have marred them with a stale disguise, and shrouded the faces that Botticelli made so human. The name of pedagogue, now so dingy, was in Greece amiable and attractive.

## GIOVANNA TORNABUONI, WITH VENUS AND THE GRACES

*Louvre, Paris*



## The Work of the Master

Nothing could portray for us in livelier freshness than this painting the passion of scholarship which pervaded the Florence of this fifteenth century ; the feeling for the world of knowledge, of what we still call 'the humanities,' as a kind of wonder-land inhabited by the dispensers of almost magic powers.

But also let us note how admirably, in the hands of the right master, pictorial art becomes the expression of an allegorical conception. No writer has at his command the means to embody such a conception with anything like the same chance of success. In both these frescoes allegory, as a device of art, perfectly justifies itself.

The second fresco is even more beautiful as a design than the first. How adorable is the figure of Giovanna Tornabuoni, seen in tall profile against the wall of the garden-close ! The delightful use of the pale, blank space, throwing up in clear contour the straight folds of her purple dress, reminds us how sadly rare in Italian painting of the Renaissance is the reliance on empty space as a factor in design. Just the contrast between this severely simple dress and the involved fluttering draperies of the other figures is enough to convey to us that here is a mortal in converse with immortals. Giovanna holds out with both hands a white cloth or apron, into which Venus, clad in red and white, drops flowers ; and the three Graces, girlish figures with hair unbound, come about her. What more effective or more simple way of portraying the charm that is to be added to fair girlhood by the arts of courtesy and graciousness, than this act of the goddess, the visible presence of Uranian Love, dropping flowers into the hands of the bride who receives them with so sweet a dignity ? The garden solitude, with its fresh grass and its half-seen fountain, enhances the import of the scene.

The most famous of Botticelli's allegories, unless we should include the Primavera in this type, is the Calumny of Apelles in the Uffizi.

This little picture has some of the master's special characteristics

## The Art of Botticelli

in an unusual degree. The clear and lucent colouring which he loved here takes on a radiance which set it apart among his works. It is extremely animated, and the figures are dramatically grouped, with passionate energy of gesture.

But we will keep to our plan of considering before all things the success of the artist in the pictorial expression of his theme.

Botticelli is here attempting to reconstruct a picture by Apelles, described by Lucian. His was by no means the only attempt in Italian art of the fifteenth century. Mantegna's version is well known through the drawing in the British Museum, from which Rembrandt made a copy, which is in the same collection.

The picture of Apelles recorded the personal experience of that painter, who nearly lost his life through the false accusation of a rival artist. Botticelli had no such personal experience to animate and spur his pencil. He was presenting a general idea; yet in that general idea was embodied the world's experience; and far from apprehending it as a rhetorical abstraction, he brings it before us as a thing lived and suffered.

Lucian's description is followed closely, though in one particular it is departed from. Calumny, whom Apelles represented as a woman of extreme beauty but inflamed and flashing with eyes of anger, is in this picture calm and cold, and the effort of the hand so loosely grasping her victim by the hair seems all too little for its aim. The group approaching the judge on his throne produces an impression of movement and vehemence; but this is mainly due to the forms and gestures of the two women, representing Treachery and Deceit, who are said, in the description of Apelles' picture, to be adorning and assisting Calumny. It seems a singular moment to choose for adorning and decking out a mistress: and the action of these two handmaidens, who are putting ornaments in the hair of Calumny, instead of assisting, impedes her movement. Moreover, it necessitates an arrangement of the three figures by which Calumny herself loses what should be her dominating position. Instead of advancing imperious and direct with her victim's hair knotted in her

### THE CALUMNY OF APELLES

*Uffizi, Florence*



## The Work of the Master

hands, she is reduced to a subordinate and almost passive part, only emphasized by the absence of expression on her features. Hence an incongruity is imparted to the central action of the picture, which becomes enigmatic. I conceive that in Apelles' painting Calumny was fiercely beautiful, intent on haling her victim to the judge and careless of those handmaidens of hers, serpent-natures of women fawning on her and striving to adorn and set off her beauty more richly, even while she strode forward with accusations on her lips. Botticelli, in making her callous and cold and seeming-reluctant, has expressed an idea more subtle and more true to general experience, but pictorially the motive is not fully realized.

Though these complexities make for weaknesses in the presentment of the allegory, they are atoned for by the vivid dramatic power of the painting. It is anything but an arrangement of frigid abstractions. It might be a scene from a Morality Play, passionately acted. And how wonderful an invention is the setting of the scene! The agitated figures move in a stately hall, richly ornamented with sculptured figures in niches and with stories in relief, while three tall arches let in a contrasted glimpse of still, empty water under clear, cloudless sky. This strange setting, in which the serene background counts for so much, prepares us at once for a scene removed from the ordinary human plane; and the gem-like lustre of the colouring, the white and purple and saffron and clear green of the dresses foiled by the black in the robes of Envy and Remorse, accord with the dream-like vividness of the conception.

## The Work of the Master

but the image of infinite hope in the arms of infinite tenderness, the little soft and helpless body cherished by the mother's hands as something more precious and wonderful than herself, and brooded over with thoughts that are all horizon. The hopes of love, the fears of love; both in the mother are without bound; for here is promise unmarred, possibility uncircumscribed. Christianity has given this theme to art as one of its central motives; and enriched it for imagination with a symbolism yet more profound and significant.

By how many ways of approach could the painter come to this theme, according to his temperament and his gift! To one, the absorbing thought might be that enshrined in the hymn of St. Bernard, familiar to us in the 33rd canto of Dante's *Paradise*, and in the lovely version made for the *Second Nun's Tale* by Chaucer, who also was in Florence in his day. His vision might be of the

Maid and mother, daughter of thy son,

who is 'humble and high over every creature,' and in the 'blissful cloister' of whose side the Eternal Love and Peace took man's shape: or, like Wordsworth's, of the

Woman above all women glorified,  
Our tainted nature's solitary boast,  
Purer than foam on central ocean tost,  
Brighter than eastern skies at daybreak strewn  
With fancied roses.

And the painter, with such thoughts in his mind, would paint his vision of the Madonna throned and in glory, with nothing less bright than gold for the sky about her, and nothing of earth but its flowers.

But the Madonna-pictures we most cherish are those in which the relationship of mother and child is most profoundly touched and enhanced; whether, as in that gracious and serene painting of Baldovinetti, now in the Louvre, the mother worships the baby lying before her knees, and the spaces of the sky seem to share in the ethereal tenderness of her thought; or whether, while clasping the child in her arms with all the passion of her human heart, she

### VI

WHEN we survey the work of Botticelli as a whole, we are struck by the comparative fewness of the themes of Christian art which he attempted. The Betrayal of Christ, the Agony in the Garden, 'Ecce Homo,' the Crucifixion, the Entombment, the Resurrection, the appearance to Mary Magdalen in the garden, the Ascension; of such central themes, some of which might be supposed to appeal specially to his genius, he made no important picture.

This limitation of subject must in great measure be set down to the accident of commission.

On the other hand, we have the Adoration of the Magi many times repeated; and a number of paintings of the Madonna and Child, with or without attendant saints.

Of all the Christian themes in art, that of the Madonna and Child is the one which has been the most repeated and remains the freshest. It is indeed a theme which is inexhaustible.

Any mother with her child in her arms is a perfect subject for painting. Intimate relationship coinciding with profound contrast offers at once a simple yet rich pictorial motive. Nothing can be more central, more humanly significant, more full of deep yet contained emotion. There are many subjects which it is easy to make rhetorical and insincere: this is one which makes rhetoric difficult. But lifted into the world of imagination, the theme becomes indefinitely deepened and enlarged; it becomes in reality a theme to which only the greatest are adequate. For now the artist is to paint not any mother's cherishing joy in her first-born,

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feels, and in her eyes shows, the coming future and the shadow of the world that is to wound, reject and kill its own divine Lover, and transfix her heart with more than mortal sorrow. No one, I think, has portrayed this latter aspect of the subject with such depth and truth as the austere Mantegna in a number of pictures, and especially in that haunting little picture in the Poldi-Pezzoli collection at Milan, where the mother, dark-eyed and presageful, with unfathomed depths of thought in her tender eyes, holds her face down to her sleeping baby's head and with her fingers presses his cheeks. Assuredly the fullness of the theme is missed if it be too removed from the common earth of our nature, disunited from the springs that are in all human breasts, the obscure but passionate and unbounded hope that is in women with their first-born, transcending all barriers of circumstance. Without that entwining hold, the everlasting poetry of the theme attenuates itself. Yet, on the other side, without the glorifying mystery it becomes, as in the countless sweet or amiable idylls with which we are familiar, robbed of its symbolic universality and significance, the hope of the world and the sorrow of the world.

For all the peculiar fascination of his Madonna-pictures, Botticelli is not among the supreme painters of this theme. Pater may have read too much of his own fancy into Botticelli's work, and certainly emphasizes unjustly the wan, dispirited languor and the peevishness which characterize rather the school-pieces than the master's own paintings. But his criticism is right, in so far as it draws attention to the painter's lack of interest in the relation between the Mother and the Child.

There is little or nothing of the passion of maternity in his Madonnas, who seem separated by sad thought from all the world, and sometimes, as in the San Barnaba altarpiece, scarcely conscious of the Child upon his mother's lap. In the picture of the Annunciation, which, though cold in colour and showing nothing of the master's own touch, is of the greatest beauty of design, the Virgin shrinks with deprecating gesture from the angel's message, bowing

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her head as if before the wind of a destiny too great to be borne. And this conception seems to pervade most of his Madonna-pictures.

It is most explicit in the tondo in the Uffizi called the Madonna with the Pomegranate. For in spite of the choir of boy angels thronging round her, with their songs and their lilies and their roses, and of the effluence of heavenly beams that is shed about her from above, the Virgin herself looks out with a face of ineffable trouble. Are we to say that the sentiment thus expressed belongs to something in the painter's own nature, or to his conception of the subject? Rather this latter: since we note that, as in other examples, the Child is no unconscious infant, but holds a pomegranate—symbol of the Fall of Man—in one hand and raises the other to bless. His divinity already seems to detach him from his human mother, and she is too conscious of that divinity to press him to her breast.

We shall wrong the depth and sincerity of Botticelli if we attribute the sadness of his Madonnas merely to a vague melancholy of sentiment. And yet one cannot help feeling that this lovely design, so admirably invented for the circular form, is somewhat baulked of its pictorial climax by the sadness of that central face among the fair heads clustering round it. For this moment and for this setting in the heavenly light, those eyes of sorrow seem ill in keeping; though we must add that perhaps just because of this so human incongruity, the picture lays a spell on our imagination more poignant than if it were more wholly joyful and angelical in its air:

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Far away we seem from those fair and tender Madonnas of Raphael and of Bellini, which charm us by their sweet humanity. Yet who shall say that Botticelli, with his abiding sense of the pain of love immingled with the mystery of life, has not a profounder conception of his theme, even if not always appropriate to the particular occasion?

Sometimes, indeed, he paints a happier sentiment, as in that

little round Madonna of the Ambrosiana, where the Virgin, kneeling, presses the milk from her breast, and the Child, with infantine struggling steps, comes towards her supported by an angel. The pictorial charm of this picture (not wholly happy in details and lacking the wonted intensity of the master) is immensely enhanced by the invention of the pavilion, of which other angels at each side pull apart the curtains, disclosing the intimacy of the scene and at the same time the vista of calm hills and trees and water beyond. It may be noted how real a part these attendant angels play in Botticelli's Madonna-paintings. They are no conventional accessories, but participators, adding a living richness to the design. This is notably the case with the most famous of Sandro's Madonnas, the 'Magnificat' of the Uffizi.

Restoration has disfigured, though by cheapening made more popular, this beautiful tondo. Botticelli never put the circular form of design to more admirable use. The disposition of the figures, so arranged that the eye, while resting on them, is led out to the serene distance of winding river and pearly sky beyond, is managed with the most natural ease. The circle is richly filled, yet not crowded; and the outstretched arms of the angels holding up the crown above the Virgin's head give an energy to the design, which otherwise might have been a little languid. How happy, too, the invention of the angel who looks over the heads of the other two who hold the book, and clasps their shoulders with his hands!

The Madonna here is pensive rather than sad, with a kind of tremulous pensiveness as she writes the words that tell of her exaltation and of the casting down of the proud and mighty. In its original state this picture must have been of a singular radiance; and, as in all the best of Botticelli's work, there is something suffused in the very design and colour of the picture which makes an appeal above and beyond the letter of the subject, so that even one wholly ignorant of its content would feel it as an expression of some transfiguring mystery, partaking deeply of human experience yet transcending that of any individual lot.

## THE MADONNA OF THE MAGNIFICAT

*Uffizi, Florence*



## The Work of the Master

What shall we say of that design in which Botticelli has portrayed the last hour of the Mother with her dead Son, the Pietà we know by the pictures at Munich and at Milan? Perhaps it is not the noblest or profoundest of conceptions; but granting the conception, it could not be expressed pictorially with more passionate vehemence. As if to emphasize the pathos of loss, the painter has portrayed the dead Christ as a beardless youth, with smooth fair limbs and head hanging backward. The attitude of the supine and relaxed form and the gesture of the Madonna on whose lap it lies, closing her eyes and sinking back in a rigid swoon, express by their very lines the utter abandonment of grief, the utter helplessness of death; and against the pallor of that young, dead body rises dark and rugged, behind, the stony sepulchre.

But we have still to speak of one of the latest of Botticelli's pictures, in which he returns on himself to recapture something of the virginal freshness of his prime, and infuses that into his later mood of spiritual trouble and ecstasy.

The little Adoration of the Shepherds in the National Gallery is in some senses the climax of Botticelli's art; it blends and fuses the lyric and dramatic strains in his nature, and in it we feel that his imagination, freed from all elements not entirely his own, expresses itself with perfect directness, disengaging the intense spirituality which belonged to his inmost character and which years of stress and trouble had made to burn with a whiter and more ardent flame. Here he seems to be unconscious of patron and public, careless also of that strong stream of naturalism and science which pervaded contemporary art, and to paint his thoughts, his inner vision, simply and passionately.

There was indeed a special reason for this entire possession of the artist by his subject.

He was painting not only a devotional picture, but his own hopes; his cherished conviction of the truth of Savonarola's prophecy that the Church of Christ was to be renewed and that all the woes of Italy were a chastening preparation for that renewal. So much

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may be gathered from the obscure inscription which Botticelli wrote in Greek at the top of the picture, and to which I have alluded earlier in this book.

The picture is pervaded by the spirit of joy, but a joy different from the sweet innocence and seraphic gaiety of Fra Angelico, and rather comparable to the joy of those released from prison and set free from grief, whose ecstasy is the keener because they have suffered much. And this is expressed pictorially. The forms of the figures, both human and angelic, are a little lean, a little haggard almost, no chosen types of conventional fairness and favour: and though there is radiance in the picture, there is also darkness and mystery, a twilight on which the dawn is winning.

The design is of the simplest; the arrangement symmetrical. Wonderful art is used in infusing variety into the symmetrical plan, but as if by a skill that from habit worked unconsciously.

In the various pictures of the Adoration of the Magi we have seen how Botticelli employs his invention to adumbrate the vastness of the world, out of the remoteness of which have come those kings and sages, the world's power and the world's wisdom, to humble themselves before the wonder of the new-born Child. But here the world and its greatness are removed. It is to the poor and common people of the field that the vision is disclosed, and angels walk among men in an accepted familiarity.

Over two strange masses of rock that slope toward each other is built the stall, its roof supported in front by two posts of wood. Under this penthouse the Virgin on her knees, oblivious of all else, hangs adoring over the Child, who looks up to his mother with arms outstretched. For once Botticelli has painted a Madonna who forgets her sadness and is lost in the joy of her motherhood. Joseph, deep in thought, sits by, with his head on his hands. The rectangular forms of the penthouse and its supports, set in the middle of the picture and occupying so much of its space, might have made the design stiff and dry: but the rigidity of its angles is relieved by the slanting ridges of the two bulks of rock, while, above, the straight

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level of the roof is subdued against the rich unevenness of tree-tops, and, below, a zig-zag path gives lines that lead in both directions out of the picture. In the sky a circle opens above, disclosing a dance of angels; and three angels, alighted like birds on the roof of the stall and singing together, unite that vision of the heavens to homely earth. But others have come down to the very earth and tread the grass with the shepherds, to whom with vehement gestures they point out the Child and his Mother, bidding them gaze and worship, and in the foreground meet with men and throw their arms about them and kiss them, in token of the new light and peace that are come that night into the world, 'peace and goodwill towards men.' Little devils, like vermin, slink obscurely into crannies and holes.

Few paintings in the world are more successful than this in picturing as a thing seen, a thing experienced through the senses by the soul, a spiritual event.

Van Eyck's wonderful *Maries at the Sepulchre* has this character also: but with all its beautiful solemnity and searching vision, that picture falls far short of Botticelli's in natural exaltation and intensity of emotion. To glance from the one painting to the other is illuminating; for in spite of the homeliness of type and the impassioned reality which remove Botticelli's panel so far from 'classical' or *Raphaelesque* tradition, we feel at once how powerful and pervading is the rhythmical element, the sense of movement,—a sort of singing quality such as charms in a born master of music,—which informs the whole design with the grace and buoyancy of nature. It is just this rare combination which forms the fascinating complexity of his art.

In the *Coronation of the Virgin*, Botticelli invented a pictorial device of marvellous beauty, the ring of angels dancing in the air. Here he repeats that device with still greater felicity, for instead of being separate in mood from the lower part of the design it is its flower and crown, like a sort of perfume arising from the gracious scene below and embodying itself visibly in these floating,

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circling forms. How admirably pictorial, too, is the invention of the light crowns of gold suspended swinging from the ribboned boughs of olive which they carry in their hands, and accentuating the sense of airy motion! And this enchanting sense of motion is heightened again by contrast with the breathless stillness of the trees beneath, between the dark stems of which, under the solemn band of foliage, appears the remote paleness of the sky.

### *THE NATIVITY*

*National Gallery*



## VII

**B**EFORE considering, as a conclusion to our study, the drawings made for the *Divina Commedia*, let me say a word on the engravings associated with Botticelli's name.

It is in connection with Dante that Vasari first mentions these. I have already given a brief account of the famous edition of Dante's poem by Landino and of the nineteen engravings made for that edition from Botticelli's designs. Few copies of the book contain the whole set. The printer began by printing the copper-plates directly on the page; but the text at the back showed through the paper and only two (or at most three) of the plates were so printed, the rest being printed on separate sheets and then pasted in the book.

The chief interest of these engravings is the fact that they supply designs to several early cantos of the *Inferno*, the illustrations to which are missing from the series of drawings in the Vatican and at Berlin. For indeed one finds little of Botticelli's power or charm in these translations by a poor engraver. And one is almost tempted to surmise that, after all, disgust on the part of the artist may have had as much to do with the interruption to the scheme of illustration by engraving as the difficulties experienced by the printers in using copper-plates instead of woodcuts for the embellishment of the edition. The summons to Rome may have proved a fortunate pretext for discontinuing the work.

Among the cantos for which a design is missing in the great series of drawings, is Canto V. of the *Inferno*, with the episode of Paolo and Francesca. One might think the subject apt to Botticelli's

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genius; but in the little print the clumsy touch of the engraver makes it impossible to do more than divine the artist's intention, though we can feel what impetuosity of movement must have been in the pen-strokes of the original drawing, what intense vitality of anguish in the floating naked forms of lovers, and in the figures of Paolo and Francesca, entwined together as they hover over Dante's head, what pathetic sweetness. But the general invention of this, as of other scenes, disappoints, for reasons we shall see when we come to the series of drawings. The crowding of more than one episode into a single small design prevents unity of impression. The devils are childishly conceived, in the old medieval manner. And if these faults are common to the drawings as to the prints, we realize at once when we look at any of the drawings how ill Botticelli was served by the engravers with their '*cattiva maniera*,' as Vasari calls it.

One can hardly help regretting that Botticelli did not himself engrave his own designs.

Original engravings by masters of high rank are all too rare: and the clear and swift incision of the burin on the copper should have been a congenial instrument of expression for an artist who felt in line as Botticelli did.

To attain mastery of the burin, however, demands the long labour of close apprenticeship; and the easier method of etching with acid was probably unknown to the Florentines of his day. If Botticelli had the wish therefore to multiply his designs by means of engraving, he could only have recourse to the engravers' workshops. But in spite of the assertion of Vasari that one Baccio Baldini, a goldsmith, having no gift of invention, made all his prints from designs by Botticelli, there exist, after all, but very few engravings which we can confidently associate with Sandro's name.

I will not go into the rather intricate questions connected with the schools of Florentine engraving in the fifteenth century. These have been elucidated, so far as our present knowledge allows, in Sir Sidney Colvin's edition of the Florentine Picture-Chronicle, to which I have already referred in these pages, and still further in the

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Catalogue of Early Italian Engravings in the British Museum by Sir Sidney Colvin and Mr. Arthur Hind.

Suffice it to say that there seems to have been no one school of craftsmen especially associated with Botticelli's designs. We have engravings based upon his drawings, executed both in the '*fine*' and the '*broad*' manner, as it has been found convenient to call the two schools or traditions which flourished in Florence during his life-time; the fine manner being based on the methods of the niello workers and the broad manner being the method of those who engraved for printing.

To the fine manner belong the set of engravings made for Landino's edition of Dante, already discussed. Much more remarkable than these is the print, of which a single impression only is known to exist, the Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne in the British Museum. Mr. Horne, who reproduced this print in his book, claimed it as a translation from a drawing by Botticelli. He has since changed his opinion, and now recognizes definitely in the design the hand of a follower, Bartolommeo di Giovanni, whom Mr. Berenson has made known as '*Alumno di Domenico*.' However this may be, I for one find it difficult to believe that this print, whether at second or third hand, does not derive from some sketch of Botticelli's own. Technically, the engraving shows an inexperienced and feeble hand, which we may imagine to be the clumsy translation from a beautiful drawing. The proportions and types of the figures and other details certainly show a variation from the master's manner, and here a follower's handiwork may be divined. But the conception and fundamental design show such a poetic energy and richness of invention as one can hardly help feeling to be inspired from some perhaps hasty study of Sandro's which he had laid aside unfinished. In any case, as with so many paintings by pupils and followers, what attracts us and arrests us is the measure in which the master's inspiration, so charged with personal character and feeling, has been imbibed.

Externally, no doubt, the design derives from antique reliefs;

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but in what a newly-felt romance is it steeped! The whole frieze-like composition is impregnated with Bacchic rapture; vines are everywhere, hanging in festoons from above and half-smothering the shaggy Faun who climbs upon the chariot of the god to pull down the teeming clusters; the very chariot itself is a great vine-stock that sends out living boughs and shoots and trailing leaves, forming at once the shafts by which two dwarfish centaurs, playing music, draw it along, and the crook of the seat whereon Bacchus sits languid, with heavily-wreathed and drooping head and with arm clasped about the half-frightened form of Ariadne beside him; and the baby-satyr at their feet in the front of the car leans back into a wealth of leaf and cluster. Vines twist about the lopped tree-stems, by which the procession passes, and seem to have stretched out to meet each other and, twisting together, hang down their huge bunches and twisted tendrils to mingle with the clashing instrument—metal wine-bowls dashed together—with which the dancing maenads who precede the chariot make wild music.

One thing in the design seems due to misunderstanding, such a mistake as a man elaborating from a sketch might well commit. The vine-stock which makes a pillar and canopy at the back of the car, above the figures of Bacchus and Ariadne, sends out horizontal branches to mix and twine with the branch that comes from the stationary tree-stem in the centre of the frieze. Even though the vine be so evidently supernatural in its growth, we cannot help being shocked by the impossibility of the movement supposed to be going forward, or at least the collapse and disaster immediately awaiting the movement. That this is due to a misunderstanding, not of the engraver, who would presumably be translating a finished drawing, but of one copying and elaborating a sketch by another, is made likely by the fact that a tree-stem with lopped branches does appear behind the car, though suspended in air, and instead of supporting the twisted vine has become inextricably confused with the vine-stock which forms the chariot.

From the extreme rarity of so many of the early Florentine

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prints, this Bacchus and Ariadne being by no means the only one which exists in but a single impression, we infer that numbers have been lost. Among the lost engravings must be the illustration or illustrations made by Botticelli for Savonarola's 'Triumph of the Faith' and recorded by Vasari. Sandro's strong influence is visible in one version of the well-known sets of Prophets and of Sibyls. But his own design is recognized with certainty in the very large and impressive engraving of the Assumption of the Virgin. This is perhaps the most important of the prints made in the 'broad manner.' Coarsened and weakened as it was by the engraver, the original drawing or painting from which this was done must have been a splendid thing. Below, the apostles, rugged-featured men with thick hair and long beards, are gathered with many gestures round the empty tomb, while, above, the Virgin appears in a glory in the heavens and bestows her girdle on St. Thomas, where he kneels, apart from the rest, on the hill-side. The glory which surrounds the Virgin is formed of young angels floating close about her with lilies and palms, with roses and olive-branches, in their hands; and on either side, a little aloof, is a little band of angels in the air playing upon divers instruments of music. One may imagine how, in the original drawing, Botticelli would have brought by some magic of suggestion to our senses the illusion of colour and perfume, of radiance and song, as he has done in some of the later designs to the *Divina Commedia*.

There are a few other engravings which show the trace of Botticelli's inspiration or influence; but of these I need not speak.

## VIII

IN the tenth canto of the *Purgatorio* Dante describes how, after emerging with his guide on the first narrow terrace of the Mount, he discerned that the upright side of the hill was of white marble and adorned with reliefs so wonderful that not Polycletus only but Nature herself would be put to shame beside them.

Every reader of the *Divine Comedy* must have been struck with the description that Dante gives of these sculptures; for in describing these works of his own imagination the poet must assuredly have expressed his own ideal of the sculptor's art. What quality is it then in these reliefs which Dante seizes on as overpowering all others? It is the impression they give, not of mere similitude, but of the animated character and movement of life. The relief of the Annunciation makes him feel that the carved Angel is actually opening his lips to utter 'Ave,' and in the very attitude and gesture of the Virgin the words 'Ecce Ancilla Domini' seemed to be imprinted 'like a figure stamped in wax.' Again, as he contemplates the relief of the Ark drawn along by oxen and the seven choirs preceding it, Dante, with his singular analytical precision, notes the conflict between his two senses, his ear telling him that the choirs are dumb, but his eyes saying 'Yes, they are singing'; so, too, he seemed to smell the smoke of the incense even against the testimony of his nostrils. In the relief of Trajan and the Widow the horsemen trampled and the eagles above moved visibly in the wind, and the emperor seemed to argue with the poor woman and she to importune him.

Come persona in cui dolor s'affretta.

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'Visible speech,' 'visibile parlare,' the poet calls this lively effect of the sculptor's art.

This kind of intense expressiveness, whereby the emotion possessing a man or woman stamps its character on the very attitude of the figure, is just what Leonardo affirms to be the main object of the artist: 'to paint man and the intentions of his soul.' It is, too, the quality which we have found exhibited in Botticelli's painting at its best; and far more than most painters he shows the feeling for movement and the power of suggesting it, which Dante praises in these ideal sculptures.

Botticelli, as we have seen, was an assiduous student of Dante. The study of the poet was one of the great influences of his life. Vasari, indeed, uses a phrase which, taken literally, implies that Sandro wrote a commentary on the *Divine Comedy*, or a portion of it. 'Comentò,' he says, 'una parte di Dante, e figurò lo inferno e le mise in stampa.' Mr. Horne suggests that these words should be taken as a single pleonastic expression, the designs themselves being the commentary: and this may be true, though the painter is quite likely to have made notes on the poem for his private use, even if he wrote no systematic commentary. In any case Vasari's statement that he wasted infinite time in the study of Dante is doubtless true, in the sense that he took the illustrations to the *Divine Comedy* very seriously and found in them profoundly congenial matter.

We should then expect that in this labour of love Botticelli would show his genius at its freest and most original.

Yet in some ways these designs are disappointing; at any rate the designs to the *Inferno*. They are not adequate to the poem.

There are two reasons for this. In the first place, Botticelli could not approach his subject with a wholly fresh mind. The study given to the poem in Florence, to its exact topography and chronology, had already been immense; and, as Mr. Horne has shown, Sandro was a friend of one of the most eminent of the students and commentators of Dante, Antonio Manetti. But, more than this, there was, at least for the *Inferno*, a traditional type of

## The Art of Botticelli

pictorial illustration which had grown up among the miniaturists ; and Botticelli took this type, just as he took the traditional types of composition for the cycle of Christian subjects, as a foundation or starting-point for his own work.

The second reason is a deeper one, and lies in Botticelli's own nature.

Mr. Horne points out that, more than any later illustrator, Botticelli is true to Dante's own conception of the style in which he cast his poem. The poem was called a Comedy, not only because it progressed from horror and anguish to ecstasy and light, but because it was written in the humble manner of common speech, as opposed to the exalted tone of Tragedy. Instead of a grand and generalizing treatment, suppressing detail and fixing attention on heroic forms relieved against vast spaces, we have a searching and relentless particularity, omitting nothing because of its everyday or mean associations, and having, on the contrary, recourse to the most familiar and 'vulgar' comparisons in order to bring before the reader's mind vividly, as an occurrence in the street, what the poet saw in the worlds beyond this world. Everything in the vision is described, defined and measured with a precision of observation which not one man in a million brings to his material experiences.

Now, it is true that Botticelli accepts this manner of conception in a general way. He does not generalize, he does not recast the matter of the poem in heroic form, as Michelangelo did, we may be sure, in his lost drawings for Dante. But he fails to give us anything like the impressions we receive from the *Inferno* itself.

Partly, no doubt, the reason is to be found in the medium of the illustrator. The great majority of the drawings are in pen and ink, over a preliminary sketch with the metal stylus ; but a few have been elaborated as finished miniatures in colour. Whether it was the artist's intention to complete the entire series in this manner, or whether after a few experiments he abandoned the method and chose the simple line as more congenial to his instincts, we cannot tell and need not enquire. I certainly think it fortunate that the majority

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are as he left them. But what an immensely limited instrument the pen line is, as Mr. Berenson has pointed out, for realizing or even suggesting the pictures that rise before us, with their gloom and flame and incessant change of movement, as we read the *Inferno* ! And again Botticelli has chosen, like the miniaturists who preceded him, to represent usually more than one episode, sometimes as many as seven or eight in a single scene ; so that we miss the concentration and intensity of a vision absorbed by one event.

Botticelli's medium has this truth to the original, that it defines everything. But then it discards atmosphere ; and how great a part this plays in Dante ! Even in the *Purgatorio*, where Botticelli begins to be more at home with his subject, how can the pen-line compete for a moment with, for instance, Dante's description of the coming of the Angel, the 'divine bird' ? First, there is a light like Mars in the west before the dawn, reddening through the mist over the sea ; then it waxes bigger and bigger with its inconceivable swiftness of approach ; and then on each side of it appears something white, and beneath it, little by little, another whiteness ; and at last the first whitenesses appear as wings, and Virgil cries 'Behold, the Angel of God ! Bend thy knees and fold thy hands.' Yet more in the *Inferno* do we miss the power of shadow, the revelation of dark and light, the storm of shifting colours.

But quite apart from the abstract character of the medium, which has its own compensating qualities, Botticelli's visions of Hell fall far short of the terrible intensity of the poet's, no less than of his severe grandeur. His ever-present impulse to create sweet rhythms of fluid lines makes something of the effect that Spenser leaves in describing such things as the foulness of Duessa, with horrid detail, yet with such unfailing flow of music that the horror is half-lost in the melody of it.

Michelangelo, who would have created images and forms so different, no doubt, from Dante's, would yet have risen to Dante's height of terror and of pity. And here we touch the inferiority of Botticelli, as compared with the greatest artists. Exquisitely respon-

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sive to beauty, and at the same time gifted with a wonderful power of representing action with dramatic energy and vehemence, he had not that suffering sense of the world's wrong infused with the light of profound understanding, that marks the creators of tragedy; nor had he that power and depth of a comprehensive and commanding humanity which enable the greatest masters to survey the world from a central standpoint, to grasp it and press out its whole meaning, not only its sweetness or its pain.

The mere mention of Michelangelo is enough to remind us of the difference, and of all that Botticelli was incapable of attaining. When, therefore, Mr. Horne emphasizes the difference between Michelangelo's exalted tragic style and Dante's professedly homely manner, we feel constrained to answer that this is but an insignificant difference compared with the power and greatness of spirit which unites those two sublime masters. And when Mr. Horne goes on to imply that Botticelli was nearer akin to the spirit of Dante than Michelangelo, we cannot assent without reserve. Since Michelangelo, he says, 'all the more considerable illustrations of the poem have been conceived in an heroic or ideal vein, such as Dante himself was careful to dissociate from his *Commedia*. The designs of Blake and Flaxman are the most notable instances of illustrations conceived in this vein; and perhaps it is the only one in which the poem could be adequately treated, in our modern view of its theme, so indelible has been the influence of Michelangelo.' Yes, but it is not only the influence of Michelangelo, it is that in Dante which is akin to Michelangelo which makes us feel Botticelli's *Inferno* inadequate. For though Dante's vision is so searching and intense and his record of his vision so particular and his manner of speech often so precisely literal and filled with homely comparisons, yet this is only a part of the truth about him; we must add that he unites with all his vivid and insistent reality and minuteness of presentation the unfailing grandeur and loftiness of tone that are inseparable from his own exalted seriousness of spirit, and also an extreme capacity to feel. Nowhere in literature is there to be found

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the same union of qualities that make Dante unique and incomparable; still less perhaps in art. But if we seek a designer capable of matching the impression made on us by Dante's *Hell* we should rather look for him in a Michelangelo than in any lesser man, even though Michelangelo uses a different kind of language and suppresses so large a part of what makes up the character of Dante's poem.

Yet if we must recognize that only a master of the supreme strength and loftiness of Michelangelo could prove adequate to the terror and pity of Dante, let us remember that there are other sides of his genius to which even Michelangelo is inadequate and where his giant powers find no congenial matter. In the *Purgatory* and even more in the *Paradise* there is a spiritual ecstasy which could find but little scope or outlet through either the mood or the manner of Michelangelo's art. And in his visions of the *Purgatory* and the *Paradise* Botticelli's peculiar qualities and powers become more and more liberated, and win more and more of our admiration, till with the concluding cantos of the *Paradise* we are left enchanted.

Nor, in spite of the incapacity of the artist to impress us by his designs to the *Inferno* in anything like the measure of the poet, must we fail to acknowledge the elements of power and beauty in many of them.

There is nothing that remains with us so memorably as Blake's wonderful invention of the circling waves of tremulous flame in which are borne the floating passionate spirits of lost lovers, and Paolo and Francesca. Nor has Botticelli Blake's extraordinary sense for the elemental, and for elemental energies, which gives vitality to the strangest and most unearthly of his creatures.

The light and swift and nervous strokes of Botticelli's pen, so apt for rendering buoyancy, agility, and grace of form and movement, lack the biting power and severity, lack also the sense of mass and weight, which these grim and passionate scenes demand. His Giants in the Ninth Circle have something of youthful grace, reminding us of Michelangelo's David; they tower in stature, but have no superhuman character. At the very outset, in the 'selva oscura'

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where the poet meets the leopard, the lion, and the wolf, our eyes are charmed by the delicate tracery of leafy pattern, the oak tree and the pine with all its cones, and we seem at the first page of some romantic fairy-tale rather than on the brink of Hell's anguish. In the next scenes we pass to the torments of the lost, but even these are translated into a kind of gaiety by the running, lively lines of the pen which delights so naively in adding bat-like wings to the absurd-faced devils. Yet often in this portion or that of a design are nobly-imagined things; as the flight of the messenger of heaven passing over Styx while the spirits in the marsh scatter in fright 'like frogs' (Canto IX.), and the centaurs on the rocks drawing their arrows on the creatures writhing in the river of blood (Canto XII.), and the forms tormented by flames (Canto XVI.), though here again the rhythmic play of the line brings an incongruous exhilaration. Where so much is involved, dispersed, and intricate—the picture of the souls in the prickly thorn-wood is like some strange pattern of a carpet, and the stony backgrounds in Cantos XII., XXIV. and XXV. are a shapeless incoherence—it is a relief to come to a design like that to Canto XXVII., where there are but the two figures of Dante and Virgil (only once represented, and not, as so often, repeated) going up the rocky stair with the spirits of wild flame issuing from the ground at either side.

But still greater is the relief when we arrive at the Mount of Purgatory and emerge from Hell. In the designs for the Inferno Botticelli certainly fails in expressing his subject pictorially; for we apprehend the meaning of them with our intelligence and delight in the vehement grace of the drawing as something separate; and often we feel that the artist was baffled and remained outside those sins and punishments, from a kind of innocence of imagination. We share his recovery of buoyancy and confidence with the very first page of the Purgatorio, where the souls are disembarking on the reedy shore; and in the next design the beautiful motion of the angel in his empty bark, without oar or sail, swiftly departing over the water, tells us of the artist's felicity in finding motives after his

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own heart. There are wonderful things in the succeeding drawings; the souls of the envious huddled together in couples against the rock, up which the poets ascend; the souls passing through the midst of the flames; the bas-relief of Trajan and the Widow, with its animated throngs and pattern of lances. But a new freshness and fragrance of atmosphere begins with Canto XXVIII., where Matilda, on the other side of the stream, is picking flowers, and the poets stand among the slim trees, delicate with sparse vernal leaves, of the Earthly Paradise. And the charm of this design, full of stillness and solitude, gives by contrast an added splendour to the irruption of the heavenly pageant, portrayed at successive moments in the following designs. These are among the richest and most marvellous creations of Botticelli's imagination: the movement of the mystical procession; the seven angels at its head bearing the seven candle-sticks, with the stream from the tall candle-flames blown backwards in long lines and the erect wings of the gryphon soaring through them out of sight; the flowers scattered in the air; the triumphal car; the sense of unearthly radiance and of singing mouths; all seems to spring from the very heart of the artist, who draws as if his soul was in his pen.

And yet, with all their splendour,—it is hard to realize that the bare pen-line could communicate so much of light and colour as seems to vibrate in these pages—these designs yield in imaginative depth of utterance to the coming designs of Paradise. Perhaps even in that glorious conclusion to the Purgatory there is just a thought too much of remembered triumphs and processions in the streets of Florence, too much of pageantry, too little of Beatrice and Dante: but, if so, the Paradise makes amends. For here in design after design we see those two, at last together, in various attitudes of converse, as the changing emotion writes on their faces; alone, or only with flights of angels soaring past them, or together in a circle (the sphere of Mercury) that is a field of trembling flames; or again, Dante runs tremulously toward Beatrice who clasps her arms round him to lift him up the heavenly ladder; and yet further, in two

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designs of incomparable radiance and movement, they stand in the ninth heaven and contemplate the heavenly hosts, the angelic orders, like 'an embodied ecstasy': and at last, in the empyrean, they float away with a rushing motion over the light which streams beneath them in form of a river with strange flowers on its banks.

As Mr. Horne reminds us, the foliage in this last design (the rest are unfinished) recalls the inventions of Blake, just as the rushing motion of the figures recalls his beautiful water-colour 'The River of Life.' It would be interesting, had I the space, to compare some of the most typical designs of these two greatest among Dante's illustrators. The two sets of drawings are in many ways totally dissimilar: but these so different artists have in common, as I noted in an earlier page, a natural faculty, scarcely attained elsewhere in European art, of communicating to us the reality of floating movement and of rushing flight; a faculty which seems especially to belong to artists of poetic nature and of spiritual imagination, to seers of visions. Blake, a born mystic, has the spiritual element in his art preponderant and extreme from the first; he is isolated, most definite, and passionately single-minded. The forms of his imagination seem never to have been dwellers on earth at all. But Botticelli, a nature more flexible and complex, submits in his impressible youth to all the influences of his time, becomes the most esteemed and practised painter among his contemporaries, taking all the round of accepted subjects for his theme; and only fitfully and by degrees disengages the most personal and original impulses of his art. And this strife and mixture in his nature are reflected in the multiplicity and agitation which characterize so many of his creations. The plenitude of unity, the repose which contains even the most troubled compositions of the greatest masters, is lacking to him. Consciously or unconsciously, he harks back to an older style, to the rich detail and ingenuous devices of medieval tradition. He was, we have seen, a born master of pictorial invention; but invention, though a rare and splendid gift, is not perhaps among the supreme gifts of the artist. But as the years go on, he seems to separate more and more

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from the master-tendencies of his time, from the passion for pictorial unity and grandeur which Leonardo sought through the medium of expressive light and shade; he, on the contrary, seeks more and more to express his ideas through the more primitive medium of line. The contours in his later pictures become more definite and expressive, and in the drawings for Dante's *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* he seems at last to have found himself, to have purged his art of all that was not spontaneous and his own. We realize how little to him, essentially, the elements of colour and mass, much less of chiaroscuro, had meant, exquisite as in passage after passage his colour had been. And with this liberation of his utterance, the hidden spirituality which had troubled his earlier art with melancholy and longings never wholly quieted by the world, wells forth like a fountain unclosed. We have noted how in the *Adoration of the Shepherds* in the National Gallery even the angels have a look of spirits that have wept and suffered before attaining to release and rapture; and how in the dramatic pictures of his last years the painter seems so far from the contented repose of the old that an almost feverish unrest consumes him. Even the ecstasy of the designs for Dante's *Paradise* seems to shine through tears of experience; and in that page, at the end, where Dante and Beatrice run on air over the river of light, and even as we look on them have almost vanished in their swiftness, we feel the spirit of the painter running with them, athirst to escape and to be free, filled with ineffable joy to shake off at last the burden of the never-satisfying world.

