

LETTER XLIII.

DRESDEN.

DEAR:--

I went to Dresden as an art-pilgrim, principally to see Raphael's great picture of the Madonna di San Sisto, supposing that to be the best specimen of his genius out of Italy. On my way I diligently studied the guide book of that indefatigable friend of the traveller, Mr. Murray, in which descriptions of the finest pictures are given, with the observations of artists; so that inexperienced persons may know exactly what to think, and where to think it. My expectations had been so often disappointed, that my pulse was somewhat calmer. Nevertheless, the glowing eulogiums of these celebrated artists could not but stimulate anticipation. We made our way, therefore, first to the salon devoted to the works of Raphael and Correggio, and soon found ourselves before the grand painting. Trembling with eagerness, I looked up. Was that the picture? W. whispered to me, "I think we have mistaken the painting."

"No, we have not," said I, struggling to overcome the disappointment which I found creeping over me. The source of this disappointment was the thin and faded appearance of the coloring, which at first suggested to me the idea of a water-colored sketch. It had evidently suffered barbarously in the process of cleaning, a fact of which I had

been forewarned. This circumstance has a particularly unfavorable effect on a picture of Raphael's, because his coloring, at best, is delicate and reserved, and, as compared with, that of Rubens, approaches to poverty; so that he can ill afford to lose any thing in this way.

Then as to conception and arrangement, there was much which annoyed me. The Virgin and Child in the centre are represented as rising in the air; on one side below them is the kneeling figure of Pope Sixtus; and on the other, that of St. Barbara. Now this Pope Sixtus is, in my eyes, a very homely old man, and as I think no better of homely old men for being popes, his presence in the picture is an annoyance. St. Barbara, on the other side, has the most beautiful head and face that could be represented; but then she is kneeling on a cloud with such a judicious and coquettish arrangement of her neck, shoulders, and face, to show every fine point in them, as makes one feel that no saint (unless with a Parisian education) could ever have dropped into such a position in the abandon of holy rapture. In short, she looks like a theatrical actress; without any sympathy with the solemnity of the religious conception, who is there merely because a beautiful woman was wanted to fill up the picture.

Then that old, faded green curtain, which is painted as hanging down on either side of the picture, is, to my eye, a nuisance. The whole interest, therefore, of the piece concentrates in the centre figures, the Madonna and Child, and two angel children gazing up from the foot

of the picture. These angel children were the first point on which my mind rested, in its struggle to overcome its disappointment, and bring itself en rapport with the artist. In order fully to appreciate their spiritual beauty, one must have seen an assortment of those things called angels, which occur in the works of the old masters. Generally speaking, I know of nothing more calculated to moderate any undue eagerness to go to heaven than the common run of canvas angels. Far the greater part are roistering, able-bodied fellows with wings, giving indisputable signs of good living, and of a coarseness slightly suggestive of blackguardism. Far otherwise with these fair creatures, with their rainbow-colored wings, and their serene, upturned eyes of thought baptized with emotion. They are the first things I have seen worthy of my ideas of Raphael.

As to the Madonna, I think that, when Wilkie says she is "nearer the perfection of female elegance and grace than any thing in painting," he does not speak with discrimination. Mere physical beauty and grace are not the characteristics of the figure: many more perfect forms can be found, both on canvas and in marble. But the merits of the figure, to my mind, are, first, its historic accuracy in representing the dark-eyed Jewish maiden; second, the wonderful fulness and depth of expression thrown into the face; and third, the mysterious resemblance and sympathy between the face of the mother and that of the divine child. To my eye, this picture has precisely that which Murillo's Assumption in the Louvre wants: it has an unfathomable depth of earnestness. The Murillo is its superior in coloring and

grace of arrangement. At first sight of the Murillo every one exclaims at once, "How beautiful!"--at sight of this they are silent. Many are at first disappointed; but the picture fastens the attention, and grows upon the thoughts; while that of Murillo is dismissed with the words of admiration on the lips.

This picture excited my ponderings and inquiries. There was a conflict of emotion in that mother's face, and shadowed mysteriously in the child's, of which I queried, "Was it fear? was it sorrow? was it adoration and faith? was it a presage of the hour when a sword should pierce through her own soul? Yet, with this, was there not a solemn triumph in the thought that she alone, of all women, had been called to that baptism of anguish? And in that infant face there seemed a foreshadowing of the spirit which said, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour."

The deep-feeling soul which conceived this picture has spread over the whole divine group a tender and transparent shadow of sorrow. It is this idea of sorrow in heaven--sorrow, for the lost, in the heart of God himself--which forms the most sacred mystery of Christianity; and into this innermost temple of sorrow had Raphael penetrated. He is a sacred poet, and his poetry has precisely that trait which Milton lacks--tenderness and sympathy. This picture, so unattractive to the fancy in merely physical recommendations, has formed a deeper part of my inner consciousness than any I have yet seen. I can recall it with

perfect distinctness, and often return to ponder it in my heart.

In this room there was also the chef-d'uvre of Correggio--his celebrated *Notte*, or the Nativity of Jesus; and, that you may know what I ought to have thought, I will quote you a sentence from Wilkie. "All the powers of art are here united to make a perfect work. Here the simplicity of the drawing of the Virgin and Child is shown in contrast with the foreshortening of the group of angels--the strongest unity of effect with the most perfect system of intricacy. The emitting the light from the body of the child, though a supernatural illusion, is eminently successful. The matchless beauty of the Virgin and Child, the group of angels overhead, the daybreak in the sky, and the whole arrangement of light and shadow, give it a right to be considered, in conception at least, the greatest of his works."

I said before that light and shadow were Correggio's gods--that the great purpose for which he lived, moved, and had his being, was to show up light and shadow. Now, so long as he paints only indifferent objects,--Nymphs, and Fauns, and mythologic divinities,--I had no objection. Light and shadow are beautiful things, capable of a thousand blendings, softenings, and harmonizings, which one loves to have represented: the great Artist of all loves light and shadow; why else does he play such a magical succession of changes upon them through all creation? But for an artist to make the most solemn mystery of religion a mere tributary to the exhibition of a trick of art, is a piece of profanity. What was in this man's head when he

painted this representation of the hour when his Maker was made flesh that he might redeem a world? Nothing but chiaro-scuro and foreshortening. This overwhelming scene would give him a fine chance to do two things: first, to represent a phosphorescent light from the body of the child; and second, to show off some foreshortened angels. Now, as to these angels, I have simply to remark that I should prefer a seraph's head to his heels; and that a group of archangels, kicking from the canvas with such alarming vigor, however much it may illustrate foreshortening, does not illustrate either glory to God in the highest, or peace on earth and good will to men. Therefore I have quarrelled with Correggio, as I always expected to do if he profaned the divine mysteries. How could any one, who had a soul to understand that most noble creation of Raphael, turn, the next moment, to admire this?

Here also are six others of Correggio's most celebrated paintings. They are all mere representations of the physical, with little of the moral. His picture of the Virgin and Child represents simply a very graceful, beautiful woman, holding a fine little child. His peculiar excellences in the management of his lights and shades appear in all.

In one of the halls we found a Magdalen by Battoni, which gave me more pleasure, on first sight, than any picture in the gallery. It is a life-sized figure of the Magdalen stretched upon the ground, reading an open Bible. I like it, first, because the figure is every way beautiful and well proportioned; second, on account of an elevated

simplicity in the arrangement and general effect. The dark, rocky background throws out distinctly the beautiful figure, raised on one elbow, her long, golden hair floating loosely down, as she bends forward over her book with parted lips, slightly flushed cheek, and an air of rapt and pleased attention. Though the neck and bosom are exposed, yet there is an angelic seriousness and gravity in the conception of the piece which would check an earthly thought. The woman is of that high class about whom there might seem to be a hovering angelic presence--the perfection of beauty and symmetry, without a tinge of sensual attraction.

All these rooms are full of artists copying different paintings,--some upon slabs of Dresden china,--producing pictures of exquisite finish, and very pretty as boudoir ornaments.

After exhausting this first room, we walked through the galleries, which I will name, to give you some idea of their extent.

Two rooms, of old German and Dutch masters, are curious,--as exhibiting the upward struggles of art. Many of the pictures are hard as a tavern sign, and as ill drawn; but they mark the era of dawning effort.

Then a long corridor of Dutch paintings, in which Rubens figures conspicuously, displaying, as usual, all manner of scarlet abominations, mixed with most triumphant successes. He has a boar hunt

here, which is absolutely terrific. Rubens has a power peculiar to himself of throwing into the eyes of animals the phosphorescent magnetic gleam of life and passion. Here also was a sketch of his for a large picture at Munich of the Last Judgment, in which the idea of physical torture is enlarged upon with a most revolting vigor of imagery.

Then a small room devoted to the Spanish and Italian schools, containing pictures by Murillo and Velasquez. Then the French hall, where were two magnificent Claudes, the finest I had yet seen. They were covered with glass, (a bad arrangement,) which rendered one of them almost entirely unseeable. I studied these long, with much interest. The combinations were poetical, the foregrounds minutely finished, even to the painting of flowers, and the fine invisible veil of ether that covers the natural landscape given as I have never before seen it. The peculiarity of these pieces is, that they are painted in green--a most common arrangement in God's landscapes, but very uncommon in those of great masters. Painters give us trees and grounds, brown, yellow, red, chocolate, any color, in short, but green. The reason of this is, that green is an exceedingly difficult color to manage. I have seen, sometimes, in spring, set against a deep-blue sky, an array of greens, from lightest yellow to deepest blue of the pines, tipped and glittering with the afternoon's sun, yet so swathed in some invisible, harmonizing medium, that the strong contrasts of color jarred upon no sense. All seemed to be bound by the invisible cestus of some celestial Venus. Yet what painter would dare attempt the same?



Herein lies the particular triumph of Claude. It is said that he took his brush and canvas into the fields, and there studied, hour after hour, into the mysteries of that airy medium which lies between the eye and the landscape, as also between the foreground and the background. Hence he, more than others, succeeds in giving the green landscape and the blue sky the same effect that God gives them. If, then, other artists would attain a like result, let them not copy Claude, but Claude's Master. Would that our American artists would remember that God's pictures are nearer than Italy. To them it might be said, (as to the Christian,) "The word is nigh thee." When we shall see a New England artist, with his easel, in the fields, seeking, hour after hour, to reproduce on the canvas the magnificent glories of an elm, with its firmament of boughs and branches,--when he has learned that there is in it what is worth a thousand Claudes--then the morning star of art will have risen on our hills. God send us an artist with a heart to reverence his own native mountains and fields, and to veil his face in awe when the great Master walks before his cottage door. When shall arise the artist whose inspiration shall be in prayer and in communion with God?--whose eye, unsealed to behold his beauty in the natural world, shall offer up, on canvas, landscapes which shall be hymns and ascriptions?

By a strange perversity, people seem to think that the Author of nature cannot or will not inspire art; but "He that formed the eye, shall he not see? he that planted the ear, shall he not hear?" Are not God's works the great models, and is not sympathy of spirit with the Master necessary to the understanding of the models?

But to continue our walk. We entered another Dutch apartment, embellished with works by Dietrich, prettily colored, and laboriously minute; then into a corridor devoted chiefly to the works of Rembrandt and scholars. In this also were a number of those minute culinary paintings, in which cabbages, brass kettles, onions, potatoes, &c., are reproduced with praiseworthy industry. Many people are enraptured with these; but for my part I have but a very little more pleasure in a turnip, onion, or potato in a picture than out, and always wish that the industry and richness of color had been bestowed upon things in themselves beautiful. The great Master, it is true, gives these models, but he gives them not to be looked at, but eaten. If painters could only contrive to paint vegetables (cheaply) so that they could be eaten, I would be willing.

Two small saloons are next devoted to the modern Dutch and German school. In these is Denner's head of an old woman, which Cowper celebrates in a pretty poem--a marvel of faithful reproduction. One would think the old lady must have sat at least a year, till he had daguerreotyped every wrinkle and twinkle. How much better all this labor spent on the head of a good old woman than on the head of a cabbage!

And now come a set of Italian rooms, in which we have some curious specimens of the Romish development in religion; as, for instance, the fathers Gregory, Augustine, and Jerome, meditating on the immaculate

conception of the Virgin. Think of a painter employing all his powers in representing such a fog bank!

Next comes a room dedicated to the works of Titian, in which two nude Venuses, of a very different character from the de Milon, are too conspicuous. Titian is sensuous; a Greek, but not of the highest class.

The next room is devoted to Paul Veronese. This Paul has quite a character of his own--a grand old Venetian, with his head full of stateliness, and court ceremony, and gorgeous conventionality, half Oriental in his passion for gold, and gems, and incense. As a specimen of the subjects in which his soul delights, take the following, which he has wrought up into a mammoth picture: Faith, Love, and Hope, presenting to the Virgin Mary a member of the old Venetian family of Concina, who, after having listened to the doctrines of the reformation, had become reconciled to the church. Here is Paul's piety, naively displayed by giving to the Virgin all the courtly graces of a high-born signorina. He paints, too, the Adoration of the Magi, because it gives such a good opportunity to deal with camels, jewels, turbans, and all the trappings of Oriental royalty. The Virgin and Child are a small part of the affair. I like Paul because he is so innocently unconscious of any thing deep to be expressed; so honestly intent on clothes, jewels, and colors. He is a magnificent master of ceremonies, and ought to have been kept by some king desirous of going down to posterity, to celebrate his royal praise and

glory.

Another room is devoted to the works of Guido. One or two of the Ecce Homo are much admired. To me they are, as compared with my conceptions of Jesus, more than inadequate. It seems to me that, if Jesus Christ should come again on earth, and walk through a gallery of paintings, and see the representations of sacred subjects, he would say again, as he did of old in the temple, "Take these things hence!"

How could men who bowed down before art as an idol, and worshipped it as an ultimate end, and thus sensualized it, represent these holy mysteries, into which angels desired to look?

There are many representations of Christ here, set forth in the guide book as full of grace and majesty, which, any soul who has ever felt his infinite beauty would reject as a libel. And as to the Virgin Mother, one's eye becomes wearied in following the countless catalogue of the effeminate inane representations.

There is more pathos and beauty in those few words of the Scripture, "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother," than in all these galleries put together. The soul that has learned to know her from the Bible, loving without idolizing, hoping for blest communion with her beyond the veil, seeking to imitate only the devotion which stood by the cross in the deepest hour of desertion, cannot be satisfied with these insipidities.

Only once or twice have I seen any thing like an approach towards the representations of the scriptural idea. One is this painting by Raphael. Another is by him, and is called Madonna Maison d'Alba: of this I have seen only a copy; it might have been painted on the words, "Now Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." The figure is that of a young Jewess, between girl and womanhood, in whose air and eye are expressed at once the princess of the house of David, the poetess, and the thoughtful sequestered maiden. She is sitting on the ground, the book of the prophets in one hand, lying listless at her side; the other hand is placed beneath the chin of her infant son, who looks inquiringly into her face. She does not see him--her eye has a sorrowful, far-darting look, as if beyond this flowery childhood she saw the dim image of a cross and a sepulchre. This was Mary, I have often thought that, in the reaction from the idolatry of Romanism, we Protestants were in danger of forgetting the treasures of religious sweetness, which the Bible has given us in her brief history.

It seems to me the time demands the forming of a new school of art based upon Protestant principles. For whatever vigor and originality there might once be in art, based on Romanism, it has certainly been worn threadbare by repetition.

Apropos to this. During the time I was in Paris, I formed the acquaintance of Schoeffer, whose Christus Consolator and Remunerator and other works, have made him known in America. I went

with a lady who has for many years been an intimate friend, and whose head has been introduced into several of his paintings. On the way she gave me some interesting particulars of him and his family. His mother was an artist--a woman of singularly ethereal and religious character. There are three brothers devoted to art; of these Ary is the one best known in America, and the most distinguished. For some time, while they were studying, they were obliged to be separated, and the mother, to keep up the sympathy between them, used to copy the design of the one with whom she resided for the other two. A singular strength of attachment unites the family.

We found Schoeffer in retired lodgings in the outskirts of Paris, and were presented to his very pretty and agreeable English wife. In his studio we saw a picture of his mother, a most lovely and delicate woman, dressed in white, like one of the saints in the Revelation.

Then we saw his celebrated picture, Francisca Rimini, representing a cloudy, dark, infernal region, in which two hapless lovers are whirled round and round in mazes of never-ending wrath and anguish. His face is hid from view; his attitude expresses the extreme of despair. But she clinging to his bosom--what words can tell the depths of love, of an anguish, and of endurance unconquerable, written in her pale sweet face! The picture smote to my heart like a dagger thrust; I felt its mournful, exquisite beauty as a libel on my Father in heaven.

No. It is not God who eternally pursues undying, patient love

with storms of vindictive wrath. Alas! well said Jesus, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee." The day will come when it will appear that in earth's history the sorrowing, invincible tenderness has been all on his part and that the strange word, long-suffering, means just what it says.

Nevertheless, the power and pathos of this picture cannot be too much praised. The coloring is beautiful, and though it pained me so much, I felt that it was one of the most striking works of art I had seen.

Schoeffer showed us a large picture, about half finished, in which he represents the gradual rise of the soul through the sorrows of earth to heaven. It consisted of figures grouped together, those nearest earth bowed down and overwhelmed with the most crushing and hopeless sorrow; above them are those who are beginning to look upward, and the sorrow in their faces is subsiding into anxious inquiry; still above them are those who, having caught a gleam of the sources of consolation, express in their faces a solemn calmness; and still higher, rising in the air, figures with clasped hands, and absorbed, upward gaze, to whose eye the mystery has been unveiled, the enigma solved, and sorrow glorified. One among these, higher than the rest, with a face of rapt adoration, seems entering the very gate of heaven.

He also showed us an unfinished picture of the Temptation of Christ. Upon a clear aerial mountain top, Satan, a thunder-scarred, unearthly figure, kneeling, points earnestly to the distant view of the kingdoms

of this world. There is a furtive and peculiar expression of eager anxiety betrayed in his face, as if the bitterness of his own blasted eternity could find a momentary consolation in this success. It is the expression of a general, who has staked all his fortune on one die. Of the figure of Jesus I could not judge, in its unfinished state.

Whether the artist will solve the problem of uniting energy with sweetness, the Godhead with the manhood, remains to be seen.

The paintings of Jesus are generally unsatisfactory; but Schoeffer has approached nearer towards expressing my idea than any artist I have yet seen.

The knowing ones are much divided about Schoeffer. Some say he is no painter. Nothing seems to me so utterly without rule or compass as this world of art divided into little cliques, each with his shibboleth, artists excommunicate each other as heartily as theologians, and a neophyte who should attempt to make up a judgment by their help would be obliged to shift opinions with every circle.

I therefore look with my own eyes, for if not the best that might be, they are the best that God has given me.

Schoeffer is certainly a poet of a high order. His ideas are beautiful and religious, and his power of expression quite equal to that of many old masters, who had nothing very particular to express.



I should think his chief danger lay in falling into mannerism, and too often repeating the same idea. He has a theory of coloring which is in danger of running out into coldness and poverty of effect. His idea seems to be, that in the representation of spiritual subjects the artist should avoid the sensualism of color, and give only the most chaste and severe tone. Hence he makes much use of white, pale blue, and cloudy grays, avoiding the gorgeousness of the old masters. But it seems probable that in the celestial regions there is more, rather than less, of brilliant coloring than on earth. What can be more brilliant than the rainbow, yet what more perfectly free from earthly grossness? Nevertheless, in looking at the pictures of Schoeffer there is such a serene and spiritual charm spread over them, that one is little inclined to wish them other than they are. No artist that I have ever seen, not even Raphael, has more power of glorifying the human face by an exalted and unearthly expression. His head of Joan of Arc, at Versailles, is a remarkable example. It is a commentary on that scripture--"And they beheld his face, as it were the face of an angel."

Schoeffer is fully possessed with the idea of which I have spoken, of raising Protestant art above the wearisome imitations of Romanism. The object is noble and important. I feel that he must succeed.

His best award is in the judgments of the unsophisticated heart. A painter who does not burn incense to his palette and worship his brushes, who reverences ideas above mechanism, will have all manner of

evil spoken against him by artists, but the human heart will always accept him.