

THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

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ARTICLE I.

THE MADONNA DI SAN SISTO.

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DURING a prolonged residence in the charming capital of Saxony, frequent pilgrimages to its magnificent gallery of paintings were of course attended by a constantly growing admiration and enthusiasm for the superb array of works of art which are there collected, and so judiciously arranged that the gallery may without exaggeration be described, "not only as a chief centre for the enjoyment of art, but also of instruction in it to the cultivated of the whole earth." In that exquisitely beautiful temple of art, filled with the masterpieces of the most famous painters of almost every period and every country, there is probably no painting more universally admired and more frequently visited than the Madonna di San Sisto, by Raphael Sanzio of Urbino.

It has a cabinet of its own, which is almost always crowded with visitors. The cabinet is situated in the northwestern corner of the gallery; a peculiarly soft light falls on the picture, set up in an altar-like structure, and has, on account of the priceless gem it enshrines and the exquisite perfection of its peerless conception, been called by an enthusiastic lover of art "the holy of holies" of the entire gallery. The visitor, the moment he enters, feels a mysterious spell come over him. Fascinated by the eloquent

appeal to his noblest emotions and highest aspirations, which seems to address him individually and to hold him captive, he yields himself unconsciously to the magic and subtle influence that pervades that sanctuary of art; and he, in turn, becomes one of the silent admirers that gaze intently on the Madonna, of which we propose to furnish a brief description, with such matters concerning its history as may enable those who only know the picture from copies, engravings, and photographs, to study it with increased interest.

The picture represents a window; a half-opened green curtain, fastened to a rod and gathered up at the sides, supposed to have just been opened, discloses to the spectators, imagined to stand or kneel *before* it,—that is, *inside* the room,—a celestial vision of passing sublimity. In the centre, enthroned on clouds and surrounded by a halo of innumerable angel heads, which from a tint of pale luminous white gradually gathers intenser coloring till it culminates in softest azure, appears the Virgin Mary, holding in her right arm and supporting with her left the infant Saviour. On the Virgin's right, slightly below her, also on clouds, adores, in kneeling attitude, but with uplifted face, Pope Sixtus II.; his tiara is deposited in the extreme right corner of the embrasure, the central portion of which is occupied by two beautiful cherubs in a leaning posture, their faces turned to the spectator, but their glance directed upwards, the one seemingly lost in intent contemplation, the other in rapt introspection. On the Virgin's left, half-kneeling, also on clouds, the radiant features of St. Barbara are downwards bent toward the contemplative angels. All the figures are life-size, and so grouped together as to form a pyramid.

Returning to the central figure, and retaining the idea of a heavenly vision, we behold a woman so passing beautiful, of that beauty which the French call *spirituelle*, so transcendently lovely, so perfect in everything conveyed by the allied terms beauty, goodness, grace, and loveliness, that we unhesitatingly say: "Here is the visible embodiment of the classical τὸ καλόν."

The circular shape of the seemingly moving clouds beneath her feet, suggesting the spherical form of the earth, the garments of all the figures waving under the pressure of gentle breezes, the adoring posture of St. Sixtus and St. Barbara, the background of angel hosts, and the contemplative and, as it were, interpreting cherubs in position nearest to the spectator — this striking *tout-ensemble* combines to prompt the thought that here is the Virgin mother with her Divine Son visiting the earth to carry to the human race the blessings of heaven. And then the Christ-child, clothed with every attribute of infant loveliness, that marvellously telling expression, that intense looking-forth, so utterly unlike infancy, and seeming to pierce one through and through, is altogether a unique creation, probably designed to kindle in the beholder's soul the conviction that in that innocent face shines forth the conscious Godhead — that the searching and suffering look is prophetic of the passion — that it is, in short, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” The conspicuous display of the angel-world, moreover, makes one think of the mystery which angels desire to look into.

In admirable keeping with the matchless delineation of the human face divine in the Virgin, the Christ-babe, the venerable head of the martyr-pope, and the exquisitely lovely St. Barbara, whose attribute of the tower appears immediately behind her right shoulder, are the grouping, the astonishing adjustment of space, the harmonious coloring, and the superbly chaste attire. But of such technical details as drawing and coloring we will not utter a word beyond the brief note in the gallery catalogues of 1806 and 1812, that “this painting seems to be a creation of the imagination without the brush.”

The attire of the Madonna consists of a delicate crimson *sopravesta*, embroidered with gold, and skirt of the same material, covered from the waist downwards with a blue cloak of ample folds; from over the left shoulder depends across the chest, yet so as to be half-hidden by the infant Christ, a semi-transparent scarf of soft texture, while from

the head floats an Italian veil, surrounding her left and gathered up under the child, of drab-like tint. The attitude is that of dignified majesty; yet it is difficult to say which feeling predominates in the serene calmness of that sunny face,—the innocent dignity and loving pride of the Virgin mother, or the manifest consciousness of her exaltation as a woman; the two are probably united, melting into each other. At a certain distance from the painting, and a peculiar elevation, the deep eloquence of those hazel eyes seems to address the beholder, who feels that the Virgin—who looks neither at the pope nor at St. Barbara, but sends forth her glance towards the spectator, alike heedless of the worship of venerable old age and beautiful youth—draws near as the mother in the very transport of bliss, as woman in the sublimity of virtue, and presents the incarnate God-child; while her sweet mildness, so gentle and sympathetic, and her soft look of persuasive entreaty appears to invite him to set his affection and hope on the child Jesus.

The difficulty of portraying in words the appearance of the Virgin and the Christ vanishes with respect to the other figures of the painting; for here the real and the concrete predominate; while there we have mainly to deal with the ideal and the abstract.

The pope is arrayed in his pontificals. He wears the *alba* or *sotane*, a white linen garment reaching from the neck to the feet; the *fano* or *ovale*, a silk handkerchief; the *pluviale*, of gold brocade lined with red, an upper garment of ceremony; the *stola*, also of gold-thread texture, a sort of scarf depending from the shoulders; the last, as well as the *alba*, girded by the red *cingulum*, or girdle. The retention of these liturgical garments appears to indicate Raphael's design to introduce the pope in his representative character, while the characteristic symbol of the pontificate, the *tiara*, meekly deposited on the window-sill, is a significant intimation that the symbol of power, though it be a crown, or *tiara*, must not burden us in the presence of the Godhead. Sixtus is in the attitude of kneeling; pressing his left hand against

the chest, the head raised in supplication, and pointing with his right outwards in the direction of the spectator. The venerable head is of the Peter type, expressive of unshaken trust ; his eyes are riveted on the Christ, and the outstretched right hand seems to commend to him the church. His countenance is of decided force ; it glows with fiery devotion, and the supplicatory look reveals faith.

St. Barbara, half-kneeling, looking downwards to the two cherubs, with folded hands on her bosom, is a figure of consummate grace and fascinating loveliness. She is a blonde, with Grecian forehead and nose, arched eyebrows and long lashes, and an exquisitely beautiful mouth. The whole face, oval, sits on a regal neck. Her attire consists of headbands, a variegated body of yellow, with a blue upper sleeve, a light Italian scarf with red border, and a green tunic over a dark gray skirt. The anachronism of her dress, which is that of a Roman lady at the beginning of the sixteenth century, presents no difficulty ; for it is doubtless the traditional beauty and self-sacrificing devotion of the martyred maiden which the great master intended to commemorate in the painting. The art critics consider this part of the picture least perfect ; but it is foreign to our purpose to open a question for whose discussion we lack the appropriate qualification.

After this brief analytical description of this wonderful creation of genius, we pass on to furnish some interpretations of its import which are entitled to great respect. We begin with von Quandt's, occasioned, in 1826, by Lepel's doubts concerning the genuineness of the Sistine Madonna as a work of Raphael. A sworn champion of its unity of design, he says : " It must be a painter's first aim to satisfy the sense of sight ; for his intuitions are restricted to the sphere of the visible, and the eye is the organ through which his artistic conception returns to an intellectual contemplation. This group combines the utmost diversity of figures. While the contrasts of this painting charm us and excite ever-increasing entertainment, the diversity becomes a harmonious whole,

in virtue of the two contrasts of the side-figures balancing each other, and the commanding central and chief figure not only holding them, key-stone-like together, but subduing them also as subordinate parts. The effect of this fine adjustment is that the eye is ever drawn back to the centre of the whole. Nowhere is either a vacancy or wearisome overburdening; and as in the upper part of the painting the whole gathers solemnity and force, so in the lower the group comes to an exquisitely beautiful termination in the two genii; for they present a delightful resting-place to the eye when the daring glance, overwhelmed with the sublimity of the scene, glides downwards.

“ If we may call the relation of the parts, as it were, the *harmony* of the picture, we may venture to denominate the beautiful transition of the contours and lines its *melody*. In this respect, also, the painting is most admirable; the whole forms a pyramid, without a corner to offend the eye, without a profusion to cause heaviness. Just in respect of satisfying the eye, this painting seems to us one of the most splendid compositions; for it combines the solemnity of symmetrical disposition with the diversity of a free and interwoven grouping.

“ But without lingering at an apparition so fascinating to the material eye, the penetration to the innermost centre of this work of art is like heaven opened to the spiritual eye. The differing degrees in which men consecrate themselves to the divine service, personified and robed in heavenly garments, seem to have passed before the soul of the enraptured painter; and their reproduction on canvas was the problem he had set himself to solve — a problem which seizes and compresses into one leading thought all the separate parts of the picture. On the right we see St. Barbara, a figure of supreme loveliness — of that loveliness which joyously and without danger to itself traverses the earth like a sunbeam, smiling on flowers, yet sustaining no tarnish from poisonous exhalations. . . . . With the lovely glance of innocent complacency and the consciousness of superior bliss, the counte-

nance of Barbara beams with sunny smiles. Opposite to her appears dignity, in the venerable form of strong old age arrayed in the insignia of supreme spiritual power. Sixtus must inspire every beholder with reverence, from seeing him reverently commend the church to the protection of the exalted One.

“As female virtue is heightened by loveliness, so male character, tried and matured by the stern realities of life, is ennobled by the stamp of firmness and dignity. Just as the central figure unites the two side figures in the visible space of the picture, so the character of the Madonna unites the two contrasts of loveliness and dignity, in the invisible realm of thought. In her person loveliness rises into beauty, dignity into sublimity, and both melt together into one being. But the climax of the whole is the Christ-child, the infant God, in every respect so plastically conceived that the painter's conception finds its only expression in forms. The two beautiful winged children, although raised above the real, — the one seemingly rapt in introspection, the other lost in reflection, may be instanced as a criterion of Raphael's greatness.”

Kugler, also a very competent art critic, says of this picture: “The Madonna is at once the exalted, divine woman who bore the Saviour of the world, and the tender, earth-born virgin whose meekness and purity were so highly exalted. Her face contains an inconceivable something which I would fain call a timid amazement at the miracle of her own exaltation, yet withal accompanied by a sense of the noble liberty and greatness of her divine elevation. The child, reposing in childlike, not in childish, carelessness in her arms, looks with calm seriousness out into the world. No other master has attempted to portray in an equally affecting manner, as Raphael has done it in the features of this child, the loveliness of infancy blended with the solemnity and the profound thought of the divine vocation. The beholder reluctantly turns his eyes from the deep impression of these two figures to bestow fit attention on the majestic

dignity of the pope, the meek resignation of Barbara, and the friendly innocence of the child angels."

Förster, in his admirable work on Raphael (ii. 283 sq.) calls the Madonna di San Sisto the crown of the painter's lyrical creations, and eloquently advocates our view that Christ, and not the Virgin, is the chief figure (according to him, this altar-painting has respect to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation), and thinks a glance at the picture sufficient to show that the child is most prominent, not the mother; that Raphael here represents with matchless power and perfection the great mystery of the incarnate Word. "The mien and attitude of the Virgin do not proclaim majesty; but the consciousness of her unspeakable happiness and sublime vocation of having borne the Saviour of the world is stamped with touching modesty on her brow, glows in her eyes, and is manifest in her entire bearing with respect to the child."

The same gifted writer has the following capital observations on the due appreciation of the painting: "We must imagine it in its original position, above the altar, in connection with the altar-service in its culminating point of the transubstantiation. Let us conceive the congregation in prayer before the altar, waiting for the moment of *the real presence of God the Saviour*. The curtain is as yet closed, heaven covered; the cherubs, established by the sill, in the composure of assurance, expect the arrival of the Divinity; above them St. Sixtus and St. Barbara kneel with the same intent. Now the curtain is rolled back; heaven opens; Madonna floats down with the holy child, able to dispense the treasures of heaven and earth, and to bestow on all the blessing of peace. Now Barbara looks down to the congregation to summon them to united prayer; then Sixtus, with supplicatory and commending gesture, points to the praying multitude, and looks trustfully up to the Godhead; but the angel boys calmly retain their former attitude; their expectation has been realized, and they are lost in the contemplation of the familiar, but ever reanimating spectacle."

In some respects similar to this interpretation, but with more decided concentration on Mary as the leading figure of the painting, is that of Weise, who sees in it the representation of the Roman doctrine of intercession. He also suggests a body of worshippers in front of the altar. According to him "Sixtus prays to the Virgin not for himself, but for the worshippers before the altar, perhaps with special reference to the fraternity of the *frati neri*, of which he was founder; <sup>1</sup> his right index-finger pointing outwards to the nave in the direction of the worshippers. The angels, in position nearest to the suppliants, look interrogatively up to Barbara, as if they desired to ascertain what may be transpiring above, and what room there may be for hope. The one, moreover, indicates the difficulty of the proffered suit; while the composure of the other seems to denote that such events, similar suits and answers, are of constant occurrence; and this last, the answer, is conveyed by Barbara to the angels, and by these to the suppliants, either in the form of promise or as a benevolent fore-assurance. Here is, therefore, a manifold and most astonishing representation of the doctrine of intercession. Christ is the Intercessor with God, Madonna with Christ, Sixtus with the Madonna. The assurance of a gracious answer is possibly conveyed by Christ to the Virgin, by her to Barbara, by Barbara to the angels, and by them to the suppliants; so that the action of the painting accomplishes a kind of never-ending circle of up and down, of prayers offered and granted, of questions asked and answers given, of fears and consolations, of doubts and affirmations; rendering the delineation, notwithstanding its seeming calmness, one of the most affecting and effective in the whole realm of art."

But we will not weary the patience of the reader with a longer array of interpretations and criticisms, which might, indeed, be indefinitely extended; for the literature on this, perhaps the greatest of Raphael's conceptions, but unquestionably the most sublime — because, probably, the last — of

<sup>1</sup> I have found no authority for this statement.

his Madonnas, is all but inexhaustible. The extracts given are sufficiently varied to indicate the diversity of treatment of which this matchless creation of genius is susceptible, and to justify, if justification be needed, the glowing terms in which we have, however imperfectly, attempted to express our admiration of it.

A brief account of the two historical personages represented in this painting seems now in place. Xystus, or Sixtus II., was a Grecian by birth, deacon of the Roman church under Stephen, and on the death of the latter chosen pope, in 257. His pontificate, in all probability, covered only one year. Cyprian calls him a peaceable and excellent prelate. Valerianus, acknowledged emperor after the assassination of Aemilius, at the beginning of his reign favored the Christians; but, on the authority of Eusebius, his disposition towards them was greatly changed, through the influence of the Magian Macrianus, an adherent of the Persian sect of the Magians. He was a great favorite with the emperor, who was very superstitious, so that he persuaded him that the Christians, alike hostile to magic and the gods, obstructed the effects of the sacrifices and the prosperity of the empire. Afraid of his own safety, he published his first edict against the Christians in April 257, leading to the martyrdom of pope Stephen. In the following year, when Valerian marched against the Persians, the persecution grew more fierce, and of the effects of his rescript to the senate we have the following account of Cyprian, in a circular addressed to his fellow-bishops in Africa :

“ Valerian has sent an order to the senate, importing that bishops, priests, and deacons should forthwith suffer; but that senators, persons of quality, and Roman knights should forfeit their honors, have their estates forfeited, and if they still refused to sacrifice should lose their heads; that matrons should have their goods seized, and be banished; that any of Caesar’s officers or domestics who already confessed the Christian faith, or should now confess it, should forfeit their estates to the exchequer, and be sent in chains to work on

Caesar's farms. . . . . You are to understand that Xystus suffered in a cemetery, upon the sixth day of August, 258, and with him four deacons."<sup>1</sup>

The four deacons are said to have been Praetextatus, Felicissimus, Agapitus, and Laurentius. The last was Cyrian's archdeacon, and seeing the bishop led forth to execution, he expostulated with him, lamenting to be left behind. "The bishop replied that he should follow him within three days by a more glorious triumph; himself being spared on account of his old age."<sup>2</sup> The Liberian calendar states that Sixtus was beheaded in the cemetery of Calixtus.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of Sixtus into the painting may be found in the circumstance that the Benedictine monastery at Piacenza was consecrated to the memory of St. Sixtus, and called, after him, "Santo Sisto." The monks doubtless requested Raphael to introduce their patron saint into the picture, which, moreover, owes its name of "Madonna di San Sisto" to this particular.

The history of St. Barbara is rather legendary. The accounts are very conflicting, and it is difficult to get at the facts. According to some, she suffered martyrdom in the reign of Maximin (235-239) at Nicomedia; while Joseph Assemani decides for the statement of Metaphrastes, that she suffered at Heliopolis, in Phoenicia, in the reign of Galerius (306). According to the former, she had been converted to Christianity through the instrumentality of Origen; while the latter ascribes her reception of the Christian faith to reflection and the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost. But all the legends are tolerably unanimous in narrating that she was most beautiful, and that her father, on that account, kept her confined in a tower (hence her attribute of the tower). In it he had constructed a bath with two windows. During his absence she caused a third window to be added, and had the floor of her room

<sup>1</sup> S. Cyrian ep. ad Successum episc. 80; ed. Felli, 82; ed. Pamelii, and for the last sentence, Cypr. l. c. ed. Baluz.

<sup>2</sup> S. Ambros. offic. 1, 41.

<sup>3</sup> Vide Butler's Lives of the Saints, Vol. ii. pp. 221, 222.

decorated with the cross. The father, on his return, inquired for the reason of the change; whereupon she proclaimed to him the doctrine of the Trinity, and exhorted him to receive the Christian faith. Her words, as well as her refusal to entertain any offer of marriage, are said to have so infuriated him that he himself led her to the judgment-seat of the proconsul; and that, when the most varied and exquisite tortures were unable to shake her steadfastness, he put her to death with his own hand; in punishment for which atrocious deed he was afterwards killed by lightning. In connection with Barbara, the Romish writers report the following miracle: In the year 1448, a man called Henry Stock, of Gorkum, in Holland, had the misfortune of being almost wholly charred by fire, but, in consequence of an invocation addressed to St. Barbara, was long alive until he had received the last sacrament.

The divine visitation meted out to her unnatural father, and the miraculous prolongation of the poor Dutchman's life, are said to be the reasons why her aid is invoked for deliverance from lightning and fire, and for grace to receive the viaticum.<sup>1</sup> The reason for the introduction of Barbara of the tower into the picture we have not been able to learn. The circumstance that she was, or is, also a patron saint of the Benedictine monastery of the *frati neri* at Piacenza may be considered a sufficient explanation.

We now take up the accounts given of the origin of this conception of the Madonna. The legend runs that Raphael, dissatisfied with all his representations of the Virgin Mary, as falling immeasurably short of his ideal of her, could not think of anything else, and embodied the ardent longing of his soul in an earnest and oft-repeated prayer to her that she might vouchsafe him a gracious answer by appearing to him in all the plenitude of her glory, in order to enable him to honor her in a manner suitable to her exalted condition. The Virgin, touched with his ardent piety, one night when he lay locked in profound sleep appeared to him in a dream,

<sup>1</sup> Vide Aschbach's K. L. Vol. i. p. 454.

surrounded by hosts of angels, carrying in her arms the Only-begotten. This vision of the night produced so powerful an impression on the painter's mind that he forthwith sought to reproduce it on canvas. The legend claims for the Sistine Madonna inspiration, and sees additional ground for confirmation in the circumstance that it is Raphael's last Madonna; that, as art connoisseurs maintain, this Madonna was painted without preparatory sketches or studies; and that, finally, the entire filling up of the picture comports admirably with the idea that Raphael lay asleep before it when he beheld the vision which he then as faithfully delineated as it had appeared to him.

Another legend pretends to explain the introduction of the two cherubs *in dolce far niente* on the window-sill. One day, on entering his studio, Raphael found two boys gazing in rapt attention at the picture. Struck with their posture, his inventive and constructive genius forthwith took up the idea that such a group would admirably fill up the vacant space in the centre of the lower part. He urged the children to remain a short while in that attitude, while he immediately proceeded to sketch them. We do not pretend to indicate the degree of probability for the truthfulness of the legend; but it is certain that the lower space of the painting was in the first instance filled with clouds, traces of which may plainly be seen through the hair of the angels. Von Quandt, an earnest and enthusiastic advocate for the unity of the conception of this *chef d'oeuvre*, was much disconcerted by this discovery, but speedily hit upon a most extraordinary metaphysical expedient for reconciling its otherwise disturbed harmony. He called to mind Kant's "discursive cognition," i.e. a thought undergoing gradual development, or, as it might be termed, "evolution of the idea." According to him, then, the conception of the painting, although in its totality present to Raphael's mind, did undergo a discursive development. He admits that such a psychological explanation strips the painter's conception of the halo of inspiration, and renders it a reflection, but holds that in the finished

work of art the conception, successively developed and distributed over its subordinate parts, regains its original unity of intuition!

In this connection, it may be proper to notice the striking coincidence that this last of the many Madonnas which Raphael's creative genius produced represents the transfiguration of the Virgin, just as his last picture illustrative of the life of Christ depicts also his transfiguration. This fact Passavant insists upon placing beyond the pale of accident, and sees in it a beautiful indication that the aspirations of the enthusiastic artist, whom he actually calls God-inspired, were an incessant struggle for the glorification of the natural into the ideal, of the human into the divine.

The spontaneity, if we may so call it, of the Madonna-figure, — that is, its manifest production on canvas without any previous study or sketch, and for which the legend of the dream claims revelation, — however, has been differently accounted for. It is again a legend, but one of considerable interest; its burden being that the Sistine Madonna is not an ideal conception, but a veritable portrait, and the portrait of Raphael's mistress. In the Pitti palace, at Florence, may be seen the celebrated picture said to be the portrait of Raphael's mistress.<sup>1</sup> It exhibits so striking a resemblance with the Sistine Madonna that those who have seen both paintings are convinced that both were painted after the same model; the only difference being, as stands to reason, that the portrait in the Pitti palace is characterized by individuality, while the head of the Sistine Madonna is treated ideally; that is to say, the separate features and the whole expression of the former are ennobled and exalted to heavenly purity in the latter. Passavant (ii. 836) describes it thus:

“It represents a beautiful Roman lady, turning to the left slightly exceeding three-fourths. The parted hair, brushed

<sup>1</sup> Förster (Raphael, p. 234), and Clément (Michel-Ange, Leonard de Vinci, Raphael, p. 408), deny both the resemblance and the genuineness of the picture. On such themes authorities will differ, and the beholder will have to judge for himself.

behind the ears, display the entire fulness of the oval. A fiery glance from the dark eyes meets the beholder; the nose is slightly *retroussé*; the mouth is marked by playful mirth; the carnation is not very deep. A row of dark, cut stones encircles the throat; the bosom is concealed by a many-plaited garment, considerably rising above the gold-embroidered, slit bodice. The left arm is covered with a wide, slit sleeve of whitish damask; the right being wrapped in the veil which covers the back of the head, and descends on both sides. The right hand lies on the bosom; the left is only seen in part at the left corner. The ground is gray. The painting, of genuine Roman bearing, fascinates by its exquisite loveliness."

It is, doubtless, a Raphael. It was formerly in the Villa Poggio Reale, and transferred, in 1824, to the Pitti Palace. It is probably the same portrait of Raphael's mistress which first Vasari, after him Francesco Bocchi, 1591, and lastly Giovanni Cinelli,<sup>1</sup> declare to have been in the house of the merchants Botti, at Florence.

Now, this portrait in the Pitti palace, in its turn, bears a certain resemblance to another, which since 1642 is catalogued among the paintings of the Palace Barberini at Rome, and also claimed to be a portrait of Raphael's mistress. Passavant (i. 224) tells us that "it represents a maiden not yet wholly dressed, having recently left the bath, in an arbor of myrtle and laurel, a fresh child of nature. A yellow-striped handkerchief surrounds the head, turban-like, and imparts to the otherwise not very animated or delicate conformation of the countenance a distinguished and charming air. With her right hand she presses a transparent cloth to her bosom. A red garment covers the lap, which supports the right arm, ornamented with a gold bracelet, on which Raphael lovingly inscribed his name (RAPHAEL. VRBINAS.)." If, as one may be inclined to believe, the Barberini portrait and that in the Pitti palace depict the same person, it would follow that the companionship of Raphael wrought a mighty change in the youthful child of nature, shedding over her

<sup>1</sup> Belleze di Firenze, 1677, p. 178.

soul the fascinating loveliness which steals over our senses in beholding the queenly charms of the Pitti portrait.

But the question comes up: Who was Raphael's mistress? The legend says, "the Fornarina." And the particulars of that legend we will now briefly unfold. Concerning the name "La Fornarina," it may at once be premised that it cannot be traced back farther than the middle of the last century; but, as custom has given that name to Raphael's mistress, we deem it expedient to retain it. The only historic account of her is given by Vasari, who, however, conceals the name, and simply states that he was inordinately attached to a girl who lived with him to the close of his life, and that he made respectable provision for her in his testament. The bits of anecdote interspersed in his biography will follow hereafter.

The notices of Vasari, who lived nearest Raphael's own time, and was acquainted with his pupils, agree with the particulars found in a ms. biography of the painter, discovered by Riccio, and published by Angelo Comolli, at Rome, in 1790; ascribed by some to Giovanni di Casa, by others to Paolo Giovio, but doubtless written in the sixteenth century. From these it appears that Raphael had intimate relations with a Roman girl of humble origin, whose name has not come down to us.

According to Misserini, she was the daughter of a soda-maker, who lived beyond the Tiber, near St. Cecilia. The house in Street St. Dorotea, number twenty, was, according to Passavant, still shown as that of her birth. It is said formerly to have had attached to it a small garden, enclosed with a low wall, where the lovely girl spent much of her time. The story further runs that she became famed for her great beauty; that, especially, young artists frequently would raise themselves on their toes in order to catch a glimpse of her; that Raphael, also, attracted by her fame, beheld her from his concealment just while she was bathing her feet at a fountain in the garden; that he fell violently in love with her, and found no rest until she became his own. Having given her his heart, he discovered in her

qualities so noble and excellent that the fires of his love refused to be quenched, and that henceforth he would not allow her to leave him.

Another account makes the Fornarina the daughter of a baker; for Fornarina derived from *fornajo*, "a baker," would signify the baker's daughter. Near the bridge and gate leading to the Strada Balbi, in the least frequented part of the city, in an out-of-the-way street, stands a small house, of ancient structure and mean appearance, which has been used from time immemorial as a bakery, and as long distinguished by a slab over the door, with the inscription, "CASA FORNARINA."

Now, the tradition concerning the beautiful girl who exerted so wonderful an influence over Raphael which is most current on the lips of the people makes her to have been born and to have lived in that house. In the year 1508 (?), Raphael, on his way to Agostino Chigi, a wealthy merchant, and, so to say, the papal minister of finance, — the decoration of whose palace and chapel he had undertaken, — saw the Fornarina for the first time, while she was arranging little rolls (*pagnotte*) in the window of her father's bakery. The impression which her transcendent beauty made on Raphael was so overwhelming that he forgot his patron Chigi, the frescos, and sketches. From that moment his work was neglected. He shunned his friends and acquaintances, and spent the best hours of the day in the humble bakery in the company of the enchanting Fornarina. The entreaties and remonstrances of Chigi, who was impatient to have Raphael complete his work, were utterly unavailing. Having learned the cause of the inexplicable carelessness of Raphael, who until then had the reputation for great diligence and enthusiastic application, the old financier, despairing of ever getting his frescos finished, hit upon an expedient of again securing the presence of his favorite painter. He sought the acquaintance of the beautiful girl, and took great pains to prevail upon her to take up her abode in his palace. His efforts proved finally successful, and from that moment the

fair Fornarina gave to Raphael until his death.<sup>1</sup> Chigi's palace is the Farnesina; and it is needless to add that the frescos — report names the Galataea and Psyche groups — were speedily completed, to the unbounded admiration of all who saw them.

The magical influence which the Fornarina exerted on Raphael is said to have operated most beneficially on the development of his style. Many art-critics, indeed, date from his acquaintance with that fascinating girl the beginning of a new era in the art of painting, when he commenced to express *the ideal in the real*. It is actually asserted that the prince of painters had looked in vain for a living embodiment of the idea of an artistic representation of the Madonna and the holy women, until he found the Fornarina in the manner already narrated. She may be called the good genius of Raphael, always hovering over the creations of his imagination, and furnishing, it is maintained, the model of his most exquisite female figures; the Galataea (?), St. Catharine in the Pitti palace, St. Cecilia, and a kneeling woman in the foreground of the Transfiguration (?) being severally regarded as representing the Fornarina.

Besides the portraits already referred to above, a fresco in a garden pavilion of the Borghese palace is also claimed to be a portrait of the Fornarina. Tradition reports her to have been the veritable shadow, or rather the soul, of Raphael. She even followed him to the Vatican, and inspired the conception of his noblest productions. The holy father, however, is said to have been very indignant about Raphael's passionate attachment to her. Her constant presence in the Vatican was universally commented on; and as her relation to Raphael was a public secret, it greatly scandalized the pope, who resolved to take measures for removing her from the artist's company. "Who is that girl?" he asked Raphael, in a tone of indignation. "If your Holiness allow me to reply," said the offended painter, calmly, but very firmly, while the enthusiasm of his boundless love for its object crimsoned his

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, ii. 122.

cheeks, "she is my eyes." The pope understood the reply, and read volumes more in Raphael's looks; he made allowance for his feelings, and, knowing that the loss of his services would have been irreparable, said no more about the matter; and the Fornarina continued to frequent the Vatican as before.<sup>1</sup>

The real history of the Fornarina is of the most fragmentary character. We know that Raphael presented to his pupil Baviera, in gratitude for his care of her, Marco Antonio's copper-plate engravings of his drawings, and provided for her a considerable annuity. All authentic notices of her, after Raphael's death, are wanting; but whoever and whatever she was, it is certain "that for centuries many have envied her lot in having become immortalized by the love of Raphael; that the portrait of a plebeian girl from one of the most obscure parts of Rome has become the ornament of palaces and churches, regaling the eyes of princes, edifying the clergy and the multitude of believers, and filling all lovers of art with pride and delight."

To this quotation from Schäfer we have only to add that her acquaintance with Raphael falls in the period of 1518-1517, most probably about 1517, when he executed most of his works for Chigi. The legendary date, duly noted and doubted above, is most probably wrong.

Vasari<sup>2</sup> states: "Fece (Raphael) a monaci neri di San Sisto in Piacenza la tavola dell' altare maggiore"; "He (Raphael) painted for the black monks of St. Sixtus at Piacenza a leaf for the chief altar." The words "la tavola dell' altare maggiore" have occasioned much discussion, bearing on the question whether the Sistine Madonna be a genuine Raphael. Considering that the question has been triumphantly solved in favor of the picture we only mention the matter as belonging to its history, give a few interesting particulars, and refer those desirous to enter the mazes of art criticism to the numerous works on the subject for fuller information. Vasari's use of the word *tavola* = *tabula*,

<sup>1</sup> Schäfer, i. 179.

<sup>2</sup> Vita di Raffaello, xxiii. 12.

and rendered "leaf," led some of the art-critics to suppose that because the Madonna di San Sisto is painted on canvas, and not on wood, the material on which almost all of Raphael's larger works are painted, it could not be that mentioned by Vasari, and must therefore be spurious. But, apart from the sharp ordeal through which every inch of this wonderful picture has passed, the reasoning based on the word *tavola* is really that of ignorance; for, no matter whether something be painted, drawn, printed, or written, on wood, canvas, paper, or metal, the Italian idiom applies to any of these surfaces the term *tavola*. The current precise terms in the sixteenth century, it cannot be denied, were *tavola* for a painting on wood, and *quadro* for one on canvas stretched over a frame. It is also true that Vasari says that Raphael "made a St. John for Cardinal Colonna on canvas"; "Fece al Cardinale Colonna un S. Giovanni in tela." On the other hand, it is equally true that Vasari used the terms *tavola* and *quadro* very loosely; for he designates the Madonna with the thistle-finch, painted on wood, a *quadro*, while he calls Titian's Ascension of Mary, painted on canvas, a *tavola*. The argument from the word *tavola*, therefore, is untenable, and proves nothing.

Another interesting question, however, attaches to this word. Vasari says that Raphael made a *tavola* for the chief altar; and in that position the painting was found, in 1753, in the Benedictine church of S. Sisto at Piacenza. Examination showed that the painting was larger than its frame, and that, in order to make it fit, the upper part, down to a line beneath the curtain-rod, had been turned in. Now, it can neither be admitted that Raphael mistook the dimensions, nor suffered a shortening of the painting, which would have marred its symmetry. The presumption, therefore, affects the accuracy of Vasari's statement that the picture was originally an altar-piece, and favors the supposition that its primary use was that of a *drappellone*, or processional banner. Now, there are several kinds of such banners, which for our present purpose may be distinguished as

servicing either internal or external uses. One of the latter kind is called by the Italians *stendardo*, or *bandiera*, and used in processions outside the church. Such a purpose the Madonna di San Sisto could not have served; its dimensions, 9' 3"  $\times$  7' equal to about 65 feet square, precluded its being carried about in the open air, where even an ordinary current would have freighted it like a sail; nor is it likely that the black monks would have asked Raphael to undertake so subordinate a task as the making of a *stendardo*; nor would the scenery of the picture, an open window with a curtain before it, comport with such a use.<sup>1</sup>

But there is no reason why it should not have been painted as a *drappellone* or banner, used in processions inside the church, and often set up, standard-like, before the altar. The *drappelloni* were mostly very valuable paintings, and surrounded by a special drapery; and the Benedictine monks may with as much propriety have asked Raphael to paint for their church a *drappellone*, to be especially used as an ornament of the chief altar on all festivals in honor of Mary, as Leo X. requested him to furnish the models for the celebrated Arazzi carpets, made by the Flemish weavers, which, after all, were *drappelloni* of a still inferior sort. This design of the picture may be the reason why Raphael painted it, contrary to his habit, on canvas. The great fame which it speedily acquired, moreover, may have induced the Benedictine monks to assign to it the permanent place of honor as altar-piece of the chief altar in their church, and Vasari afterwards seeing it there may have fallen into the error of supposing it to have been originally made for an altar-piece. Corregio, who saw it there, exclaimed, in the pride of his conscious greatness, "I also am a painter!" But it must be owned that, apart from his coloring, he has never equalled, still less excelled, the great Raphael in sublimity and spirituality of expression, in dignity and arrangement, in drawing, and many other points.<sup>2</sup>

A copy of the Madonna di San Sisto, in the abbey of the

<sup>1</sup> Quandt.

<sup>2</sup> Passavant, i. 302; Schäfer, i. 182.

Benedictine nuns of St. Amand at Rouen, removed to the Hôtel de Ville of that city, is claimed to have been painted by Raphael. An Article in the *Revue encyclopédique* (December 1826, No. 96) states that, "in the year 1508, the abbess of St. Amand asked and obtained of Cardinal George d'Amboise, a painting for a chapel consecrated to the Virgin. That cardinal addressed the famous painter, whose name and reputation were then, as they still are, in everybody's mouth. Raphael sent him a painting like that which he had made for the monastery of St. Sixtus." Now, since the Sistine Madonna was not painted until 1518, and the first Cardinal d'Amboise died May 25, 1510, it is clear that it could not have been made at his instance. His nephew, bearing the same name, succeeded him as archbishop of Rouen, but was not made cardinal until 1545. He may have had a copy made by a French artist, — it has been suggested by Jean de Lyon, the best pupil of Giulio Romano, who had reached the climax of his art about 1540. Passavant, however, pronounces the altar-piece at Rouen a production of the seventeenth century, as the taste and manner of that period seem to belong to it. The deviations from the original are certainly striking. The copyist has changed St. Sixtus into St. Amand by the substitution of the episcopal mitre and the pastoral staff for the tiara, and introduced cords and tassels, much used in the seventeenth century. The drawing and coloring, also, are very inferior, and the angel heads in the halo very clumsy. Besides all this, no historical data have been found showing that Raphael painted a picture for Rouen. The claim to originality, according to the most competent judges, must be wholly abandoned.

The history of the acquisition of the Sistine Madonna for the Dresden gallery remains to be told. Frederick Augustus II., as electoral prince of Saxony, had occasion, on a journey to Italy in 1711 and 1712, to visit Piacenza, and saw there in the monastic church of the Benedictines the celebrated painting which had graced its chief altar for more than two centuries. He admired it so greatly that even then he con-

ceived the idea of securing it, if possible, for the Dresden gallery. More than twenty years elapsed before an opportunity for its purchase presented itself. The electoral court of Saxony commissioned, in 1753, the painter Carlo Cesare Giovannini, at Bologna, to prepare a report on the condition of the picture. He went, accompanied by Dr. the Abbot Giovanni Battista Biamoni of Piacenza, to St. Sisto, and drew up the minutes of his examination, of which the original was deposited at Bologna, and a copy forwarded to Dresden. From these minutes, preserved in the secret archives of the court, it appears that Giovannini had the picture taken down, and immediately identified its genuineness. He discovered some slight injuries in the drapery, and several darkened spots in the body of the Christ-child, which he supposed might be the result of a too liberal application of varnish (?), made by Raphael himself; adding, however, that the picture had probably suffered more from dryness, as it had remained upwards of two hundred years in the same place, without anything having been done for its preservation. He also noticed that the upper part of the painting, with a portion of the curtain, had been tucked in, in order to adapt it to the dimensions of the frame, and took cognizance of dirt spots occasioned by the vicious habits of copyists to touch indistinct or pale portions with oil or saliva: the dust gathering on such moistened spots being very damaging to oil paintings. Giovannini was subsequently authorized to purchase the picture. But it was by no means an easy task to execute the commission; for, on the one hand, its removal had to be concealed from the people; and on the other, the clandestine traffic of the monastic officers had to remain a profound secret. Those gentlemen accordingly stipulated that a faithful copy should occupy the place of the original, as part of the bargain. The copy was well made by the Venetian painter Guiseppe Nogari; and it is said that even to this day credulous Italians are not wanting, who stoutly maintain the originality of the painting at Piacenza. When this part of the transaction had been completed to the satis-

faction of the holy fathers they received the stipulated price of forty thousand Roman scudi or twenty thousand ducats, and the Sistine Madonna was ready to be sent to Dresden.

Rumor says that, in order to prevent detection, and to allay the possible suspicions of custom-house officers, recourse was had to the expedient of covering the picture with a landscape painted in distemper. Giovannini himself took charge of the case, and safely reached the place of destination in November 1753. The king's joy at having secured this precious pearl is said to have been unbounded; and he was all impatience to have it unpacked and set up. He caused it to be taken to the coronation room of the castle. Some difficulty arising as to the most suitable place for obtaining the best light for the picture, the practised eye of the king instantly fixed upon the throne-side of the room, and, pointing out the very site of the throne as the most eligible spot, with his own hands pushed the chair away, saying: "Room for the great Raphael."

Reference has already been made to the condition of the picture at the time of its arrival at Dresden. The unsuitableness of the old gallery building, insufficient protection from the hurtful effects of heat and cold, and the equally injurious coal-smoke, had wrought visible changes in many of the gems of the gallery, and among them in the Sistine Madonna. Serious and anxious fear was entertained that, if the matter were not speedily attended to, this gem might be irretrievably lost. This led to an invitation to the famous restorer of paintings, the Italian Palmaroli, who came in 1826 to Dresden, to bestow his saving art upon some of the choicest treasures of the gallery. After a triumphal experiment on Garofalo's "Madonna surrounded by angels playing on musical instruments, below her St. Peter, Bruno, and George," it was decided that the Sistine Madonna should be confided to his skilful hands. Von Quandt affirmed that the picture had never been varnished, to the great deterioration of its coloring. The absence of varnish, moreover, had rendered the canvass so stiff and devoid of elasticity that

the paint actually threatened to crack. Palmaroli was charged to check the work of destruction, but not allowed to attempt a thorough cleansing of the accumulated dirt of three centuries. He undertook and completed the difficult task of recanvassing the picture, and, by the application of a thin coat of mastic, of imparting new life to the coloring.

After a further lapse of thirty years, the mastic had dried up, and the painting greatly suffered from coal-smoke and dampness, when, on the occasion of removing the picture to its new, and let us hope its lasting, home, inspector Schirmer was charged with the delicate and difficult task of carefully cleansing and freshening it up. The complete success of his skilful execution has astonished every competent connoisseur; and the marvellous effect of his judicious use of balsam of copaiba in the resuscitation of the strength and harmony of the coloring, is the best vindication of the masterly skill of Palmaroli's work, which at first was greatly underrated, and actually laid him open to the charge of having spoiled one of the master-pieces of the great Raphael.

The Sistine Madonna has now found an appropriate resting-place in a separate cabinet of the beautiful Dresden gallery. An altar-like structure of chaste design has been erected, and the leaf is filled by the Madonna. It is now under plate glass, deemed sufficient protection from the deleterious influences of coal-smoke and changes of temperature. The frame gives the name of the artist; and the dates, 1483 and 1520, indicate the years of his birth and death. The front of the lower part of the altar bears the following inscription: "Fece (Raphael) a monaci neri di San Sisto in Piacenza la tavola dell' altare maggiore, dentrovi la nostra Donna con S. Sisto e S. Barbara, cosa veramente rarissima e singolare"; "He (Raphael) painted for the black brothers of the monastery of St. Sixtus at Piacenza a leaf for the chief altar, displaying our Lady with St. Sixtus and St. Barbara — truly a most rare and unique work of art (Vasari, Vita di Raffaello, xxiii. 12)."

This modest summary of criticism is enthusiastically in-

dorsed by the thousands who annually throng to the cabinet where the Sistine Madonna is now set up in solitary majesty, and derive from the study and contemplation of this wonderful work of art not only delightful instruction, but also suggestions of thought and emotion touching the purest and deepest chords of our nature. If this has been accomplished, to however small an extent, the writer is abundantly satisfied, trusting that the collection of interesting details relating to the painting, scattered over many volumes not readily accessible, will be welcomed by every admirer of the famous Madonna di San Sisto.

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## ARTICLE II.

### THE SYNTHETIC OR COSMIC PHILOSOPHY.

BY JOHN BASCOM, LL.D., PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN.

As the synthetic philosophy, so called by Mr. Spencer, or cosmic philosophy, as Mr. Fiske prefers to term it, has recently received a comprehensive yet compact statement by Mr. Fiske, and has been presented in full for a series of years by Mr. Spencer, it is in a position to claim and to accept thorough discussion. Its advocates are laborious, discriminating, and able; while their work is the culmination of a vigorous and continuous line of philosophic thought in England, extending through more than two centuries, and at the same time including much of the most advanced scientific sentiment of the present period.

There have been but few advocates of any system better fitted to enlarge, harmonize, compact, and present a philosophy than is Mr. Spencer. His powers of analysis and synthesis are extraordinary, and his style is clear, full, and plausible in the extreme. The breadth of the topics discussed, and his fulness of knowledge in each, enable him to frame an argument captivating in matter, and impressing the mind with more than its real strength. The scope and vigor