

## ARTICLE VII.

PERKINS'S TUSCAN SCULPTORS.<sup>1</sup>

THESE superb and costly volumes are excellent in paper, type, and embellishment, affording constant pleasure to a reader's taste. Many of the engravings are wonderful for their delicacy of outline, and for the insight they give into the works of art which they illustrate. They leave a definite and lasting impression. That of St. Cecilia by Donatello, and the Creation by Ghiberti, in the first volume, are exquisite in beauty. The biographies are many of them very interesting and instructive, presenting striking examples of the unwearied and patient industry of men of the greatest genius. The style is very precise and elegant; the words used in the description being so exact and fitting that any change would often obscure the meaning. The author has taken great pains in studying his subject, and the reader has the satisfaction of perusing the words of a master fully qualified to give instruction.

Our clerical students cannot fail to be interested in the record which these volumes give of the labors performed and the sufferings endured by the great artists of Tuscany. The writer of sermons is apt to imagine, that he is the only man who lives a life of unrequited toil. The perusal of Mr. Perkins's narratives illustrates the fact that the lofty genius and exquisite taste of artists have prompted them to arduous work, and have borne them so far above the standard of their age as to deprive them of the reward which was their due.

The following are a few specimens of the suggestive records with which these volumes abound. They are presented for the most part, although not exactly, in the words of Mr. Perkins.

*Niccola Pisano and the Pisan pulpi.*—It was during the eleventh century, when Pisa was chief among the Ghibelline cities of Europe and a seaport, that the lonely buildings which now from its principal attraction were erected. We must look to a still earlier period for her antique sarcophagi which line the corridors of her Campo Santo, and which doubtless were in her possession when she was a colony of imperial Rome; while others were brought from the East, Sicily, and various parts of Italy, during the Middle Ages. When these sarcophagi decorated the exterior

<sup>1</sup> Tuscan Sculptors, their Lives, Works, and Times; with Illustrations from Original Drawings and Photographs. By Charles C. Perkins. Two vols. royal octavo. pp. 267, 267. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green. 1864. Price, \$22.50.

of the *Duomo* during the eleventh, twelfth, and part of the thirteenth century, they served as tombs of distinguished Pisans, and illustrious foreigners deceased at Pisa, and linked together her Roman and mediæval existence (pp. 3 seq.).

The noble buildings of the city and the ancient marbles that decorated them formed one of Niccola Pisano's principal sources of instruction. He was born between 1205 and 1207, became a great architect, whose influence extended not only through Italy but all Europe. At the age of fifteen he obtained the appointment of architect to Frederic II., who passed through Pisa on his way to be crowned at Rome. Niccola joined the suite of the emperor, and went with him to Naples, where he worked for about ten years (p. 9).

After leaving Naples, Niccola designed a *Basilica* in honor of St. Anthony at Padua. His first essay, made in 1237, as a sculptor, is an alto-relievo of the *Deposition*, which still fills a lunette over one of the side doors of the cathedral of San Martino at Lucca. He sculptured also a sarcophagus for the remains of St. Dominic, at Bologna. The reliefs illustrated the miracles worked by the saint in his life-time (pp. 9, 12, 19). But Niccola's great work, which established his fame as a sculptor, was the pulpit of the Baptistery at Pisa.

The form of a pulpit throughout Italy up to this time, 1260, was in general that of a sarcophagus, supported upon four columns, and sculptured with reliefs on three sides. Niccola's pulpit, ornate and elegant, is hexagonal, by which he gained more space for sculptural decoration. It has many supporting columns, spanned by round arches, which are filled with Gothic tracery, and with a multitude of statuettes, placed above the Corinthian and Byzantine capitals, and in the spandrels of the arches. Its columns are supported, like those of the Lombard church porticoes, upon the backs of lions, the emblems of sacerdotal vigilance, and symbols of Jesus Christ, and his resurrection. The five bas-reliefs upon it represent the birth of Christ, the adoration of the Magi, the circumcision, the crucifixion, and the last judgment. In the adoration (the best of the series), sits a dignified Madonna (suggested by the Phædra of the sarcophagus) holding the divine child upon her knees, who graciously leans forward to receive the costly myrrh, typical of his burial, from Caspar, king of the Ethiopians; the incense, symbolic of God, and of the priest after the order of Melchisedec, from Balthazar, king of Saba; and the little golden apple, in token of allegiance to the King of the earth, from Melchior, king of the Arabians. Behind the Madonna stands St. Joseph; next to him an angel, and still further to the left the three fiery-looking steeds of the three kings (pp. 16, 17).

Niccola's last work was the fountain at Perugia, which the magistrates of that city considered its most valuable possession, unique not only in Italy, but in the world.

Niccola died in 1278. Inestimable were the services rendered to art by this great man. Never hurried by an ill-regulated imagination into extravagances, he was careful in selecting his objects of study, and his methods of self-cultivation; he was an indefatigable worker, now in Pisa, then in Naples, Padua, Siena, Lucca, or Florence; here to design a church, there to model a bas-relief, erect a pulpit, a palace, or a tower; by turns architect and sculptor, great in both, original in both, a reviver in both, laying deep and well the foundations of his edifices by hitherto unpractised methods, and sculpturing his bas-reliefs upon principles evolved from the study of antique models long unheeded. Ever respected and esteemed by the many persons of all classes with whom he came into contact, he was truly a great man, one to whom the world owes a debt of gratitude, and who looms up in gigantic proportions through the mist of five centuries, holding the same relation to Italian art which Dante holds to Italian literature (p. 84).

*The Campo Santo of Pisa and its Architect.* — During early Christian times it was customary to bury the dead in churches, which thence obtained the name of 'Caemiteria.' (Bingham states that the word 'Caemiterium' is equivalent to church; and according to an inscription cited by Cardinal Borgia the Basilica of St. Paul's was so called. Eusebius, Chrysostom and other church Fathers also called them *τάφοι*. In the Constantinian Basilicas the saints were buried in the crypt or confession. Rome was one of the last cities that abandoned the custom of burying the dead in the atria of the churches. In the ninth century they were buried inside the church. Florence continued the old practice even later than Rome.) Sepulture was afterwards restricted to their porticoes by decrees of the early councils; but this also was given up as likely to breed pestilence; and public cemeteries, apart from the dwellings of men, were first used in France, and then in other parts of Europe. Their introduction into Italy was projected by Archbishop Lanfranchi in 1108, who brought a ship-load of earth from Mount Calvary to Pisa, which he caused to be spread out in the shape of a parallelogram, according to the traditional dimensions of Noah's ark; to which was subsequently added, in 1178, the contents of fifty Pisan galleys which returned from the crusade undertaken by Frederic Barbarossa, freighted with the sacred earth. A century later Giovanni Pisano, son of the famous architect and sculptor, Niccola Pisano, having been appointed to enclose the space with walls, designed and built the first, as well as the most beautiful, Campo Santo, in Italy. Following the ground-plan marked out by Archbishop Lanfranchi, Giovanni raised his outer wall without windows, and with only two outer doors, looking towards the Duomo; so that the frescoes, with which they were to be covered on the inside, might be protected as far as possible from the injurious effect of the salt and damp sea winds. Between these outer walls, which he decorated with arches and pilasters, and the inner, directly

contiguous to the quadrangle, he made a broad-roofed corridor, paved with marble, lighted by Gothic windows and four open doorways, through which are now obtained constantly recurring glimpses of the graves, the solemn cypresses, and the ever-blooming roses of this God's-acre.

After Giovanni's day, the walls of the Campo Santo were adorned by the frescoes of Giotto, Orcagna, and other eminent painters; and on either side of its corridors were ranged antique sarcophagi, and modern marbles of a sacred character, many of them by Giovanni Pisano himself (pp. 39, 40).

About A.D. 1300, Giovanni sculptured a beautiful pulpit of marble for the church of San Andrea, in Pistoja. Modelled after the Pisan pulpit, it is hexagonal in form, and five of its panels are filled with reliefs. One of these, the massacre of the innocents, is considered Giovanni's master-piece. Rare powers of conception and dramatic feeling are shown in the sullen satisfaction with which Herod looks down upon the rush of maddened soldiers, despairing mothers, and shrieking infants, as well as in the figure of the woman who sits upon the ground, bowed in silent grief over the dead body of her child, and of her who yet struggles, in the agony of despair, to save her darling from a like fate. The relief of the crucifixion contains an admirable group of women at the foot of the cross (p. 45).

Among Giovanni's other works are the impressive monuments of Pope Benedict XI. in Perugia, and of St. Margaret at Costona. He flourished between 1240 and 1320, and died 1320 (pp. 48, 50).

*Ghiberti.*—Toward the end of the fourteenth century, there arose in Florence two men, Ghiberti and Donatello, who were destined to make the fame of their native city as illustrious in her school of sculpture as it had been in that of painting, long esteemed the first in Italy.

Lorenzo Ghiberti, born in 1381, was descended from an honorable family. While he was very young his father died; and his mother soon after married a noted goldsmith, Bartolo, who more than supplied the place of his lost parent.

While learning the goldsmith's art from his step-father, Lorenzo gave much of his time to modelling and casting little figures in imitation of antique medals, to making portraits of his friends, and to the study of painting of which he was very fond. When about eighteen he went as an assistant to a brother artist to paint some frescoes in the palace of Carlo Malatesta of Rimini. Struck with the talent Ghiberti displayed in the frescoes he painted, Malatesta made such promises of advancement, that he would have remained at Rimini, had he not received a letter from his step-father, stating that the Seignior of Florence and the Merchant's Guild had issued a manifesto, inviting the best Italian artists to compete for a bronze door for the Baptistery, and urging him not to neglect so favorable an opportunity of winning his way to fame. Ghiberti immediately went home, and entered his name on the list of competitors,

from whom he and five others were chosen to model and cast a bas-relief representing the sacrifice of Isaac, to be presented in a year's time for adjudication.

The real rivals were two Florentines — Ghiberti and Brunelleschi. The judges hesitated to whom the prize should be awarded. Brunelleschi disinterestedly avowed his rival's superiority, and withdrew from the field.

Ghiberti had earned his victory by patience and submission to the wise counsels of his step-father, who induced him to make many designs, which he carefully criticised, and then submitted to the judgment of many competent citizens and strangers of note, before permitting his step-son to cast the one which they considered the most perfect. These trial-plates are now in the bronze-room of the Uffizi. In Ghiberti's Abraham, we see a father, who while preparing to obey the divine command, still hopes for a respite, and in his Isaac a submissive victim; the angel who points out the ram caught in the thicket, which Abraham could not otherwise, and does not yet see, sets us at rest about the conclusion; while the servants with the ass which brought the faggots for the sacrifice, are so skilfully placed, as to enter into the composition without distracting our attention from the principal group.

Brunelleschi's Abraham is, on the contrary, a savage zealot, whose knife is already half-buried in the throat of his writhing victim, and who, in his hot haste, does not heed the ram which is placed directly before him, nor the angel, who seizes his wrist to avert his blow; while the ass, and the two servants, each carrying on a separate action, fill up the foreground so obtrusively, as to call off the eye from what should be the main point of interest.

Ghiberti immediately received the commission for the first Baptistery gate and in a month began to model his compositions for its twenty-eight panels. Twenty of these relate to the history of our Lord, preceded by the annunciation and followed by the descent of the Holy Ghost. In the remaining eight he placed the four evangelists and the four doctors of the church, filling up the corners of each with heads of prophets and sybils, and even framing the whole door in an elaborate border of leaves. The most lovely among these beautiful works is the annunciation, in which the virgin shrinks back beneath an exquisite little portico, before a graceful angel; and two of the most striking are the raising of Lazarus, and the temptation of our Lord.

Twenty-one years elapsed between the commencement and the completion of the first gate, set up in 1424; and no less than twenty artists, among whom was Donatello, assisted in modelling and casting it (pp. 122-128).

The subjects for the second gate of the Baptistery were selected by Lionardo Bruni, the artist being left at liberty as to their mode of treatment. Respecting them Bruni says: "I think that the ten stories for the new

door, selected from the Old Testament, should possess variety of illustration, by which I mean, that they should afford variety in composition, which is pleasant to the eye, and at the same time be not only significant, but remarkable as events. The artist who is to model them should thoroughly understand the meaning of each one, so that he may fitly represent actors and events; and be gifted with an elevated taste, that he may fitly compose them. Though I have no doubt that this work, as I have planned it, will prove satisfactory in every respect, still I should greatly like to be near the artist who is to illustrate these Bible incidents, that I might assist him to understand them in all their bearings."

"In modelling these reliefs," says Ghiberti, "I strove to imitate nature to the utmost, and by investigating her methods of work to see how nearly I could approach her, I sought to understand how forms strike upon the eye, and how the theoretic part of sculptural and pictorial art should be managed. Working with the utmost diligence and care, I introduced into some of my compositions as many as a hundred figures, which I modelled upon different planes, so that those nearest the eye might appear larger, and those more remote smaller in proportion."

By means of these many figures and by the use of perspective, he represented in some of his compositions as many as four successive actions; as, for instance, in the most beautiful of all, in which he had the skill to combine into one perfect whole, while keeping each clear and unconfused, the creation of Adam, that of Eve, their sin, and its punishment.

In the flat spaces of this gate Ghiberti disposed twenty-four statuettes of prophets and scriptural personages in niches; and at the corners of the reliefs introduced as many heads, with portraits of himself and his step-father, while around the whole he modelled an elaborate frieze of leaves, birds, and animals (pp. 128-130).

Apart from their beauty, these gates, which Michael Angelo pronounced "beautiful enough to be the gates of Paradise," have an interest as the record of the greater part of a great artist's life; since Ghiberti, when he began them, was but twenty-five, and when he finished them was an old man of seventy-four. He could have completed them much sooner, had he not at the same time received and executed many commissions for statues, bas-reliefs, and goldsmith's works, and also spent much time at Rome, as we learn from his enthusiastic mention of the statue of a Hermaphrodite, which he saw there soon after it had been dug up near San Celso. "No tongue," he says, in speaking of this statue, "can describe the learning and art displayed in it, or do justice to its masterly style"; and in a similar strain of enthusiasm he dilates upon another dug up near Florence, "which," he conjectures, "was hidden away in the spot where it has now been found, by some gentle spirit in the early days of Christianity, who, seeing its perfection, was so moved to pity, that he had a tomb made, in which he buried it under a stone-slab to protect it from injury.

The touch only can discover many of its beauties, which escape the eye in any light." None but a great artist, who had long made antique marbles the object of close study, and had quickened the fineness of his touch by handling them for the purpose of restoration, could have attained to what may be called a sixth sense.

He died at the age of seventy-four, chief magistrate of his native city (pp. 130-136).

*Lionardo da Vinci.*— To Lionardo poetry, painting, sculpture, engraving, architecture, astronomy, music, in short, all arts and sciences were equally natural; he appeared in each "to the manner born," and as if each had been the exclusive study of his life. He was eminently fitted for sculpture by his plastic tendencies, by his extreme love of finish, his delicacy of handling, his masterly but unexaggerated boldness as a draughtsman, and the high qualities of his imagination. Lomazzo describes a terra-cotta head of the infant Christ which had come into his possession, as combining "the simplicity and purity of a child, with a vague something denoting wisdom, intellect, and majesty; the bearing of a tender infant with the majesty of an old man."

With a boldness of self-assertion, pardonable in so great a man, Lionardo writes to Duke Lodovico Sforza: "I can do anything possible to man; and as well as any living artist, either in sculpture or painting." The duke and his court were captivated by the charm of his conversation, which exercised an irresistible power over all minds. There was in his look, and the expression of his noble countenance, a sort of mute eloquence which prejudiced all hearts in his favor, and when he took in his hand his silver lyre, to which he had added hitherto unknown improvements, their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Professors of music and masters of arms were in turn obliged to acknowledge his incontestable superiority, and all were overcome with wonder when they saw that the hand which swept like a magic breeze over the cords of a lyre, and traced the most graceful and delicate lines upon the canvas, was able to bend a horse-shoe, or control at his will the most fiery steed.

Immediately after his arrival at Milan, he was made Director of the Ducal Academy of Fine Arts, and was commissioned to make an equestrian statue of Francesco Sforza, the illustrious founder of his patron's house. Upon this work, for which he made an infinite quantity of designs, and two perfect models, the first in a classical, the second in a modern and more picturesque style, Lionardo spent fourteen years. The first of these models represents the hero armed from head to foot, holding in his hand a baton, which rests upon his saddle-bow, and seated upon a heavy but carefully studied horse. This design did not satisfy Lionardo. Accordingly, in the year 1490, he again recommenced his labors and modelled a group representing a fighting warrior, under the body of whose fiery horse lay a struggling soldier. In the fourteen sketches which he made for it, before

finally deciding upon one which satisfied him, he drew the warrior and his horse in various attitudes — both with and without the fallen soldier — and made careful studies of the horse's body divided as if for casting in bronze.

Being occupied at the same time in painting the fresco of the Last Supper, and always given to procrastination, he put off the casting of his work until it was too late; for when Lodovico Sforza was overthrown, and Milan fell into the hands of Louis XII., that conqueror, hating Lodovico Sforza, and not having sufficient admiration for a great work of art to raise him above personal feelings, gave the model for a target to his soldiers who totally destroyed it. By this act of wanton revenge, the world was deprived of a work of art, which, judging from the great admiration that it excited at Milan, and from our knowledge of Lionardo's genius, and of his profound studies in human and equine anatomy, must have been the finest equestrian statue ever modelled. Disheartened by the destruction of his master-piece, Da Vinci devoted the rest of his life to painting and science; but the memory of what he had accomplished in sculpture remained, to make his name in that, as in all other arts, the synonym of perfection (pp. 184-186). Lionardo was born in 1432 and died in 1519.

*Benedetto da Rovizzano.* — Benedetto Guarlotti, born in the latter part of the fifteenth century, was especially distinguished as a sculptor of ornament; and for his skill in working out small figures and decorative emblems so nearly in the round, that by their contrast with the graduated relief of the other portions, they produced a novel and striking effect.

Rovizzano went to England in 1524, and began a tomb for Cardinal Wolsey. He worked five years upon it before the cardinal's disgrace, after which he was ordered by Henry VIII. to complete it for him; but, as it was not finished when the king died, his body was temporarily deposited with that of his queen, Jane Seymour, in St. George's Chapel at Windsor. After the execution of King Charles I., who himself intended to be buried in it, the parliament ordered its rich copper figures to be melted down, sparing the sarcophagus, in which ultimately the body of Lord Nelson was deposited. Ordered, in the plenitude of his power, by Cardinal Wolsey, who was destined to die disgraced and broken-hearted; selected for his tomb by a king whose head was to fall upon the scaffold; and finally tenanted by the hero of Trafalgar, this monument furnishes a striking commentary upon the futility of man's projects, as does the history of its sculptor upon the disappointments of life. The two great works which would have immortalized his name were wantonly destroyed, and after his return to Italy he spent the last years of his life in total blindness (pp. 257-259).