

Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), a prolific Florentine painter, is today best known for his monumental history of Italian art in the Renaissance. The book is organized as a series of biographies beginning with Cimabue in the 13th century and culminating with the author's autobiography. Vasari believed in the perfectability of art, a process of increasing mastery in the study and understanding of nature. He considered that perfection had at last been attained around 1500, principally by Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo. He also believed in the high destiny of the artist who, through the divine gift of genius, was worthy of the highest esteem and social position. The excerpts that follow include his preface to the third and last part of the Lives, and selections from his biography of Raphael.

PREFACE

Those masters whose Lives we have written in the second part made substantial additions to the arts of architecture, painting and sculpture, improving on those of the first part in rule, order, proportion, design and style. If they were not altogether perfect, they came so near the truth, that the third category, of whom we are now to speak, profited by the light they shed, and attained the summit of perfection, producing the more valuable and renowned modern works. But in order that the nature of these improvements may be better appreciated, I will describe in a few words the five points already enumerated, and relate succinctly the source of that excellence which, by surpassing the achievements of the ancients, has rendered the modern age so glorious.

Rule in architecture is the measurement of antiques, following the plans of ancient buildings in making modern ones. Order is the differentiation of one kind from another so that every body shall have its characteristic parts, and that the Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Tuscan shall no longer be mingled indiscriminately. Proportion in sculpture, as in architecture, is the making of the bodies of figures upright, the members being properly arranged, and the same in painting. Design is the imitation of the most beautiful things of nature in all figures whether painted or chiselled, and this requires a hand and genius to transfer everything which the eye sees, exactly and correctly, whether it be in drawings, on paper panel, or other surface, both in relief and sculpture. Style is improved by frequently copying the most beautiful things, and by combining the finest members, whether hands, heads, bodies or legs, to produce a perfect figure, which, being introduced in every work and in every figure, form what is known as a fine style. Giotto and the early artists did not do this, although they had discovered the principles of every difficulty and superficially treated them, as, for example, in drawing more correctly than had been done before, and in approaching nature more nearly in blending colours, in the composition of figures in scenes, and many other things, of which enough has been said.

But although the artists of the second period made great additions to the arts in all these particulars, yet they did not attain to the final stages of perfection, for they lacked a freedom which, while outside the rules, was guided by them, and which was not incompatible with order and correctness. This demanded a prolific invention and the beauty of the smallest details. In proportion they lacked good judgment which, without measuring the figures, invests them with a grace beyond measure in the dimensions chosen. They did not attain to the zenith of design, because, although they made their arms round and their legs straight, they were not skilled in the muscles, and lacked that graceful and sweet ease which is partly seen and partly felt in matters of flesh and living things, but they were crude and stunted, their eyes being difficult and their style hard.

Moreover, they did not possess that lightness of touch in making all their figures slender and graceful, especially the women and infants, who should be rendered as truthfully as the men, while avoiding coarseness so that they may not be clumsy, as in nature, but refined by design and good judgment. Their draperies lacked beauty, their fancies variety, their colouring charm, their buildings diversity and their landscapes distance and variety. Although many of them, like Andrea Verrocchio, Antonio del Pollajuolo and others of more recent date endeavoured to improve the design of their figures by more study while approaching nature more closely, yet they were not quite sure of their ground. However, their work would bear comparison with the antique, as we see by Verrocchio's restoration of the marble legs and arms of the Marsyas of the Casa Medici at Florence. They also lacked finish and perfection in feet, hands, hair, beards, and did not make all the members correspond to the antique with the proper proportions. If they had possessed this finish, which is the perfection and flower of the arts, they would have also possessed a resolute boldness in their work, and would have obtained a lightness, polish and grace to which they did not attain, despite all their efforts which give the supreme results of art to fine figures, whether in relief or painted. That finish and assurance which they lacked they could not readily attain by study, which has a tendency to render the style dry when it becomes an end in itself. The others were able to attain to it after they had seen some of the finest works mentioned by Pliny dug out of the earth: the Laocoon, the Hercules, the great torso of Belvedere, the Venus, the Cleopatra, the Apollo, and endless others, which are copied in their softness and in their hardness from the best living examples, with actions which do not distort them, but give them motion and display the utmost grace. This removed a certain dryness and crudeness caused by overmuch study, observable in Piero della Francesca, Lazzaro Vasari, Alesso Baldovinetti, Andrea del Castagno, Pesello, Ercole Ferrarese, Giovan. Bellini, Cosimo Rosselli, the abbot of S. Clemente, Domenico del Ghirlandajo, Sandro Botticello, Andrea Mantegna, Filippo¹ and Luca Signorelli. All these endeavoured to attain the impossible by their labours, especially in foreshortening and unpleasant objects, but the effort of producing them was too apparent in the result. Thus, although most were well designed and flawless, vigour was invariably absent from them, and they lacked a soft blending of colour, first observable in Francia of Bologna and Pietro Perugino. The people, when they beheld the new and living beauty, ran madly to see it, thinking that it would never be possible to improve upon it. But the works of Lionardo da Vinci clearly proved how much they erred, for he began the third style, which I will call the modern, notable for boldness of design, the subtlest imitation of Nature in trifling details, good rule, better order, correct proportion, perfect design and divine grace, prolific and diving to the depths of art, endowing his figures with motion and breath. Somewhat later followed Giorgione da Castel Franco, who gave tone to his pictures and endowed his things with tremendous life by means of the well-managed depth of the shadows.

improve or nature

classical

No less skilful in imparting to his works force, relief, sweetness and grace was Frà Bartolommeo of S. Marco; but the most graceful of all was Raphael of Urbino, who, studying the labours of both the ancient and the modern masters, selected the best from each, and out of his garner enriched the art of painting with that absolute perfection which the figures of Apelles and Zeuxis anciently possessed, and even more, if I may say so. Nature herself was vanquished by his colours, and his invention was facile and appropriate, as anyone may judge who has seen his works, which are like writings, showing us the sites and the buildings, and the ways and habits of native and foreign peoples just as he desired. Besides the grace of his heads, whether young or old, men or women, he represented the modest with modesty, the bold as bold, and his infants sometimes with mischievous and sometimes with playful eyes. His draperies are neither too simple nor too involved, but simply natural. Andrea del Sarto followed him in this manner, but with a softer and less bold colouring, and it may be said that he was a rare artist because his works are faultless. It is impossible to describe the delicate vivacity which characterises the works of Antonio da Correggio. He depicted hair in a manner unknown before, for it had previously been made hard and dry, while his was soft and downy, the separate hairs polished so that they seemed of gold and more beautiful than natural ones, which were surpassed by his colouring. Francesco Mazzola Parmigiano did the like, surpassing him in many respects in grace, ornament and fine style, as many of his paintings show, the faces laughing, the eyes speaking, the very pulses seeming to beat, just as his brush pleased. An examination of the wall-paintings of Polidoro and Maturino will show how marvellous are their figures, and the beholder will wonder how they have been able to produce those stupendous works, not by speech, which is easy, but with the brush, as they have done in their skilful representations of the deeds of the Romans.

How many are there among the dead whose colours have endowed their figures with such life as is imparted by Il Rosso, Frà Sebastiano Giulo Romano, Perino del Vaga, not to speak of the many celebrated living men. But the important fact is that art has been brought to such perfection to-day, design, invention and colouring coming easily to those who possess them, that where the first masters took six years to paint one picture our masters to-day would only take one year to paint six, as I am firmly convinced both from observation and experience; and many more are now completed than the masters of former days produced.

But the man who bears the palm of all ages, transcending and eclipsing all the rest, is the divine Michelagnolo Buonarroti, who is supreme not in one art only but in all three at once. He surpasses not only all those who have, as it were, surpassed Nature, but the most famous ancients also, who undoubtedly surpassed her. He has proceeded from conquest to conquest, never finding a difficulty which he cannot easily overcome by the force of his divine genius, by his industry, design, art, judgment and grace, and this not only in painting and in colours, comprising all forms and bodies, straight and not straight, palpable and impalpable, visible and invisible, but in the extreme rotundity of his statues. With the point of his chisel and by his fruitful labours he has spread his branches far, and fued the world with more delicious fruit than the three noble arts had produced before, in such marvellous perfection that it may well and safely be said that his statues are in every respect much finer than the ancient ones, as he knew how to select the most perfect members, arms, hands, heads, feet, form them into a perfect whole, with the most complete grace and absolute perfection, the very difficulties appearing easy in his style, so that it is impossible ever to see better. If by chance there were any works of the most renowned Greeks and Romans which might be brought forward for comparison, his sculptures would only gain in value and renown as their manifest superiority to those of the ancients became more apparent. But if we so greatly admire those who devoted their lives to their work, when induced by extraordinary rewards and great happiness, what must we say of the men who produced such precious fruit not only without reward but in miserable poverty? It is believed that if there were just rewards in our age we should become undoubtedly greater and better than the ancients ever were.

But the necessity of fighting against famine rather than for fame crushes men of genius and prevents them from becoming known, which is a shame and disgrace to those who could improve their condition and will not. Let this suffice; it is now time to turn to the Lives and treat separately all those who have produced celebrated works in this third style. The first of these was Lionardo da Vinci, with whom we now begin.

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RAPHAEL OF URBINO, Painter and Architect (1483-1520)

THE liberality with which Heaven now and again unites in one person the inexhaustible riches of its treasures and all those graces and rare gifts which are usually shared among many over a long period is seen in Raphael Sanzio of Urbino, who was as excellent as gracious, and endowed with a natural modesty and goodness sometimes seen in those who possess to an unusual degree a humane and gentle nature adorned with affability and good-fellowship, and he always showed himself sweet and pleasant with persons of every degree and in all circumstances. Thus Nature created Michelagnolo Buonarroti to excel and conquer in art, but Raphael to excel in art and in manners also. Most artists have hitherto displayed something of folly and savagery, which, in addition to rendering them eccentric and fantastical, has also displayed itself in the darkness of vice and not in the splendour of those virtues which render men immortal. In Raphael, on the other hand, the rarest gifts were combined with such grace, diligence, beauty, modesty and good character that they would have sufficed to cover the ugliest vice and the worst blemishes. We may indeed say that those who possess such gifts as Raphael are not mere men, but rather mortal gods, and that those who by their works leave an honoured name among us on the roll of fame may hope to receive a fitting reward in heaven for their labours and their merits.

Raphael was born at Urbino, a most important city of Italy, in 1483, on Good Friday, at three in the morning, of Giovanni de' Santi, a painter of no great merit, but of good intelligence and well able to show his son the right way, a favour which bad fortune had not granted to himself in his youth. Giovanni, knowing how important it was for the child, whom he called Raphael as a good augury, being his only son, to have his mother's milk and not that of a nurse, wished her to suckle it, so that the child might see the ways of his equals in his tender years rather than the rough manners of clowns and people of low condition. When the boy was grown, Giovanni began to teach him painting, finding him much inclined to that art and of great intelligence. Thus Raphael, before many years and while still a child, greatly assisted his father in the numerous works which he did in the state of Urbino. At last this good and loving father perceived that his son could learn little more from him, and determined to put him with Pietro Perugino, who, as I have already said, occupied the first place among the painters of the time. Accordingly Giovanni went to Perugia, and not finding Pietro there he waited for him, occupying the time in doing some things in S. Francesco. When Pietro returned from Rome,¹ Giovanni being courteous and well bred, made his acquaintance, and at a fitting opportunity told him what he wished in the most tactful manner. Pietro, who was also courteous and a friend of young men of promise, agreed to take Raphael. Accordingly Giovanni returned joyfully to Urbino, and took the boy with him to Perugia, his mother, who loved him tenderly, weeping bitterly at the separation.² When Pietro had seen Raphael's method of drawing and his fine manners and behaviour, he formed an opinion of him that was amply justified by time. It is well known that while Raphael was studying Pietro's style he imitated him so exactly in everything that his portraits cannot be distinguished from those of his master, nor indeed can other things.

Character 1

love for art drew him to Florence,³ for he heard great things from some painters of Siena of a cartoon done by Lionardo da Vinci in the Pope's Hall at Florence of a fine group of horses, to be put in the hall of the palace, and also of some nudes of even greater excellence done by Michelagnolo in competition with Lionardo. This excited so strong a desire in Raphael that he put aside his work and all thought of his personal advantage, for excellence in art always attracted him.

Arrived in Florence, he was no less delighted with the city than with the works of art there, which he thought divine, and he determined to live there for some time

It is well known that after his stay in Florence Raphael greatly altered and improved his style, through having seen the works of the foremost masters, and he never reverted to his former manner, which looks like the work of a different and inferior hand.

Bramante, who was in the service of Julius II., wrote to him on account of a slight relationship, and because they were of the same country, saying that he had induced the Pope to have certain apartments done, and that Raphael might have a chance of showing his powers there. This pleased Raphael so that he left his works at Florence

and went to Rome.⁴ Arrived there, Raphael found a great part of the chambers of the palace already painted, and the whole being done by several masters. Thus Pietro della Francesca had finished one scene, Luca da Cortona had completed a wall, while Don Pietro della Gatta, abbot of S. Clemente, Arezzo, had begun some things. Bramantino da Milano also had painted several figures, mostly portraits, and considered very fine. Raphael received a hearty welcome from Pope Julius, and in the chamber of the Segnatura he painted the theologians reconciling Philosophy and Astrology with Theology, including portraits of all the wise men of the world in disputation.¹ Some astrologers there have drawn figures of their science and various characters on tablets, carried by angels to the Evangelists, who explain them. Among these is Diogenes with a pensive air, lying on the steps, a figure admirable for its beauty and the disordered drapery. There also are Aristotle and Plato, with the Ethics and Timæus respectively, and a group of philosophers in a ring about them. Indescribably fine are those astrologers and geometricians drawing figures and characters with their sextants. Among them is a youth of remarkable beauty with his arms spread in astonishment and head bent. This is a portrait of Federigo II., Duke of Mantua, who was then in Rome. Another figure bends towards the ground, holding a pair of compasses in his hand and turning them on a board. This is said to be a life-like portrait of Bramante the architect. The next figure, with his back turned and a globe in his hand, is a portrait of Zoroaster. Beside him is Raphael himself, drawn with the help of a mirror. He is a very modest-looking young man, of graceful and pleasant mien, wearing a black cap on his head. The beauty and excellence of the heads of the Evangelists are inexpressible, as he has given them an air of attention and carefulness which is most natural, especially in those who are writing. Behind St. Matthew, as he is copying the characters from tablets, held by an angel, is an old man with paper on his knees copying what Matthew dictates. As he stands in that uncomfortable position, he seems to move his lips and head to follow the pen. The minor considerations, which are numerous, are well thought out, and the composition of the entire scene, which is admirably portioned out, show Raphael's determination to hold the field, without a rival, against all who wielded the brush. He further adorned this work with a perspective and many figures, so delicately and finely finished that Pope Julius caused all the other works of the other masters, both old and new, to be destroyed, that Raphael alone might have the glory of replacing what had been done. Although the work of Gio. Antonio Sodoma of Vercelli, which was above the scene of Raphael's, was to have been destroyed by the Pope's order, Raphael decided to make use of its arrangement and of the grotesques. In each of the four circles he made an allegorical figure to point

the significance of the scene beneath, towards which it turns. For the first, where he had painted Philosophy, Astrology, Geometry and Poetry agreeing with Theology, is a woman representing Knowledge, seated in a chair supported on either side by a goddess Cybele, with the numerous breasts ascribed by the ancients to Diana Polymastes. Her garment is of four colours, representing the four elements, her head being the colour of fire, her bust that of air, her thighs that of earth, and her legs that of water. Some beautiful children are with her. In another circle towards the window looking towards the Belvedere is Poetry in the person of Polyhymnia, crowned with laurel, holding an ancient instrument in one hand and a book in the other. Her legs are crossed, the face having an expression of immortal beauty, the eyes being raised to heaven. By her are two children, full of life and movement, harmonising well with her and the others. On this side Raphael afterwards did the Mount Parnassus¹ above the window already mentioned. In the circle over the scene where the holy doctors are ordering Mass is Theology with books and other things about her, and children of no less beauty than the others. Over the window looking into the court, in another circle, he did Justice with her scales and naked sword, with similar children of the utmost beauty, because on the wall underneath he had represented civil and canon law, as I shall relate. On the same vaulting, at the corners, he did four scenes, designed and coloured with great diligence, though the figures are not large. In one of them, next the Theology, he did the sin of Adam in eating the apple, in a graceful style. In the one where Astrology is, he represented that science putting the fixed and moving stars in their appointed places. In the one of Mount Parnassus he did Marsyas flayed at a tree by Apollo; and next the scene of the giving of the Decretals is a Judgment of Solomon. These four scenes are full of feeling and expression, executed with great diligence in beautiful and graceful colouring.

I must now relate what was done on the walls below. On the wall towards the Belvedere, containing the Mount Parnassus and Fountain of Helicon, he made a shady laurel grove about the mount, so that the trembling of the leaves in the soft air can almost be seen, while a number of naked cupids, with lovely faces, are floating above, holding laurel branches, of which they make garlands and scatter them over the mount. The beauty of the figures and the nobility of the painting breathe a truly divine afflatus, and cause those who examine them to marvel that they should be the work of a human mind, through the imperfect medium of colours, and that the excellence of the design should make them appear alive. The poets scattered about the mountain are remarkable in this respect, some standing and some writing, others talking, and others singing or conversing in groups of four or six according to the disposition. Here are portraits of all the most famous poets, both ancient and modern, taken partly from statues, partly from medals, and many from old pictures, while others were living. Here we see Ovid, Virgil, Ennius, Tibullus, Catullus, Propertius and Homer, holding up his blind head and singing verses, while at his feet is one writing. Here in a group are the nine Muses, with Apollo, breathing realities of wonderful beauty and grace. Here are the learned Sappho, the divine Dante, the delicate Petrarca, the amorous Boccaccio, all full of life; Tibaldeo is there also, and numerous other moderns, the whole scene being done with exquisite grace and finished with care. On another wall he did Heaven, with Christ and the Virgin, St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, Evangelists, martyrs in the clouds, with God the Father above sending out the Holy Spirit over a number of saints who subscribe to the Mass and argue upon the Host which is on the altar. Among them are the four Doctors of the Church, surrounded by saints, including Dominic, Francis, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, Scotus, Nicholas of Lyra, Dante, Frà Girolamo Savonarola of Ferrara, and all the Christian theologians, including a number of portraits. In the air are four children holding open the Gospels, and it would be impossible for any painter to produce figures of more grace and perfection than these. The saints in a group in the air seem alive, and are remarkable for the foreshortening and relief. Their draperies also are varied and very beautiful, and the heads rather celestial than human, especially that of Christ, displaying all the clemency and pity which divine painting can demonstrate to mortal man.

Parnassus

Propertius

Indeed, Raphael had the gift of rendering his heads sweet and gracious, as we see in a Madonna with her hands to her breast contemplating the Child, who looks incapable of refusing a favour. Raphael appropriately rendered his patriarchs venerable, his apostles simple, and his matryrs full of faith. But he showed much more art and genius in the holy Christian doctors, disputing in groups of six, three and two. Their faces show curiosity and their effort to establish the certainty of which they are in doubt, using their hands in arguing and certain gestures of the body, attentive ears, knit brows, and many different kinds of astonishment, various and appropriate. On the other hand, the four Doctors of the Church, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, solve, by means of the Holy Scriptures, all the questions of the Gospels, which are held by children flying in the air. On the other wall, containing the other window, he did Justinian giving laws to the doctors, who correct them; above are Temperance, Fortitude and Prudence. On the other side the Pope being a portrait of Julius II., while Giovanni de' Medici the cardinal, afterwards Pope Leo, Cardinal Antonio di Monte, and Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, afterwards Pope Paul III., are also present, with other portraits. The Pope was greatly delighted with this work.

His style improved so greatly that the Pope entrusted to him the second chamber towards the great hall. His reputation had now become very great, and at this time he painted a portrait of Pope Julius in oils so wonderfully life-like and true that it inspired fear as if it were alive.

At this time Raphael had acquired great renown at Rome. But although his graceful style commanded the admiration of all, and he continually studied the numerous antiquities in the city, he had not as yet endowed his figures with the grandeur and majesty which he imparted to them henceforward.

It happened at this time that Michelagnolo caused the Pope so much upset and alarm in the chapel, of which I shall speak in his Life, whereby he was forced to fly to Florence. Bramante had the keys of the chapel, and, being friendly with Raphael, he showed him Michelagnolo's methods so that he might understand them. This at once led Raphael to do over again the Prophet Isaiah in S. Agostino above the St. Anne of Andrea Sansovino, which he had just finished. Aided by what he had seen of Michelagnolo, he greatly improved and enlarged the figure, endowing it with more majesty. When Michelagnolo saw it afterwards he concluded that Bramante had played him this bad turn to benefit Raphael.

The glory and the rewards of Raphael increased together. To leave a memory of himself he built a palace in the Borgo Nuovo at Rome, decorated with stucco by Bramante.

By these and other works the fame of Raphael spread to France and Flanders. Albert Dürer, a remarkable German painter and author of some fine copper engravings, paid him the tribute of his homage and sent him his own portrait, painted in water-colours, on cambric, so fine that it was transparent, without the use of white paint, the white material forming the lights of the picture. This appeared marvellous to Raphael, who sent back many drawings of his own which were greatly valued by Albert.

For the monastery of Palermo, called S. Maria dello Spasmo, of the friars of Monte Oliveto, Raphael did Christ bearing the Cross, which is considered marvellous, seeing the cruelty of the executioners leading Him to death on Mount Calvary with fierce rage. The Christ in his grief and pain at the approach of death has fallen through the weight of the cross, and, bathed in sweat and blood, turns towards the Maries, who are weeping bitterly. Here Veronica is stretching out her hand and offering the handkerchief with an expression of deep love. The work is full of armed men on horse and foot, who issue from the gate of Jerusalem with the standards of justice in their hands, in varied and fine attitudes.

When this picture was finished, but not set up in its place, it was nearly lost, because on its way by sea to Palermo a terrible storm overtook the ship, which was broken on a rock, and the men and merchandise all perished, except this picture, which was washed up at Genoa in its case. When it was fished out and landed it was found to be a divine work, and proved to be uninjured, for even the fury of the winds and waves respected such painting. When the news had spread, the monks hastened to claim it, and no sooner was it restored to them through the influence of the Pope than they handsomely rewarded those who had saved it. It was again sent by ship, and was set up in Palermo, where it is more famous than the mountain of Vulcan. While Raphael was at work on these things, which he had to do, since it was for great and distinguished persons, and he could not decline them in his own interest, he nevertheless continued his work in the Pope's chambers and halls, where he kept men constantly employed in carrying on the work from his designs, while he supervised the whole, giving assistance as he well knew how.

Raphael was very amorous, and fond of women, and was always swift to serve them. Possibly his friends showed him too much complaisance in the matter. Thus, when Agostino Chigi, his close friend, employed him to paint the first loggia in his palace, Raphael neglected the work for one of his mistresses. Agostino, in despair, had the lady brought to his house to live in the part where Raphael was at work, contriving this with difficulty by the help of others. That is why the work was completed.

Having hitherto described the works of this great man, I will make some observations on his style for the benefit of our artists, before I come to the other particulars of his life and death. In his childhood Raphael imitated the style of Pietro Ferugino, his master, improving it greatly in design, colouring and invention. But in riper years he perceived that this was too far from the truth. For he saw the works of Lionardo da Vinci, who had no equal for the fashion of the heads of women and children, and in rendering his figures graceful, while in movement he surpassed all other artists; these filled Raphael with wonder and amazement. As this style pleased him more than any he had ever seen, he set to work to study it, and gradually and painfully abandoning the manner of Pietro, he sought as far as possible to imitate Lionardo. But in spite of all his diligence and study he could never surpass Lionardo, and though some consider him superior in sweetness, and in a certain natural facility, yet he never excelled that wonderful groundwork of ideas, and that grandeur of art, in which few have equalled Lionardo. Raphael, however, approached him more closely than any other painter, especially in grace of colouring.

But to return to Raphael himself. The style which he learnt of Pietro when young became a great disadvantage to him. He had learned it readily because it was slight, dry and defective in design, but his not being able to throw it off rendered it very difficult for him to learn the beauty of nudes, and the method of difficult foreshortening of the cartoon of Michelagnolo Buonarroti for the Hall of the Council at Florence. Another man would have lost heart at having wasted so much time, but not so Raphael, who purged himself of the style of Pietro, and used it as a stepping-stone to reach that of Michelagnolo, full as it was of difficulties in every part. The master having thus become a pupil again, applied himself to do as a man in a few months the work of several years, at an age when one learns quickly. Indeed, he who does not learn good principles and the style which he means to follow at an early age, acquiring facility by experience, seeking to understand the parts and put them in practice, will hardly ever become perfect, and can only do so with great pains, and after long study. When Raphael began to change and improve his style, he had never studied the nude as it should be studied, but had only done portraits as he had seen his master Pietro do them, assisted by his own natural grace.

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Rover

Accordingly he studied the nude, comparing the muscles of dead men with those of the living, which do not seem so marked when covered with skin as they do when the skin is removed. He afterwards saw how the soft and fleshy parts are made, and graceful turnings and twists, the effects of swelling, lowering and raising a member or the whole body, the system of bones, nerves and veins, becoming excellent in all the parts as a great master should. But seeing that he could not in this respect attain to the perfection of Michelagnolo, and being a man of good judgment, he reflected that painting does not consist of representing nude figures alone, but that it has a large field, and among the excellent painters there were many who could express their ideas with ease, felicity and good judgment, composing scenes not overcrowded or poor, and with few figures, but with good invention and order, and who deserved the name of skilled and judicious artists. It was possible, he reflected, to enrich his works with variety of perspective, buildings and landscapes, a light and delicate treatment of the draperies, sometimes causing the figure to be lost in the darkness, and sometimes coming into the clear light, making living and beautiful heads of women, children, youths and old men, endowing them with suitable movement and vigour. He also reflected upon the importance of the flight of horses in battle, the courage of the soldiers, the knowledge of all sorts of animals, and, above all, the method of drawing portraits of men to make them appear life-like and easily recognised, with a number of other things, such as draperies, shoes, helmets, armour, women's head-dresses, hair, beards, vases, trees, caves, rain, lightning, fine weather, night, moonlight, bright sun, and other necessities of present-day painting. Reflecting upon these things, Raphael determined that, if he could not equal Michelagnolo in some respects, he would do so in the other particulars, and perhaps surpass him. Accordingly he did not imitate him, not wishing to lose time, but studied to make himself the best master in the particulars mentioned. If other artists had done this instead of studying and imitating Michelagnolo only, though they could not attain to such perfection, they would not have striven in vain, attaining a very hard manner, full of difficulty, without beauty or colouring, and poor in invention, when by seeking to be universal, and imitating other parts, they might have benefited themselves and the world. Having made this resolution, and knowing that Frà Bartolommeo of S. Marco had a very good method of painting, solid design and pleasant colouring, although he sometimes used the shadows too freely to obtain greater relief, Raphael borrowed from him what he thought would be of service, namely a medium style in design and colouring, combining it with particulars selected from the best things of other masters. He thus formed a single style out of many, which was always considered his own, and was, and will always be, most highly esteemed by artists. This is seen to perfection in the sibyls and prophets done in the Pace, as has been said, for which he derived so much assistance from having seen the work of Michelagnolo in the Pope's chapel. If Raphael had stopped here, without seeking to aggrandise and vary his style, to show that he understood nudes as well as Michelagnolo, he would not have partly obscured the good name he had earned, for his nudes in the chamber of the Borgia tower in the Burning of the Borgo Nuovo, though good, are not flawless. Equally unsatisfactory are those done by him on the vaulting of the palace of Agostino Ghigi in Trastevere, because they lack his characteristic grace and sweetness. This was caused in great measure by his having employed others to colour from his designs. Recognising this mistake, he did the Transfiguration of S. Pietro a Montorio by himself unaided, so that it combines all the requisites of a good painting. If he had not employed printers' lampblack, through some caprice, which darkens with time, as has been said, and spoils the other colours with which it is mixed, I think the work would now be as fresh as when he did it, whereas it has now become rather faded.

I have entered upon these questions at the end of this Life to show how great were the labours, studies and diligence of this famous artist, and chiefly for the benefit of other painters, so that they may rise superior to disadvantages as Raphael did by his prudence and skill. Let me also add that everyone should be contented with doing the things for which he has a natural bent, and ought not to endeavour out of emulation to do what does not come to him naturally, in order that he may not labour in vain, frequently with shame and loss. Besides this, he should rest contented and not endeavour to surpass those who have worked miracles in art through great natural ability and the especial favour of God. For a man without natural ability, try how he may, will never succeed like one who successfully progresses with the aid of Nature. Among the ancients Paolo Uccello is an example of this, for he steadily deteriorated through his efforts to do more than he was able. The same remark applies in our own day to Jacopo da Pontormo, and may be seen in many others, as I have related and shall relate again. Perhaps this is because when Heaven has distributed favours it wishes men to rest content with their share.

Having spoken upon these questions of art, possibly at greater length than was necessary, I will now return to Raphael.

A great friend of his, Bernardo Divizio, cardinal of Bibbiena, had for many years urged him to take a wife. Raphael had not definitely refused, but had temporised, saying he would wait for three or four years. At the end of this time, when he did not expect it, the cardinal reminded him of his promise. Feeling obliged to keep his word, Raphael accepted a niece of the cardinal for wife. But being very ill-content with this arrangement, he kept putting things off, so that many months passed without the marriage taking place. This was not done without a purpose, because he had served the court so many years, and Leo was his debtor for a good sum, so that he had received an intimation that, on completing the room which he was doing, the Pope would give him the red hat for his labours and ability, as it was proposed to create a good number of cardinals, some of less merit than Raphael.

Meanwhile Raphael continued his secret pleasures beyond all measure. After an unusually wild debauch he returned home with a severe fever, and the doctors believed him to have caught a chill. As he did not confess the cause of his disorder, the doctors imprudently let blood, thus enfeebling him when he needed restoratives. Accordingly he made his will, first sending his mistress out of the house, like a Christian, leaving her the means to live honestly. He then divided his things among his pupils, Giulio Romano, of whom he was always very fond, Gio. Francesco of Florence, called "il Fattore," and some priest of Urbino, a relation. He ordained and left a provision that one of the antique tabernacles in S. Maria Rotonda should be restored with new stones, and an altar erected with a marble statue of the Madonna. This was chosen for his tomb after his death. He left all his possessions to Giulio and Gio. Francesco, making M. Baldassare da Pescia, then the Pope's datary, his executor. Having confessed and shown penitence, he finished the course of his life on the day of his birth, Good Friday, aged thirty-seven. We may believe that his soul adorns heaven as his talent has embellished the earth. At the head of the dead man, in the room where he worked, they put the Transfiguration, which he had done for the Cardinal de' Medici. The sight of the dead and of this living work filled all who saw them with poignant sorrow. The picture was placed by the cardinal in S. Pietro a Montorio, at the high altar, and was always prized for its execution.³ The body received honoured

born + died Good Friday

burial, as befitted so noble a spirit, for there was not an artist who did not grieve or who failed to accompany it to the tomb. His death caused great grief to the papal court, as he held office there as groom of the chamber, and afterwards the Pope became so fond of him that his death made him weep bitterly. O happy spirit, for all are proud to speak of thee and celebrate thy deeds, admiring every design! With the death of this admirable artist painting might well have died also, for when he closed his eyes she was left all but blind. We who remain can imitate the good and perfect examples left by him, and keep his memory green for his genius and the debt which we owe to him. It is, indeed, due to him that the arts, colouring and invention have all been brought to such perfection that further progress can hardly be expected, and it is unlikely that anyone will ever surpass him. Besides these services rendered to art, as a friend he was courteous alike to the upper, the middle and the lower classes. One of his numerous qualities fills me with amazement: that Heaven endowed him with the power of showing a disposition quite contrary to that of most painters. For the artists who worked with Raphael, not only the poor ones, but those who aspired to be great—and there are many such in our profession—lived united and in harmony, all their evil humours disappearing when they saw him, and every vile and base thought deserting their mind. Such a thing was never seen at any other time, and it arose because they were conquered by his courtesy and tact, and still more by his good nature, so full of gentleness and love that even animals loved him, not to speak of men. It is said that he would leave his own work to oblige any painter who had known him, and even those who did not. He always kept a great number employed, assisting and teaching them with as much affection as if they had been his own sons. He never went to court without having fifty painters at his heels, all good and skilful, who accompanied him to do him honour. In short, he did not live like a painter, but as a prince. For this cause, O Art of Painting, thou mayest consider thyself fortunate in having possessed an artist who, by his genius and character, has raised thee above the heavens. Blessed indeed art thou to have seen thy disciples brought together by the instruction of such a man, uniting the arts and virtues, which in Raphael compelled the greatness of Julius II. and the generosity of Leo, men occupying the highest dignity, to treat him with familiarity, and practise every kind of liberality, so that by means of their favour, and the wealth they gave him, he was able to do great honour to himself and to his art. Happy also were those who served under him, because all who imitated him were on a safe road, and so those who imitate his labours in art will be rewarded by the world, as those who copy his virtuous life will be rewarded in heaven. [