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[Illustration: \_Madonna of Castelfranco\_ Photogravure from the

Painting by Giorgione in the Parish Church, Castelfranco]

THE

MADONNA IN ART

BY

ESTELLE M. HURLL

Illustrated

A mother is a mother still--

The holiest thing alive.

--COLERIDGE.

BOSTON

L.C. PAGE AND COMPANY

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PREFACE.

This little book is intended as a companion volume to "Child-Life in

Art," and is a study of Madonna art as a revelation of motherhood.

With the historical and legendary incidents in the life of the Virgin

it has nothing to do. These subjects have been discussed

comprehensively and finally in Mrs. Jameson's splendid work on the

"Legends of the Madonna." Out of the great mass of Madonna subjects

are selected, here, only the idealized and devotional pictures of the

Mother and Babe. The methods of classifying such works are explained

in the Introduction.

Great pains have been taken to choose as illustrations, not only the

pictures which are universal favorites, but others which are less

widely known and not easily accessible.

The cover was designed by Miss Isabelle A. Sinclair, in the various

colors appropriate to the Virgin Mary. The lily is the Virgin's

flower, \_la fleur de Marie\_, the highest symbol of her purity. The

gold border surrounding the panel is copied from the ornamentation of

the mantle worn by Botticelli's Dresden Madonna.

ESTELLE M. HURLL.

\_New Bedford, Mass., May, 1897.\_

INTRODUCTION.

It is now about fifteen centuries since the Madonna with her Babe was

first introduced into art, and it is safe to say that, throughout all

this time, the subject has been unrivalled in popularity. It requires

no very profound philosophy to discover the reason for this. The

Madonna is the universal type of motherhood, a subject which, in its

very nature, appeals to all classes and conditions of people. No one

is too ignorant to understand it, and none too wise to be superior to

its charm. The little child appreciates it as readily as the old man,

and both, alike, are drawn to it by an irresistible attraction. Thus,

century after century, the artist has poured out his soul in this

all-prevailing theme of mother love until we have an accumulation of

Madonna pictures so great that no one would dare to estimate their

number. It would seem that every conceivable type was long since

exhausted; but the end is not yet. So long as we have mothers, art

will continue to produce Madonnas.

With so much available material, the student of Madonna art would be

discouraged at the outset were it not possible to approach the subject

systematically. Even the vast number of Madonna pictures becomes

manageable when studied by some method of classification. Several

plans are possible. The historical student is naturally guided in his

grouping by the periods in which the pictures were produced; the

critic, by the technical schools which they represent. Besides these

more scholarly methods, are others, founded on simpler and more

obvious dividing lines. Such are the two proposed in the following

pages, forming, respectively, Part I. and Part II. of our little

volume.

The first is based on the style of composition in which the picture is

painted; the second, on the subject which it treats. The first

examines the mechanical arrangement of the figures; the second asks,

what is the real relation between them? The first deals with external

characteristics; the second, with the inner significance.

Proceeding by the first, we ask, what are the general styles of

treatment in which Madonna pictures have been rendered? The answer

names the following five classes:

1. The Portrait Madonna, the figures in half-length against an

indefinite background.

2. The Madonna Enthroned, where the setting is some sort of a throne

or dais.

3. The Madonna in the Sky or the "Madonna in Gloria," where the

figures are set in the heavens, as represented by a glory of light, by

clouds, by a company of cherubs, or by simple elevation above the

earth's surface.

4. The Pastoral Madonna, with a landscape background.

5. The Madonna in a Home Environment, where the setting is an

interior.

The foregoing subjects are arranged in the order of historical

development, so far as is possible. The first and last of the classes

enumerated are so small, compared with the others, that they are

somewhat insignificant in the whole number of Madonna pictures. Yet,

in all probability, it is along these lines that future art is most

likely to develop the subject, choosing the portrait Madonna because

of its universal adaptability, and representing the Madonna in her

home, in an effort to realize, historically, the New Testament scenes.

Of the remaining three, the enthroned Madonna is, doubtless, the

largest class, historically considered, because of the long period

through which it has been represented. The pastoral and enskied

Madonnas were in high favor in the first period of their perfection.

Our next question is concerned with the aspects of motherhood

displayed in Madonna pictures: in what relation to her child has the

Madonna been represented? The answer includes the following three

subjects:

1. The Madonna of Love (The Mater Amabilis), in which the relation is

purely maternal. The emphasis is upon a mother's natural affection as

displayed towards her child.

2. The Madonna in Adoration (The Madre Pia), in which the mother's

attitude is one of humility, contemplating her child with awe.

3. The Madonna as Witness, in which the Mother is preëminently the

Christ-bearer, wearing the honors of her proud position as witness to

her son's great destiny.

These subjects are mentioned in the order of philosophical climax, and

as we go from the first to the second, and from the second to the

third, we advance farther and farther into the experience of

motherhood. At the same time there is an increase in the dignity of

the Madonna and in her importance as an individual. In the Mater

Amabilis she is subordinate to her child, absorbed in him, so to

speak; his infantine charms often overmatch her own beauty. When she

rises to the responsibilities of her high calling, she is, for the

time being, of equal interest and importance. Æsthetically, she is

now even more attractive than her child, whose seriousness, in such

pictures, takes something from his childlikeness. Chronologically, our

list reads backwards, as the religious aspect of Mary's motherhood was

the first treated in art, while the naturalistic conception came last.

Regarded as expressive of national characteristics, the Mater Amabilis

is the Madonna best beloved in northern countries, while the other two

subjects belong specially to the art of the south.

It will be seen that any number of Madonna pictures, having been

arranged in the five groups designated in Part I., may be gathered up

and redistributed in the three classes of Part II. To make this clear,

the pictures mentioned in the first method of classification are

frequently referred to a second time, viewed from an entirely

different standpoint. Since the lines of cleavage are so widely

dissimilar in the two cases, both methods of study are necessary to a

complete understanding of a picture. By the first, we learn a

convenient term of description by which we may casually designate a

Madonna; by the second, we find its highest meaning as a work of art,

and are admitted to some new secret of a mother's love.

PART I.

MADONNAS CLASSED BY THE STYLE OF COMPOSITION.

THE MADONNA IN ART.

CHAPTER I.

THE PORTRAIT MADONNA.

The first Madonna pictures known to us are of the portrait style, and

are of Byzantine or Greek origin. They were brought to Rome and the

western empire from Constantinople (the ancient Byzantium), the

capital of the eastern empire, where a new school of Christian art had

developed out of that of ancient Greece. Justinian's conquest of Italy

sowed the new art-seed in a fertile field, where it soon took root and

multiplied rapidly. There was, however, little or no improvement in

the type for a long period; it remained practically unchanged till

the thirteenth century. Thus, while a Byzantine Madonna is to be found

in nearly every old church in Italy, to see one is to see all. They

are half-length figures against a background of gold leaf, at first

laid on solidly, or, at a somewhat later date, studded with cherubs.

The Virgin has a meagre, ascetic countenance, large, ill-shaped eyes,

and an almost peevish expression; her head is draped in a heavy, dark

blue veil, falling in stiff folds.

Unattractive as such pictures are to us from an artistic standpoint,

they inspire us with respect if not with reverence. Once objects of

mingled devotion and admiration, they are still regarded with awe by

many who can no longer admire. Their real origin being lost in

obscurity, innumerable legends have arisen, attributing them to

miraculous agencies, and also endowing them with power to work

miracles. There is an early and widespread tradition, imported with

the Madonna from the East, which makes St. Luke a painter. It is said

that he painted many portraits of the Virgin, and, naturally, all the

churches possessing old Byzantine pictures claim that they are genuine

works from the hand of the evangelist. There is one in the Ara Coeli

at Rome, and another in S. Maria in Cosmedino, of which marvellous

tales are told, besides others of great sanctity in St. Mark's,

Venice, and in Padua.

It would not be interesting to dwell, in any detail, upon these

curious old pictures. We would do better to take our first example

from the art which, though founded on Byzantine types, had begun to

learn of nature. Such a picture we find in the Venice Academy, by

Jacopo Bellini, painted at the beginning of the fifteenth century,

somewhat later than any corresponding picture could have been found

elsewhere in Italy, as Venice was chronologically behind the other art

schools. The background is a glory of cherub heads touched with gold

hatching. Both mother and child wear heavy nimbi, ornamented with

gold. These points recall Byzantine work; but the gentler face of the

Virgin, and the graceful fall of her drapery, show that we are in a

different world of art. The child is dressed in a little tunic, in the

primitive method.

With the dawn of the Italian Renaissance, the old style of portrait

Madonna passed out of vogue. More elaborate backgrounds were

introduced from the growing resources of technique. In the fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries, pictures of the portrait style were

comparatively rare. Raphael, however, was not above adopting this

method, as every lover of the Granduca Madonna will remember. His

friend Bartolommeo also selected this style of composition for some of

the loveliest of his works.

[Illustration: JACOPO BELLINI.--MADONNA AND CHILD.]

The story of the friendship between these two men is full of interest.

At the time of Raphael's first appearance in Florence (1504),

Bartolommeo had been four years a monk, and had laid aside, apparently

forever, the brush he had previously wielded with such promise. The

young stranger sought the Frate in his cell at San Marco, and soon

found the way to his heart. Stimulated by this new friendship,

Bartolommeo roused himself from lethargy and resumed the practice of

art with increasing success. It is pleasant to trace the influence

which the two artists exerted upon each other. The older man had

experience and learning; the younger had enthusiasm and genius. Now it

happened that, by nature, Bartolommeo was specially gifted in the

arrangement of large compositions, with many figures and stately

architectural backgrounds. It is by these that he is chiefly known

to-day. So it is the more interesting that, when Raphael's sweet

simplicity first touched him, he turned aside, for the time, from

these elaborate plans and gave himself to the portrayal of the Madonna

in that simplest possible way, the half-length portrait picture.

Several of these he painted upon the walls of his own convent,

glorifying that dim place of prayer and fasting with visions of

radiant and happy motherhood. One of these may still be seen in the

cell sometimes called the Capella Giovanato. It instantly recalls the

Tempi Madonna of Raphael, both in the pose of the figure and in the

genuineness of feeling exhibited. Damp and decay have warred in vain

against it, and the modern visitor lingers before the Mother and Babe

with hushed admiration.

Two other similar frescoes have been removed to the Academy. They show

the same motherly tenderness, the same innocent and beautiful

babyhood. The mother holds her child close in her arms, pressing her

forehead to his, or bending her cheek to receive his kiss. He throws

his little arm about her neck, clinging to her veil or caressing her

face.

Besides this group of pictures by Bartolommeo, there are other

scattered instances of portrait Madonnas during the Italian

Renaissance, by men too great to be tied to the fashions of their day.

Mantegna was such a painter, and Luini another. All told, however,

their pictures of this sort make up a class too rare to deserve longer

description.

A century later, the Spanish school occasionally reverted to the same

style of treatment. A pair of notable pictures are the Madonna of

Bethlehem, by Alonzo Cano, and the Madonna of the Napkin, by Murillo.

Both are in Seville, the latter in the museum, the former still

hanging in its original place in the cathedral.

Of Cano's work, a great authority[1] on Spanish art has written, that,

"in serene, celestial beauty, it is excelled by no image of the

blessed Mary ever devised in Spain." Murillo's picture is better

known, and has a curious interest from its history. The cook in the

Capuchin monastery, where the artist had been painting, begged a

picture as a parting gift. No canvas being at hand, a napkin was

offered instead, on which the master painted a Madonna, unexcelled

among his works in brilliancy of color.

[Footnote 1: Stirling-Maxwell, in "Annals of the Artists of Spain."]

[Illustration: GABRIEL MAX.--MADONNA AND CHILD.]

As the portrait picture was the first style of Madonna known to art,

so, also, it is the last. By a leap of nearly a thousand years, we

have returned, in our own day, to the method of the tenth century. It

is strange that what was once a matter of necessity should at last

become an object of choice. In the beginning of Madonna art, the

limited resources of technique precluded any attempts to make a more

elaborate setting. Such difficulties no longer stand in the way, and

where we now see a portrait Madonna, the artist has deliberately

discarded all accessories in order better to idealize his theme.

Take, for instance, the portrait Madonnas by Gabriel Max. Here are no

details to divert the attention from motherhood, pure and simple. We

do not ask of the subject whether she is of high or of low estate, a

queen or a peasant. We have only to look into the earnest, loving face

to read that here is a mother. There are two pictures of this sort,

evidently studied from the same Bohemian models. In one, the mother

looks down at her babe; in the other, directly at the spectator, with

a singularly visionary expression. When weary with the senseless

repetition of the set compositions of past ages, we turn with relief

to a simple portrait mother like this, at once the most primitive and

the most advanced form of Madonna art. It is only another case where

the simplest is the best.

CHAPTER II.

THE MADONNA ENTHRONED.

In every true home the mother is queen, enthroned in the hearts of her

loving children. There is, therefore, a beautiful double significance,

which we should always have in mind, in looking at the Madonna

enthroned. According to the theological conception of the period in

which it was first produced, the picture stands for the Virgin Mother

as Queen of Heaven. Understood typically, it represents the exaltation

of motherhood.

In the history of art development, the enthroned Madonna begins where

the portrait Madonna ends. We may date it from the thirteenth century,

when Cimabue, of Florence, and Guido, of Siena, produced their famous

pictures. Similar types had previously appeared in the mosaic

decorations of churches, but now, for the first time, they were

worthily set forth in panel pictures.

The story of Cimabue's Madonna is one of the oft-told tales we like to

hear repeated. How on a certain day, about 1270, Charles of Anjou was

passing through Florence; how he honored the studio of Cimabue by a

visit; how the Madonna was then first uncovered; how the people

shouted so joyously that the street was thereafter named the Borgo dei

Allegri; and how the great picture was finally borne in triumphal

procession to the church of Santa Maria Novella,--all these are the

scenes in the pretty drama. The late Sir Frederick Leighton has

preserved for future centuries this story, already six hundred years

old, in a charming pageant picture: "Cimabue's Madonna carried

through the streets of Florence." This was the first work ever

exhibited by the English artist, and was an important step in the

career which ended in the presidency of the Royal Academy.

Cimabue's Madonna still hangs in Santa Maria Novella, over the altar

of the Ruccellai chapel, and thither many a pilgrim takes his way to

honor the memory of the father of modern painting. The throne is a

sort of carved armchair, very simple in form, but richly overlaid with

gold; the surrounding background is filled with adoring angels. Here

sits the Madonna, in stiff solemnity, holding her child on her lap. If

we find it hard to admire her beauty, we must note the superiority of

the picture to its predecessors.

For the enthroned Madonna in a really attractive and beautiful form,

we must pass at once to the period of full art development. In the

interval, many variations upon the theme have been invented. The

throne may be of any size, shape, or material; the composition may

consist of any number of figures. The Madonna, seated or standing, is

now the centre of an assembly of personages symmetrically grouped

about her. There is little or no unity of action among them; each one

is an independent figure. The guard of honor may be composed of

saints, as in Montagna's Madonna, of the Brera, Milan; or again it is

a company of angels, as in the Berlin Madonna, attributed to

Botticelli, similar to which is the picture by Ghirlandajo in the

Uffizi Gallery. Where saints are represented, each one is marked by

some special emblem, the identification of which makes, in itself, an

interesting study. St. Peter's key, St. Paul's sword, St. Catherine's

wheel, and St. Barbara's tower soon become familiar symbols to those

fond of this kind of lore.

Among the idealized presences about the Virgin's throne may sometimes

be seen the prosaic figure of the donor, whose munificence has made

the picture possible. This is well illustrated in the famous Madonna

of Victory in the Louvre, painted in commemoration of the Battle of

Fornovo, where Mantegna represents Francesco Gonzaga, commander of the

Venetian forces, kneeling at the Virgin's feet.

A charming feature in many enthroned Madonnas is the group of cherubs

below,--one, two, or the mystic three. They are not the exclusive

possession of any single school of art; Bartolommeo and Andrea del

Sarto of the Florentines, Francia of the Bolognese, and Bellini and

Cima of the Venetians were particularly partial to them. The

treatment in Northern Italy gives them a more definite purpose in the

composition than does that of Florence, for here they are always

musicians, playing on all sorts of instruments,--the violin, the

mandolin, or the pipe.

Bartolommeo was specially successful in the subject of the enthroned

Madonna, having fine gifts of composition united with profound

religious earnestness. The great picture in the Pitti gallery at

Florence may serve as a typical example. Andrea del Sarto's

\_chef-d'oeuvre\_--the Madonna di San Francesco (Uffizi)--may also be

assigned to this class, although the arrangement is entirely novel.

The Virgin, holding the babe in her arms, stands on a sort of

pedestal, carved at the corners with a design of harpies, from which

the picture is often known as the Madonna of the Harpies. The

pedestal throne is also seen in two of Correggio's Dresden

pictures, but here the Virgin is seated, with the child on her lap. An

exceedingly simple throne Madonna is that of Luini, in the Brera at

Milan, where the Virgin sits on a plain coping not at all high.

[Illustration: PERUGINO.--MADONNA AND SAINTS.

(DETAIL.)]

A beautiful Madonna enthroned is by Perugino, in the Vatican Gallery

at Rome; one of the artist's best works in power and vivacity of

color. The throne is an architectural structure of elegant simplicity

of design, apparently of carved and inlaid marble. The Virgin sits in

quiet dignity, her face bent towards the bishops at her right, St.

Costantius and St. Herculanus. On the other side stand the youthful

St. Laurence and St. Louis of Toulouse. Although Perugino was an

exceedingly prolific artist, he did not often choose this particular

subject. On this account the picture is especially interesting, and

also because it is the original model of well known works by two of

the Umbrian painter's most illustrious pupils.

Many, indeed, were the apprentices trained in the famous \_bottega\_ at

Perugia, but, among them all, Raphael and Pinturicchio took the lead.

These were the two who honored their master by repeating, with

modifications of their own, the beautiful composition of the Vatican.

Pinturicchio's picture is in the Church of St. Andrea, at Perugia. A

charming feature, which he introduced, is a little St. John, standing

at the foot of the throne. Raphael's picture is the so-called Ansidei

Madonna, of the National Gallery, London, purchased by the English

government, in 1885, for the fabulous price of £72,000. The

composition is here reduced to its simplest possible form, with only

one saint on each side,--St. Nicholas on the right, St. John the

Baptist on the left. The Virgin and child give no attention to these

personages, but are absorbed in a book which is open on the Mother's

knee.

Raphael had no great liking for this style of picture, which was

rather too formal for his taste. It is noticeable that, in the few

instances where he painted it, he took the suggestion, as here, from

some previous work. Thus his Madonna of St. Anthony, also in the

National Gallery (loaned by the King of Naples), was based upon an old

picture by Bernardino di Mariotto, according to the strict orders of

the nuns for whose convent it was a commission. The Baldacchino

Madonna of the Pitti, at Florence, is closely akin to Bartolommeo's

composition in the same gallery.

Glancing, briefly, at these scattered examples, we learn that the

enthroned Madonna belongs to every school of Italian art, and

exhibits an astonishing variety of forms. Probably it was in the North

of Italy that it flourished most. The Paduan School has its fine

representation in Mantegna's picture, already referred to; the

Brescian, in Moretto's Madonna of S. Clemente; the Veronese, in

Girolamo dai Libri's splendid altar piece in San Giorgio Maggiore; the

Bergamesque, in Lotto's Madonna of S. Bartolommeo. Above all, it was

in Venice, the Queen City of the Adriatic, that the enthroned Madonna

reached the greatest popularity: the spirit of the composition was

peculiarly adapted to the Venetian love of pomp and ceremony.

To understand Venetian art aright, we must distinguish the character

of the earlier and later periods. With Vivarini, Bellini, and Cima,

the Madonna in Trono was the expression of a devout religious feeling.

With Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese, it was merely one among many

popular art subjects. Thus arose two different general types. The

earlier Madonna was a somewhat cold type of beauty; the faultless

regularity of her features and the imperturbable calm of her

expression make her rather unapproachable; but she shows a strong,

sweet purity of character, worthy of profound respect.

One of Cima's most important works is the Madonna of this type in the

Venice Academy. High on a marble throne, she sits under a pillared

portico, behind which stretches a pleasant landscape. Three saints

stand on each side,--an old man, a youth, and a maiden. On the steps

sit two choristers playing the violin and mandolin.

Palma's great altar-piece, at Vicenza, is another splendid enthroned

Madonna. Attended by St. George and St. Lucy, and entertained by a

musical angel seated at her feet, the Virgin supports her beautiful

boy, as he gives his blessing.

Bellini's enthroned Madonnas are known throughout the world. The

picture by which he established his fame was one of this class,

originally painted for a chapel in San Giobbe, but now hanging in the

Venice Academy. Ruskin has pronounced it "one of the greatest pictures

ever painted in Christendom in her central art power." It is a large

composition, with three saints at each side, and three choristers

below.

The Frari Madonna is in a simpler vein, and consists of three

compartments, the central one containing the Virgin's throne. The

angioletti, on the steps, are probably the most popular of their

charming class in Venice.

[Illustration: GIOVANNI BELLINI.--MADONNA OF SAN

ZACCARIA. (DETAIL.)]

The San Zaccaria Madonna was painted when Bellini was over eighty

years old, and has certain technical qualities surpassing any the

artist had previously attained. The depth of light and shade is

particularly remarkable; the colors rich and harmonious. The attendant

saints are St. Lucy on the right, a pretty blonde girl, with St.

Jerome beyond her, absorbed in his Bible; opposite, stand St.

Catherine, pensively looking down, and St. Peter, in profound

meditation. The entire picture, both in conception and execution, may

be considered a representative example of the times.

Following the Bellini school, and forming, as it were, a connecting

link between the earlier and the later art, was Giorgione. Less than a

score of existing works give witness to the rare spirit of this

master, who was spared to earth only thirty-four years. These are of a

quality to place him among the immortals. The enthroned Madonna is the

subject of two, one in the Madrid Gallery, and another at

Castel-Franco. They create an entirely distinct Madonna ideal,--a

poetic being, who sits, with drooping head and dreamy eyes, as if

seeing unspeakable visions.

The Castel-Franco picture expresses the finest elements in Venetian

character. Every other composition seems elaborate and artificial when

compared with the simplicity of this. Other Madonnas seem almost

coarse beside such delicacy. The Virgin's throne is of an unusual

height,--a double plinth,--the upper step of which is somewhat above

the heads of the attendant saints, Liberale and Francis. This simple,

compositional device emphasizes the effect of her pensive expression.

It is as if her high meditations set her apart from human

companionship. There is, indeed, something almost pathetic in her

isolation, but for the strength of character in her face. The color

scheme is as simple and beautiful as the underlying conception. The

Virgin's tunic is of green, and the mantle, falling from the right

shoulder and lying across her lap, is red, with deep shadows in its

large folds. The back of the seat is covered with a strip of red and

gold embroidery.

The later period of Venetian art is marked by a new ideal of the

Virgin. She is now a magnificent creature of flesh and blood. Her face

is proud and handsome; her figure large, well-proportioned, and

somewhat voluptuous. No Bethlehem stable ever sheltered this haughty

beauty; her home is in kings' palaces; she belongs distinctly to the

realm of wealth and worldliness. She has never known sorrow, anxiety,

or poverty; life has brought her nothing but pleasure and luxury. Her

throne stands no longer in the sacred place of some inner sanctuary,

where angel choristers make music. It is an elevated platform, at one

side of the composition, as in Titian's Pesaro altar-piece, and

Veronese's Madonna in the Venice Academy. This gives an opportunity

for a display of elaborate draperies, such as we may see in Veronese's

picture.

The peculiar qualities of art in Verona and Venice are blended in

Paolo Veronese. No artist ever enjoyed more the splendors of color, or

combined them in more enchanting harmonies. Such gifts transform the

commonest materials, and, though his Virgin is a very ordinary woman,

she has undeniable charms. An oft-copied figure, in this picture, is

that of the little St. John, a universal favorite among child lovers.

[Illustration: VERONESE.--MADONNA AND SAINTS.]

The reader must have remarked that, though the fundamental idea of

the enthroned Madonna is that of queenship, the Virgin wears no crown

in any of the pictures thus far cited; the crowned Madonna is not

characteristic of Italian art. It is found occasionally in mosaics

from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, and in some of the early

votive pictures, but does not appear in the later period except in a

few Venetian pictures by Giovanni da Murano and Carlo Crivelli. The

same idea was often carried out by placing two hovering angels over

the Virgin's head, holding the crown between them. Botticelli's

Madonna of the Inkhorn is treated in this way.

The crown is essentially Teutonic in origin and character. Turning to

the representative art of Germany and Belgium, we find the Virgin

almost invariably wearing a crown, whether she sits on a throne, or in

a pastoral environment. No better example could be named than the

celebrated Holbein Madonna, of Darmstadt, known chiefly through the

copy in the Dresden Gallery. Here the imposing height of the Virgin is

rendered still more impressive by a high, golden crown, richly

embossed and edged with pearls. Beneath this her blond hair falls

loosely over her beautiful neck, and gleams on the blue garment

hanging over her shoulders. Strong and tender, this noble figure sums

up the finest elements in the Madonna art of the North.

A simple and lovely form for the Madonna's crown is the narrow golden

fillet set with pearls, singly or in clusters. This is placed over the

Virgin's brow just at the edge of the hair, which is otherwise

unconfined. This is seen on Madonnas by Van Eyck (Frankfort), Dürer

(woodcut of 1513), Memling (Bruges), Schongauer (Munich).

[Illustration: QUENTIN MASSYS.--MADONNA AND

CHILD.]

In the enthroned Madonna by Quentin Massys, in the Berlin Gallery, we

have many typical characteristics of Northern art. The throne itself

is exceedingly rich, ornamented with agate pillars with embossed

capitals of gold. The Virgin has the fine features and earnest, tender

expression which recalls earlier Flemish painters. Her dress falls in

rich, heavy folds upon the marble pavement. But, as with Van Eyck and

Memling, Holbein and Schongauer, fine clothes do not conceal her

girlish simplicity or her loving heart. A low table, spread with food,

stands at the left,--a curious domestic element to introduce, and

thoroughly Northern in realism.

Considered as a symbol of the exaltation of motherhood, there is no

reason why the throne should go out of fashion; but if it is to

appear, it must be used intelligently, and with some adaptation to

present modes of thought, not servilely imitated from the forms of a

by-gone age. This is a fact too little appreciated by the artists of

to-day. Many modern pictures could be cited--by Bouguereau, Ittenbach,

and others--of enthroned Madonnas in which is adopted the form, but

not the spirit, of the Italian Rennaissance. In such works, the

setting is a mere affectation entirely out of taste. If we are to have

a throne, let us have a Madonna who is a veritable queen.

CHAPTER III.

THE MADONNA IN THE SKY.

(THE MADONNA IN GLORIA.)

We have seen that the first Madonnas were painted against a background

either of solid gold, or of cherub figures, and that the latter style

of setting was continued in the early pictures of the enthroned

Madonna. The effect was to idealize the subject, and carry it into the

region of the heavenly. This was the germinal idea which grew into the

"Madonna in Gloria."

The glory was originally a sort of nimbus of a larger order,

surrounding the entire figure, instead of merely the head. It was oval

in shape, like the almond or mandorla.

A picture of this class is the famous Madonna della Stella, of Fra

Angelico. It is in a beautiful Gothic tabernacle, which is the sole

ornament of a cell in San Marco, Florence. At every step in these

sacred precincts, we meet some reminder of the Angelic Brother. How

the gray walls blossomed, under his brush, into forms and colors of

eternal beauty! After seeing the larger wall-paintings in corridors

and refectory, this little gem seems to epitomize his choicest gifts.

A rich frame, fit setting for the jewel, encloses an outer circle of

adoring angels, and within, the central panel contains only the full

length figure of the Virgin with her child, against a mandorla formed

of golden rays running from centre to circumference. The Madonna is

enveloped in a long, dark blue cloak, drawn around her head like a

Byzantine veil. A single star gleams above her brow, from which is

derived the title of the picture. She holds her child fondly, and he,

with responsive affection, nestles against his mother, pressing his

little face into her neck. Faithful to the standards of his

predecessors, and untouched by the new spirit of naturalism all about

him, the monk painter preserves, in his conception, the most sacred

traditions of past ages, and yet unites with them an element of love

and tenderness which appeals strongly to every human heart.

[Illustration: FRA ANGELICO.--MADONNA DELLA STELLA.]

It is but a step from this earlier form of the Madonna in Gloria to

the more modern style of the Madonna in the Sky, where the field of

vision is enlarged, and we see the Virgin and child raised above the

surface of the earth. In some pictures, her elevation is very slight.

There is a curious composition, by Andrea del Sarto (Berlin Gallery),

where we are puzzled to know if the Madonna is enthroned or enskied.

A flight of steps in the centre leads up as if to a throne, but above

these the Virgin sits in a niche, on a bank of clouds.

In Correggio's Madonna of St. Sebastian, in the Dresden Gallery, the

Virgin seems to be descending from heaven to earth with her babe, and

the surrounding clouds and cherubs rest literally upon the heads of

the saints who are honored by the vision.

In other pictures the dividing line between earth and heaven is much

more strongly marked. We have a landscape below, then a stratum of

intervening air, and, in the upper sky, the Madonna with her child.

The lower part of the picture is occupied by a company of saints, to

whom the heavenly vision is vouchsafed; or, in rare cases, by cherubs.

The Virgin appears in a cloud of cherub heads, or accompanied by a few

child-angels. There are a few pictures in which her mother, St.

Anne, sits with her. Adoring seraphs sometimes attend, one on each

side, or even sainted personages. All these variations are exemplified

in the pictures which we are to consider.

[Illustration: UMBRIAN SCHOOL.--GLORIFICATION OF THE

VIRGIN.]

The first has come down to us from the hand of some unknown Umbrian

painter. In the National Gallery, London, where it now hangs, it was

once attributed to Lo Spagna, but is now entered in the catalogue as

nameless. It matters little whether or not we know the name of the

master; he could ask no higher tribute to his talent than the

universal admiration which his picture commands.

In the foreground of a quiet Umbrian landscape is a marble balcony, on

the railing of which sit two captivating little boy choristers. One

roguish fellow pipes on a trumpet, while the other, his face

tip-tilted to the heavenly vision, makes music on a small guitar.

Above, on a cloud, sits the Virgin, with the sweet, mystic smile on

her face, so characteristic of Umbrian art. She supports her babe with

her right arm, and in her left hand carries a lily stalk. The child,

standing on his mother's knee and clinging to her neck, turns his face

out with sweet earnestness. In clouds at the side, tiny cherubs bear

tapers, while others, floating above, hold a large crown just over her

head.

Although we cannot limit this style of picture to any special

locality, it appears to have found much favor in the art of Northern

Italy. In the Brescian school, Moretto was unusually fond of the

subject. His treatment of the theme is somewhat heavy; there is little

of the ethereal in his celestial vision, either in the type of

womanhood or in the style of arrangement. In defiance of the law of

gravitation, he poses his upper figures so as to form a solid pyramid,

wide at the base, and tapering abruptly to the apex.

[Illustration: MORETTO.--MADONNA IN GLORY.]

In the glorified Madonna of St. John the Evangelist, Brescia, the

pyramidal effect is accentuated by curtains draped back on either side

of the upper part of the composition. In the Madonna of San Giorgio

Maggiore, at Verona, we have a much more attractive picture. The

"gloria" encompassing the vision is clearly defined, giving so strong

an effect of the supernatural that we cease to judge the composition

by ordinary standards of natural law. The Virgin's white veil flutters

from her head as if caught by some heavenly breeze. Her cloak floats

about her by the same mysterious force, held in graceful festoons by

winged cherub heads.

Below is a group of five virgin martyrs, with St. Cecilia in the

centre, wearing a crown of roses; St. Lucia holds the awl, the

instrument of her torture, looking down at St. Catherine, who leans

against her terrible wheel; St. Agnes, on the other side, reads

quietly from a book while she caresses her lamb, and St. Barbara

stands behind her, with eyes lifted to the sky. They are all splendid

young Amazons, recalling Moretto's fine St. Justina of the Vienna

Gallery. There is no trace of ascetism in their strong, well-developed

figures, and in their faces no suggestion of an unhealthy pietism.

Moretto's ideals were an anticipation of the most advanced ideas of

the modern science of physical culture. His Madonna and saints derive

their beauty neither from over refinement on the one hand, nor from

sensuous charms on the other, but from sane and harmonious

self-development.

The Berlin Gallery contains a third glorified Madonna by the same

painter, treated as a Holy Family. St. Elizabeth sits beside the

Virgin, who holds her own boy on her right side, while bending to

embrace the little St. John with the left arm. So large a group is not

appropriately treated in this way, yet the picture is so fine a work

of art as to disarm criticism.

Still another representative of the Brescian school must be considered

in the person of Savoldo. Born of a noble family, and following

painting as an amusement rather than as an actual profession, his

works are rare, and one of the finest examples of his art is the

Glorification of the Virgin, in the Brera Gallery, at Milan. The

mandorla-shaped glory surrounds the Virgin's figure, studded with

faintly discerned cherub heads. On either side, a musical angel is in

adoration; four saints stand on the earth below. The entire conception

is rendered with the utmost delicacy: the grace and beauty of the

Madonna are of exactly the quality to make her appearance a beatific

vision.

From Brescia we turn to Verona, where we again find many pictures of

the beautiful subject. There are, in the churches of Verona, at least

three notable works, by Gianfrancesco Caroto, in this style. One is in

Sant' Anastasia, another is in San Giorgio, and the third--the

artist's best existing work--is in San Fermo Maggiore, and shows the

Virgin's mother, St. Anne, seated with her in the clouds.

Girolamo dai Libri was a few years younger than Caroto, and at one

period was, to some extent, an imitator of the latter. Beginning as a

miniaturist, he finally attained a high place among the Veronese

artists of the first order. His characteristics can nowhere be seen to

better advantage than in the Madonna of St. Andrew and St. Peter, in

the Verona Gallery. The Virgin is in an oval glory, edged all around

with small, fleecy clouds. She has a beautiful, matronly face, with

abundant hair, smoothly brushed over her forehead. The two apostles,

below, are fine, strong figures, full of virility.

Morando, or Cavazzola, was, doubtless, the most gifted of the older

school of Verona, possessing some of the best qualities of the later

master, Paolo Veronese. We should not leave the school, therefore,

without mentioning a remarkable contribution he added to this class of

pictures in his latest altar-piece. Here the upper air is filled with

a sacred company, the Virgin and child are attended by St. Francis and

St. Anthony, and surrounded by seven allegorical figures to represent

the cardinal virtues. Below are six saints, specially honored in the

Franciscan Order. The picture is called the finest production of the

school in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.

In the Venetian school, Titian and Tintoretto both painted the subject

of the Madonna in glory, but the pictures are not notable compared

with many others from their hands.

From the North of Italy we naturally turn next to the South, to

inquire what Raphael was doing at the same period in Rome. Occupied by

many great works under the papal patronage, he still found time for

his favorite subject of the Madonna, painting some pictures in the

styles already mastered, and two for the first time in the style of

the Madonna in the sky.

[Illustration: SPANISH SCHOOL.--MADONNA ON THE CRESCENT

MOON.]

The first was the Foligno Madonna, now in the Vatican Gallery. It was

painted in 1511 for the pope's secretary, Sigismund Conti, as a

thank-offering for having escaped the danger of a falling meteor at

Foligno. No thoughtful observer can be slow to recognize the

superiority of this composition over all others of its kind in point

of unity. Here is no formal row of saints, each absorbed in his or her

own reflections, apart from any common purpose. On the contrary, all

unite in paying honor to the Queen of Heaven. Not less superior to his

contemporaries was the painter's skill in arranging the figures of

Mother and child with such grace of equilibrium that they seem to

float in the upper air.

In the Sistine Madonna, Raphael carried this form of composition to

the highest perfection. So simple and apparently unstudied is its

beauty, that we do not realize the masterliness of its art. We seem to

be standing before an altar, or, better still, before an open window,

from which the curtains have been drawn aside, allowing us to look

directly into the heaven of heavens. A cloud of cherub faces fills

the air, from the midst of which, and advancing towards us, is the

Virgin with her child. The downward force of gravity is perfectly

counterbalanced by the vital energy of her progress forward. There is

here no uncomfortable sense, on the part of the spectator, that

natural law is disregarded. While the seated Madonna in glory seems

often in danger of falling to earth, this full-length figure in motion

avoids any such solidity of effect.

The figures on either side are also so posed as to arouse no surprise

at their presence. We should have said beforehand that heavy

pontifical robes would be absurdly incongruous in such a composition,

but Raphael solves the problem so simply that few would suspect the

difficulties. The final touch of beauty is added in the cherub heads

below, recalling the naïve charm of the similar figures in the

Umbrian picture we have considered.

[Illustration: BOUGUEREAU.--MADONNA OF THE ANGELS.]

After the time of Raphael, a pretty form of Madonna in glory was

occasionally painted, showing the Virgin with her babe sitting above

the crescent moon. The conception appears more than once in the

paintings of Albert Dürer, and later, artists of all schools adopted

it. Sassoferrato's picture in the Vatican Gallery is a popular

example. Tintoretto's, in Berlin, is not so well known. In the Dresden

Gallery is a work, by an unknown Spanish painter of the seventeenth

century, differing from the others in that the Virgin is standing, as

in the oft-repeated Spanish pictures of the Immaculate Conception.

It is of pictures like this that our poet Longfellow is speaking, when

he thus apostrophizes the Virgin:

"Thou peerless queen of air,

As sandals to thy feet the silver moon dost wear."

The enskied Madonna involves many technical difficulties of

composition, and demands a high order of artistic imagination. It

could hardly be called a frequent subject in the period of greatest

artistic daring, and no modern painter has shown any adequate

understanding of the subject, though there are not lacking those who

have made the attempt. Bodenhausen, Defregger, Bouguereau, have all

followed Raphael in representing the Queen of Heaven as a full-length

figure in the sky; but their conception has not the dignity

corresponding to the style of treatment.

Impatient and dissatisfied with such modern art, we turn back to the

old masters with new appreciation of their great gifts.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PASTORAL MADONNA.

It was many centuries before art, at first devoted exclusively to

figure painting, turned to the study of natural scenery. Thus it was

that Madonna pictures, of various kinds, had long been established in

popular favor before the idea of a landscape setting was introduced.

We need not look for interesting pictures of this class before the

latter part of the fifteenth century, and it was not until the

sixteenth that the pastoral Madonna, in its highest form, was first

produced. Even then there was no great number which show a really

sympathetic love of nature.

In the ideal pastoral, the landscape entirely fills the picture, and

the figures are, as it were, an integral part of it. Such pictures are

so rare that we write in golden letters the names of the few who have

given us these treasures.

Raphael's justly comes first in the list. His earliest Madonnas show

his love of natural scenery, in the charming glimpses of Umbrian

landscape, which form the background. These are treated, as Müntz

points out, with marked "simplicity of outline and breadth of design."

They are, however, but the beginning of the great things that were to

follow. The young painter's sojourn in Florence witnessed a marvellous

development of his powers. Here he was surrounded by the greatest

artists of his time, and he was quick to absorb into himself something

of excellence from them all. His fertility of production was amazing.

In a period of four years (1504-1508), interrupted by visits to

Perugia and Urbino, he produced about twenty Madonnas, in which we

may trace the new influences affecting him.

Leonardo da Vinci was, doubtless, his greatest inspiration, and it was

from this master-student of nature that the young man learned, with

new enthusiasm, the value of going directly to Nature herself. The

fruit of this new study is a group of lovely pastoral Madonnas, which

are entirely unique as Nature idyls. Three of these are among the

world's great favorites. They are, the Belle Jardinière (The Beautiful

Gardener), of the Louvre Gallery, Paris; the Madonna in Grünen (The

Madonna in the Meadow), in the Belvedere Gallery, Vienna; and the

Cardellino Madonna (The Madonna of the Goldfinch), of the Uffizi,

Florence.

We turn from one to another of these three beautiful pictures, always

in doubt as to which is the greatest. Fortunately, it is a question

which there is no occasion to decide, as every lover of art may be the

happy possessor of all three, in that highest mode of possession

attained by devoted study.

In each one we have the typical Tuscan landscape, filling the whole

picture with its tranquil beauty. The "glad green earth" blossoms with

dainty flowers; the fair blue sky above is reflected in the placid

surface of a lake. From its shores rise gently undulating hills, where

towers show the signs of happy activity. In the foreground of this

peaceful scene sits a beautiful woman with two charming children at

her knee. They belong to the landscape as naturally as the trees and

flowers; they partake of its tranquil, placid happiness.

[Illustration: RAPHAEL.--MADONNA IN THE MEADOW.]

Almost identical in general style of composition, the three pictures

show many points of dissimilarity when we come to a closer study of

the figures. Considered as a type of womanly beauty, the Belle

Jardinière is perhaps the most commonplace of the three Virgins, or,

to put it negatively, the least attractive. She is distinctly of the

peasant class, gentle, amiable, and entirely unassuming. The Madonna

in the Meadow is a maturer woman, more dignified, more beautiful. The

smooth braids of her hair are coiled about the head, accentuating its

lovely outline. The falling mantle reveals the finely modelled

shoulders. The Madonna of the Goldfinch is a still higher type of

loveliness, uniting with gentle dignity a certain delicate, high-bred

grace, which Raphael alone could impart. Her face is charmingly framed

in the soft hair which falls modestly about it. One wonders if any

modern \_coiffeur\_ could invent so many styles of hair dressing as does

this gifted young painter of the sixteenth century.

Turning from the mother to the children, we find the same general

types repeated in the three pictures, but with some difference of

\_motif\_. The Christ-child of the Belle Jardinière is looking up fondly

to his mother. In the Vienna picture he is eagerly interested in the

cross which the little St. John gives him. In the Uffizi picture he is

more serious, and strokes the goldfinch with an air of abstraction,

meditating on the holy things his mother has been reading to him.

The arrangement of the three figures is the same in all the pictures,

and is so entirely simple that we forget the greatness of the art. The

Virgin, dominating the composition, brings into unity the two smaller

figures. This unity is somewhat less perfect in the Belle Jardinière,

because the little St. John is almost neglected in the intense

absorption of mother and child in each other.

Once again, in the later days at Rome, Raphael recurred to the

pastoral Madonna type of this Florentine period, and painted the

picture known as the Casa Alba Madonna. We have again the same smiling

landscape and the same charming children, but a Virgin of an

altogether new order. A turbaned Roman beauty of superb, Juno-like

physique, she does not belong to the idyllic character of her

surroundings. It is as if some brilliant exotic had been transplanted

from her native haunts to quiet fields, where hitherto the modest lily

had bloomed alone.

As Raphael's first inspiration for the pastoral Madonna came from the

influence of Leonardo da Vinci, it is of interest to compare his work

with that of the great Lombard himself. Critics tell us that the

Madonna pictures in which he came nearest to his model are the Madonna

in the Meadow and the Holy Family of the Lamb. (Madrid.) These we may

place beside the Madonna of the Rocks, which is the only entirely

authentic Da Vinci Madonna which we have.

It is only the skilled connoisseur who, in travelling from Paris to

Vienna, and from Vienna to Madrid, can hold in memory the qualities of

technique which link together the three pictures; but for general

characteristics of composition, the black and white reproductions may

suffice. Leonardo availed himself of his intimate knowledge of Nature

to choose from her storehouse something which is unique rather than

typical. The rock grotto doubtless has a real counterpart, but we must

go far to find it. In the river, gleaming beyond, we see the painter's

characteristic treatment of water, which Raphael was glad to adopt.

The triangular arrangement of the figures, the relation of the Virgin

to the children, the simple, childish beauty of the latter, and their

attitude towards each other--all these points suggest the source of

Raphael's similar conceptions. The Virgin's hair falls over her

shoulders entirely unbound, in gentle, waving ripples.

[Illustration: LEONARDO DA VINCI.--MADONNA OF THE

ROCKS.]

We do not need to be told, though the historian has taken pains to

record it, that a feature of personal beauty by which Leonardo was

always greatly pleased was "curled and waving hair." We see it in the

first touch of his hand when, as a boy in the workshop of Verrochio,

he painted the wavy-haired angel in his Master's Baptism; and here,

again, in the Virgin, we find it the crowning element of her

mysterious loveliness. We try in vain to penetrate the secret of her

smile,--it is as evasive as it is enchanting. And herein lies the

distinguishing difference between Leonardo and Raphael. The former is

always mysterious and subtle; the latter is always frank and

ingenuous. While both are true interpreters of nature, Leonardo

reveals the rare and inexplicable, Raphael chooses the typical and

familiar. Both are possessed of a strong sense of the harmony of

nature with human life. The smile of the Virgin of the Rocks is a part

of the mystery of her shadowy environment;[2] the serenity of the

Madonna in the Meadow belongs to the atmosphere of the open fields.

[Footnote 2: That the Leonardesque \_smile\_ requires a Leonardesque

\_setting\_ is seen, I think, in the pictures by Da Vinci's imitators.

The Madonna by Sodoma, recently added to the Brera Gallery at Milan,

is an example in point. Here the inevitable smile of mystery seems

meaningless in the sunny, open landscape.]

Among others who were affected by the influence of Leonardo--and chief

of the Lombards--was Luini. His pastoral Madonna has, however, little

in common with the landscapes of his master, judging from the lovely

example in the Brera. The group of figures is strikingly suggestive of

Da Vinci, but the quiet, rural pasture in which the Virgin sits is

Luini's own. In the distance is a thick clump of trees, finely drawn

in stem and branch. At one side is a shepherd's hut with a flock of

sheep grazing near. The child Jesus reaches from his mother's lap to

play with the lamb which the little St. John has brought, a \_motif\_

similar to Raphael's Madrid picture, and perhaps due, in both

painters, to the example of Leonardo.

It is said by the learned that during the period of the Renaissance

the love of nature received an immense impulse from the revival of the

Latin poets, and that this impulse was felt most in the large cities.

In the pictures noted, we have seen its effect in Florentine and

Lombard art; that it was also felt in isolated places, we may see in

some of Correggio's work at Parma, at about the same time. Two, at

least, of his Madonna pictures are as famous for their beautiful

landscapes as for the rare grace and charm of their figures. These are

the kneeling Madonna, of the Uffizi, and "La Zingarella," at Naples.

Both show a perfect adaptation of the surroundings to the spirit of

the scene. In the first it is morning, and the gladness of Nature

reflects the Mother's rapturous joy in her awakening babe. A brilliant

light floods the figures in the foreground and melts across the green

slopes into the hazy distance of the sea-bound horizon. In the second

it is twilight, and a calm stillness broods over all, as under the

feathery palms the Mother bends, watchful, over her little one's

slumbers. Such were the revelations of Nature to the country-bred

painter from the little town of Correggio.

Turning now to Venice for our last examples, we find that the love of

natural scenery was remarkably strong in this city of water and sky,

where the very absence of verdure may have created a homesick longing

for the green fields. It was Venetian art which originated that form

of pastoral Madonna known as the Santa Conversazione. This is usually

a long, narrow picture, showing a group of sacred personages, against

a landscape setting, centering about the Madonna and child. The

composition has none of the formality of the enthroned Madonna. An

underlying unity of purpose and action binds all the figures together

in natural and harmonious relations.

The acknowledged leader of this style of composition--the inventor

indeed, according to many--was Palma Vecchio. It is curious that of a

painter whose works are so widely admired, almost nothing is known.

Even the traditions which once lent color to his life have been

shattered by the ruthless hand of the modern investigator. The span of

his life extended from 1480 to 1528. Thus he came at the beginning of

the century made glorious by Titian, and contributed not a little in

his own way to its glory.

It is supposed that he studied under Giovanni Bellini, and at one time

was a friend and colleague of Lorenzo Lotto. A child of the

mountains--for he was born in Serinalta--he never entirely lost the

influence of his early surroundings.

To the last his figures are grave, vigorous, sometimes almost rude,

partaking of the characteristics of the everlasting hills. Perhaps it

was these traits which made the Santa Conversazione a favorite

composition with him. He has an intense love of Nature in her most

luxuriant mood.

[Illustration: PALMA VECCHIO.--SANTA CONVERSAZIONE.]

For a collection of Palma's pictures, we should choose at least four

to represent his treatment of the Santa Conversazione: those at

Naples, Dresden, Munich, and Vienna. The Naples picture is considered

the most successful of Palma's large pictures of this kind, but it is

not easy for the less critical observer to choose a favorite among the

four. One general formula describes them all: a sunny landscape with

hills clad in their greenest garb; a tree in the foreground, beneath

which sits the Virgin, a comely, country-bred matron, who seems to

have drawn her splendid vigor from the clear, bright air. On her lap

she supports a sprightly little boy, who is the centre of attention.

In the simpler compositions the Madonna is at the left, and at the

right kneel or sit two saints. One is a handsome young rustic, unkempt

and roughly clad, sometimes figuring as St. John the Baptist, and

sometimes as St. Roch. With him is contrasted a beautiful young female

saint, usually St. Catherine. Where the composition includes other

figures, the Virgin is in the centre, with the attendant personages

symmetrically grouped on either side. In the Vienna picture the two

additional figures at the left are the aged St. Celestin and a fine

St. Barbara.

Of all schools of painting, the Venetian is the least translatable

into black and white, so rich in colors is the palette which composed

it. This is especially true of Palma, and to understand aright his

Santa Conversazione, we must read into it the harmony of colors which

it expresses, the chords of blue, red, brown, and green, the

shimmering lights and brilliant atmosphere.

[Illustration: FILIPPINO LIPPI.--MADONNA IN A ROSE

GARDEN.]

The subject of the Santa Conversazione should not be left without a

brief reference to other Venetians, who added to the popularity of

this charming style of picture. Berenson mentions seven by Palma's

pupil, Bonifazio Veronese, and one by his friend, Lorenzo Lotto. Cima,

Cariani, Paris Bordone, and last, but not least, the great Titian,[3]

lent their gifts to the subject, so that we have abundant evidence of

the Venetian love of natural scenery.

It remains to consider one more form of the pastoral Madonna, that

which represents the Virgin and child in "a garden inclosed," in

allusion to the symbolism of Solomon's Song (4:12). The subject is

found among the woodcuts of Albert Dürer, but I have never seen it in

any German painting.

[Footnote 3: See particularly Titian's works in the Louvre, of which

the Vierge au Lapin is an especially charming pastoral.]

In Italian art there are two famous pictures of this class: by

Francia, in the Munich Gallery, and by Filippino Lippi (or so

attributed), in the Pitti, at Florence. In both the \_motif\_ is the

same: in the foreground, a square inclosure surrounded by a

rose-hedge, with a hilly landscape in the distance; the Virgin

kneeling before her child in the centre. Filippino Lippi's is one of

those pictures whose beauty attracts crowds of admirers to the canvas.

Copyists are kept busy, repeating the composition for eager

purchasers, and it has made its way all over the world. The circle of

graceful angels who, with the boy St. John, join the mother in adoring

the Christ-child, is one of the chief attractions of the picture. It

is a pretty conceit that one of these angels showers rose leaves upon

the babe.

The pastoral Madonna is the sort of picture which can never be

outgrown. The charm of nature is as perennial as is the beauty of

motherhood, and the two are always in harmony. Here, then, is a

proper subject for modern Madonna art, a field which has scarcely

been opened by the artists of our own day. Such pastoral Madonnas as

have been painted within recent years are all more or less artificial

in conception. Compared with the idyllic charm of the sixteenth

century pictures, they seem like pretty scenes in a well-mounted

opera. We are looking for better things.

CHAPTER V.

THE MADONNA IN A HOME ENVIRONMENT.

A subject so sacred as the Madonna was long held in too great

reverence to permit of any common or realistic treatment. The pastoral

setting brought the mother and her babe into somewhat closer and more

human relations than had before been deemed possible; but art was slow

to presume any further upon this familiarity. The Madonna as a

domestic subject, represented in the interior of her home, was

hesitatingly adopted, and has been so rarely treated, even down to our

own times, as to form but a small group of pictures in the great body

of art.

[Illustration: SCHONGAUER.--HOLY FAMILY.]

The Northern painters naturally led the way. Peculiarly home-loving

in their tastes, their ideal woman is the \_hausfrau\_, and it was with

them no lowering of the Madonna's dignity to represent her in this

capacity. A picture in the style of Quentin Massys hangs in the Munich

Gallery, and shows a Flemish bedroom of the fifteenth century. At the

left stands the bed, and on the right burns the fire, with a kettle

hanging over it. The Virgin sits alone with her babe at her breast.

More frequently a domestic scene of this sort includes other figures

belonging to the Holy Family. A typical German example is the picture

by Schongauer in the Belvedere Gallery at Vienna. The Virgin is seated

in homely surroundings, intent upon a bunch of grapes which she holds

in her hands, and which she has taken from a basket standing on the

floor beside her. Long, waving hair falls over her shoulders; a snowy

kerchief is folded primly in the neck of her dress; she is the

impersonation of virgin modesty. Her baby boy stands on her lap,

nestling against his mother; his eyes fixed on the fruit, his eager

little face glowing with pleasure. Beyond are seen the cattle, which

Joseph is feeding. He pauses at the door, a bundle of hay in his arms,

to look in with fond pride at his young wife and her child.

Schongauer's work belongs to the latter part of the fifteenth century,

and there was nothing similar to it in Italy at the same period. It is

true that Madonnas in domestic settings have been attributed to

contemporaneous Italians, but they were probably by some Flemish hand.

[Illustration: RAPHAEL.--MADONNA DELL' IMPANNATA.]

Giulio Romano, a pupil of Raphael, was perhaps the first of the

Italians to give any domestic touch to the subject of the Madonna and

child. His Madonna della Catina of the Dresden Gallery is well known.

It is so called from the basin in which the Christ-child stands while

the little St. John pours in water from a pitcher for the bath.

Another picture by the same artist shows the Madonna seated with her

child in the interior of a bedchamber. This was one of the

"discoveries" of the late Senator Giovanni Morelli, the critic, and is

in a private collection in Dresden.

To Giulio Romano also, according to recent criticism, is due the

domestic Madonna known as the "Impannata," and usually attributed to

Raphael. It is probable that both artists had a hand in it, the master

in the arrangement of the composition, the pupil in its execution. A

bed at one side is concealed by a green curtain. In the rear is the

cloth-covered window which gives the picture its name. Elizabeth and

Mary Magdalene have brought home the child, who springs to his

mother's arms, smiling back brightly at his friends. One other Madonna

from Raphael's brush (the Orleans) has an interior setting, but the

domestic environment here is undoubtedly the work of some Flemish

painter of later date.

By the seventeenth century, the Holy Family in a home environment can

be found somewhat more often in various localities. By the French

painter Mignard there is a well-known picture in the Louvre called La

Vierge à la Grappe. By F. Barocci of Urbino there is an example in the

National Gallery known as the Madonna del Gatto, in which the child

holds a bird out of the reach of a cat. A similar \_motif\_, certainly

not a pleasant one, is seen in Murillo's Holy Family of the Bird, in

Madrid. By Salimbeni, in the Pitti, is a Holy Family in an interior,

showing the boy Jesus and his cousin St. John playing with puppies.

Rembrandt's domestic Madonna pictures, equally homely as to

environment, are by no means scenes of hilarity, but rather of frugal

contentment. Two similar works bear the title of Le Ménage du

Menuisier--the Carpenter's Home. In both, the scene is the interior of

a common room devoted to work and household purposes. Joseph is seen

in the rear at his bench, while the central figures are the mother and

child.

In the Louvre picture, the Virgin's mother is present, caressing her

grandchild, who is held at his mother's breast. The composition at St.

Petersburg (Hermitage Gallery) is simpler, and shows the Virgin

contemplating her babe as he lies asleep in the cradle. Another

well-known picture by Rembrandt is in the Munich Gallery, where again

we have signs of the carpenter's toil, but where the laborer has

stopped for a moment to peep at the babe, who has gone off to

dreamland at his mother's breast and now sleeps sweetly in her lap.

Let those who think such pictures too homely for a sacred theme

compare them with the simplicity of the Gospels.

PART II.

MADONNAS CLASSED ACCORDING TO THEIR SIGNIFICANCE AS TYPES OF

MOTHERHOOD.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MADONNA OF LOVE.

(THE MATER AMABILIS.)

Undoubtedly the most popular of all Madonna subjects--certainly the

most easily understood--is the Mater Amabilis. The mother's mood may

be read at a glance: she is showing in one of a thousand tender ways

her motherly affection for her child. She clasps him in her arms,

holding him to her breast, pressing her face to his, kissing him,

caressing him, or playing with him. Love is written in every line of

her face; love is the key-note of the picture.

The style of composition best adapted to such a theme is manifestly

the simplest. The more formal types of the enthroned and glorified

Madonnas are the least suitable for the display of maternal affection,

while the portrait Madonna, and the Madonna in landscape or domestic

scenes, are readily conceived as the Mater Amabilis. Nevertheless,

these distinctions have not by any means been rigidly regarded in art.

This is manifest in some of the illustrations in Part I., as the

Enthroned Madonna, by Quentin Massys, where the mother kisses her

child, and Angelico's Madonna in Glory, where she holds him to her

cheek.

Gathering our examples from so many methods of composition, we are in

the midst of a multitude of pictures which no man can number, and

which set forth every conceivable phase of motherliness.

Let us make Raphael our starting-point. From the same master whose

influence led him to the study of external nature, he learned also

the study of human nature. To the interpretation of mother-love he

brought all the fresh ardor of youth, and a sunny temperament which

saw only joy in the face of Nature. One after another of the series of

his Florentine pictures gives us a new glimpse of the loving relation

between mother and child.

The Belle Jardinière gazes into her boy's face in fond absorption. The

Tempi Madonna holds him to her heart, pressing her lips to his soft

cheek. In the Orleans and Colonna pictures she smiles indulgently into

his eyes as he lies across her lap, plucking at the bosom of her

dress. Other pictures show the two eagerly reading together from the

Book of Wisdom (The Conestabile and Ansidei Madonnas).

The painter's later work evinces a growing maturity of thought. In the

Holy Family of Francis I., how strong and tender is the mother's

attitude, as she stoops to lift her child from his cradle; in the

Chair Madonna, how protecting is the capacious embrace with which she

gathers him to herself in brooding love. No technical artistic

education is necessary for the appreciation of such pictures. All who

have known a mother's love look and understand, and look again and are

satisfied.

Correggio touches the heart in much the same way; he, too, saw the

world through rose-colored glasses. His interpretation of life is full

of buoyant enjoyment. Beside the tranquil joy of Raphael's ideals, his

figures express a tumultuous gladness, an overflowing gayety. This is

the more curious because of the singular melancholy which is

attributed to him. The outer circumstances of his life moved in a

quiet groove which was almost humdrum. He passed his days in

comparative obscurity at Parma, far from the great art influences of

his time. But isolation seemed the better to develop his rare

individuality. He was the architect of his own fortunes, and wrought

out independently a style peculiar to himself. His most famous Madonna

pictures are large compositions, crowded with figures of extravagant

attitudes and expression. The fame of these more pretentious works

rests not so much upon their inner significance as upon their splendid

technique. They are unsurpassed for masterly handling of color, and

for triumphs of chiaroscuro.

There are better qualities of sentiment in the smaller pictures, where

the mother is alone with her child. It is here that we find something

worthy to compare with Raphael. There are several of these, produced

in rapid succession during the period when the artist was engaged upon

the frescoes of S. Giovanni (Parma), and soon after marriage had

opened his heart to sweet, domestic influences.

The first was the Uffizi picture, so widely known and loved. The

mother has gathered up her mantle so that it covers her head and drops

at one side on a step, forming a soft, blue cushion for the babe. Here

the little darling lies, looking up into his mother's face. Kneeling

on the step below, she bends over him, with her hands playfully

outstretched, in a transport of maternal affection.

Following this came the picture now in the National Gallery, called

the Madonna della Cesta, from the basket that lies on the ground. It

is a domestic scene in the outer air: the mother is dressing her babe,

and smilingly arrests his hand, which, on a sudden impulse, he has

stretched towards some coveted object. The same face is almost exactly

repeated in the Madonna of the Hermitage Gallery (St. Petersburg),

who offers her breast to her boy, at that moment turning about to

receive some fruit presented by a child angel. There are two

duplicates of this picture in other galleries.

The Zingarella (the Gypsy) is so called from the gypsy turban worn by

the Madonna. The mother, supposed to be painted from the artist's

wife, sits with the child asleep on her lap. With motherly tenderness

she bends so closely over him that her forehead touches his little

head. It is unfortunate that this beautiful work is not better known.

It is in the Naples Gallery.

A comparison of these pictures discloses a remarkable variety in

action and grouping. On the other hand, the Madonnas are quite similar

in general type. With the exception of the Zingarella, who is the most

motherly, they are all in a playful mood. The same playfulness, but

of a more sweet and motherly kind, lights the face of the Madonna

della Scala. The composition is somewhat in the portrait style,

showing the mother in half length, seated under a sort of canopy. The

babe clings closely to her neck, turning about at the spectator with a

glance half shy and half mischievous. His coyness awakens a smile of

tender amusement in the gentle, young face above him.

The picture has an interesting history. It was originally painted in

fresco over the eastern gate of Parma, where Vasari saw and admired

it. In after years, the wall which it decorated was incorporated into

a small new church, of which it formed the rear wall. To accommodate

the high level of the Madonna, the building was somewhat elevated,

and, being entered by a flight of steps, was known as S. Maria della

Scala (of the staircase). The name attached itself to the picture

even after the church was destroyed (in 1812), and the fresco

removed to the town gallery. The marks of defacement which it bears

are due to the votive offerings which were formerly fastened upon

it,--among them, a silver crown worn by the Madonna as late as the

eighteenth century. Though such scars injure its artistic beauty, they

add not a little to the romantic interest which invests it.

[Illustration: CORREGGIO.--MADONNA DELLA SCALA.]

Beside such names as Raphael and Correggio, history furnishes but one

other worthy of comparison for the portrayal of the Mater Amabilis--it

is Titian. His Madonna is by no means uniformly motherly. There are

times when we look in vain for any softening of her aristocratic

features; when her stately dignity seems quite incompatible with

demonstrativeness.[4] But when love melts her heart how gracious is

her unbending, how winning her smile! Once she goes so far as to play

in the fields with her little boy, quieting a rabbit with one hand for

him to admire. (La Vierge au Lapin, Louvre.) In other pictures she

holds him lying across her lap, smiling thoughtfully upon him. Such an

one is the Madonna with Sts. Ulfo and Brigida, in the Madrid Gallery.

The child is taking the flowers St. Brigida offers him, and his mother

looks down with the pleased expression of fond pride. Again, when her

babe holds his two little hands full of the roses his cousin St. John

has brought him, she smiles gently at the eagerness of the two

children. (Uffizi Gallery.)

[Footnote 4: See the Madonna of the Cherries in the Belvedere at

Vienna, and the Madonna and Saints in the Dresden Gallery.]

[Illustration: TITIAN.--MADONNA AND SAINTS.

(DETAIL.)]

Another similar composition reveals a still sweeter intimacy between

mother and son. The babe stretches out his hand coaxingly towards his

mother's breast, but she draws her veil about her, gently denying

his appeal. A more beautiful mother, or a more bewitching babe, it

were hard to find. Three fine half-length figures of saints complete

this composition, each of great interest and individuality, but not

necessary to the unity of action--the Madonna alone making a complete

picture. There are two copies of this work, one in the Belvedere at

Vienna, and one in the Louvre at Paris.

The \_motif\_ of this picture is not unique in art, as will have been

remarked in passing. The first duty of maternity, and one of its

purest joys, is to sustain the newborn life at the mother's breast. A

coarse interpretation of the subject desecrates a holy shrine, while a

delicate rendering, such as Raphael's or Titian's, invests it with a

new beauty. Other pictures of this class should be mentioned in the

same connection. There is one in the Hermitage Gallery at St.

Petersburg, attributed by late critics to the little-known painter,

Bernardino de' Conti. The Madonna's face, her hair drawn smoothly over

her temples, has a beautiful matronliness. Still another is the

Madonna of the Green Cushion, by Solario, in the Louvre. Here the babe

lies on a cushion before his mother, who bends over him ecstatically,

her fair young face aglow with maternal love as she sees his

contentment.

We have noticed that in one of Corregio's pictures the babe lies

asleep on his mother's lap. It is interesting to trace this pretty

\_motif\_ through other works of art. No phase of motherhood is more

touching than the watchful care which guards the child while he

sleeps; nor is infancy ever more appealing than in peaceful and

innocent slumber. Mrs. Browning understood this well, when she wrote

her beautiful poem interpreting the thoughts of "the Virgin Mary to

the Child Jesus." Hopes and fears, joy and pity, are alternately

stirred in the heart of the watcher, as she bends over the tiny face,

scanning every change that flits across it. Each verse suggests a

subject for a picture.

We should naturally expect that Raphael would not overlook so

beautiful a theme as the mother watching her sleeping child. Nor are

we disappointed. The Madonna of the Diadem, in the Louvre, belongs to

this class of pictures. Like the pastoral Madonnas of the Florentine

period, it includes the figure of the little St. John, to whom, in

this instance, the proud mother is showing her babe, daintily lifting

the veil which covers his face.

The seventeenth century produced many pictures of this class; among

them, a beautiful work by Guido Reni, in Rome, deserves mention,

being executed with greater care than was usual with him. Sassoferrato

and Carlo Dolce frequently painted the subject. Their Madonnas often

seem affected, not to say sentimental, after the simpler and nobler

types of the earlier period. But nowhere is their peculiar sweetness

more appropriate than beside a sleeping babe. The Corsini picture by

Carlo Dolce is an exquisite nursery scene. Its popularity depends

more, perhaps, upon the babe than the mother. Like Lady Isobel's child

in another poem of motherhood by Mrs. Browning, he sleeps--

"Fast, warm, as if its mother's smile,

Laden with love's dewy weight,

And red as rose of Harpocrate,

Dropt upon its eyelids, pressed

Lashes to cheek in a sealèd rest."

In Northern Madonna art, the Mater Amabilis is the preëminent subject.

This fact is due partly to the German theological tendency to

subordinate the mother to her divine Son, but more especially to the

characteristic domesticity of Teutonic peoples. From Van Eyck and

Schongauer, through Dürer and Holbein, down to Rembrandt and Rubens,

we trace this strongly marked predilection in every style of

composition, regardless of proprieties. Van Eyck does not hesitate to

occupy his richly dressed enthroned Madonna at Frankfort with giving

her breast to her babe, and Dürer portrays the same maternal duties in

the Virgin on the Crescent Moon. Holbein's Meyer Madonna, splendid

with her jewelled crown, is not less motherly than Schongauer's young

Virgin sitting in a rude stable.

Rembrandt in humble Dutch interiors, Rubens in numerous Holy Families

modelled upon the Flemish life about him always conceive of the

Virgin Mother as delighting in her maternal cares. As has been said of

Dürer's Madonna,--and the description applies equally well to many

others in the North,--"She suckles her son with a calm feeling of

happiness; she gazes upon him with admiration as he lies upon her lap;

she caresses him and presses him to her bosom without a thought

whether it is becoming to her, or whether she is being admired."

[Illustration: DÜRER.--MADONNA AND CHILD.]

This entire absence of posing on the part of the German Virgin is one

of the most admirable elements in this art. This characteristic is

perfectly illustrated in Dürer's portrait Madonna of the Belvedere

Gallery, at Vienna. This is an excellent specimen of the master, who,

alone of the Germans, is considered the peer of his great Italian

contemporaries. Frankly admired both by Titian and Raphael, he has in

common with them the supreme gift of seeing and reproducing natural

human affections. His work, however, is as thoroughly German as theirs

is Italian. The Madonna of this picture has the round, maidenly face

of the typical German ideal. A transparent veil droops over the

flowing hair, covered by a blue drapery above. The mother holds her

child high in her arms, bending her face over him. The babe is a

beautiful little fellow, full of vivacity. He holds up a pear

gleefully, to meet his mother's smile. The picture is painted with

great delicacy of finish.

The Mater Amabilis is the subject \_par excellence\_ of modern Madonna

art. Carrying on its surface so much beauty and significance, it is

naturally attractive to all figure painters. While other Madonna

subjects are too often beyond the comprehension of either the artist

or his patron, this falls within the range of both. The shop windows

are full of pretty pictures of this kind, in all styles of treatment.

There are the portrait Madonnas by Gabriel Max, already mentioned, and

pastoral Madonnas by Bouguereau, by Carl Müller, by N. Barabino, and

by Dagnan-Bouveret. Others carry the subject into the more formal

compositions of the enthroned and enskied Madonnas, being, as we have

seen, not without illustrious predecessors among the old masters. Of

these we have Guay's Mater Amabilis, where the mother leans from her

throne to support her child, playing on the step below with his

cousin, St. John; and Mary L. Macomber's picture, where the enthroned

Madonna folds her babe in her protecting arms, as if to shield him

from impending evil.

[Illustration: BODENHAUSEN.--MADONNA AND CHILD.]

By Bodenhausen we have the extremely popular Mater Amabilis in Gloria,

where a girlish young mother, her long hair streaming about her,

stands in upper air, poised above the great ball of the earth, holding

her sweet babe to her heart.

Pictures like these constantly reiterate the story of a mother's

love--an old, old story, which begins again with every new birth.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MADONNA IN ADORATION.

(THE MADRE PIA.)

The first tender joys of a mother's love are strangely mingled with

awe. Her babe is a precious gift of God, which she receives into

trembling hands. A new sense of responsibility presses upon her with

almost overwhelming force. Hers is the highest honor given unto woman;

she accepts it with solemn joy, deeming herself all too unworthy.

This spirit of humility has been idealized in art, in the form of

Madonna known as the Madre Pia. It represents the Virgin Mary adoring

her son. Sometimes she kneels before him, sometimes she sits with

clasped hands, holding him in her lap. Whatever the variation in

attitude, the thought is the same: it is an expression of that higher,

finer aspect of motherhood which regards infancy as an object not only

of love, but of reverent humility. It is a recognition of the great

mystery of life which invests even the helpless babe with a dignity

commanding respect.

A picture with so serious an intention can never be widely understood.

The meaning is too subtile for the casual observer. An outgrowth of

mediæval pietism, it was superseded by more popular subjects, and has

never since been revived. The subject had its origin as an idealized

nativity, set in pastoral surroundings which suggest the Bethlehem

manger. Theologically it represented the Virgin as the first

worshipper of her divine Son. But though the sacred mystery of Mary's

experience sets her forever apart as "blessed among women," she is the

type of true motherhood in all generations.

The Madonna in Adoration is, properly speaking, a fifteenth century

subject. It belongs primarily to that most mystic of all schools of

art, the Umbrian, centering in the town of Perugia. Nowhere else was

painting so distinctly an adjunct of religious services, chiefly

designed to aid the worshipper in prayer and contemplation.

As an exponent of the typical qualities of the Perugian school stands

the artist who is known by its name, Perugino. His favorite subject is

the Madre Pia, and his best picture of the kind is the Madonna of the

National Gallery. Having once seen her here, the traveller recognizes

her again and again in other galleries, in the many replicas of this

charming composition. The Madonna kneels in the foreground, adoring

with folded hands the child, who is supported in a sitting posture on

the ground, by a guardian angel. The Virgin's face is full of fervent

and exalted emotion.

Perugino had no direct imitator of his Madre Pia, but his Bolognese

admirer Francia treated the subject in a way that readily suggests the

source of his inspiration. His Madonna of the Rose Garden in Munich

instantly recalls Perugino. The artist has, however, chosen a novel

\_motif\_ in representing the moment when the Virgin is just sinking on

her knees, as if overcome by emotion.

Between the Umbrian school and the Florentine, a reciprocal influence

was exerted. If the latter taught the former many secrets of

composition and technical execution, the Umbrians in turn imparted

something of their mysticism to their more matter-of-fact neighbors.

While the Umbrian school of the fifteenth century was occupied with

the Madre Pia, Florence also was devoted to the same subject.

Sculpture led the race, and in the front ranks was Luca della Robbia,

founder of the school which bears his family name.

Beginning as a worker in marble, his inventive genius presently

wrought out a style of sculpture peculiarly his own. This was the

enamelled terra-cotta bas-relief showing pure white figures against a

background of pale blue. They were made chiefly in circular

medallions, lunettes, and tabernacles, and were scattered throughout

the churches and homes of Tuscany.

Associated with Luca in his work was his nephew Andrea, who, in turn,

had three sculptor sons, Giovanni, Girolamo, and Luca II. So great was

the demand for their ware that the Della Robbia studios became a

veritable manufactory from which hundreds of pieces went forth. Of

these, a goodly number represent the Madonna in Adoration. While it is

difficult to trace every one of these with absolute correctness to its

individual author, the majority seem to be by Andrea, who, as it would

appear, had a special fondness for the subject. It must be

acknowledged that the nephew is inferior to his uncle in his ideal of

the Virgin, less original than Luca in his conceptions, and less noble

in his results. His work, notwithstanding, has many charming

qualities, which are specially appropriate to the character of the

particular subject under consideration. There is, indeed, a peculiar

value in low relief, for purposes of idealization. It has an effect of

spiritualizing the material, and giving the figures an ethereal

appearance. Andrea profited by this advantage, and, in addition,

showed great delicacy of judgment in subduing curves and retaining

simplicity in his lines.

We may see all this in the popular tabernacle which he designed, and

of which there are at least five, and probably more, copies. The

Madonna kneels prayerfully before her babe, who lies on the ground by

some lily stalks. In the sky above are two cherubim and hands holding

a crown. There is a girlish grace in the kneeling figure, and a rare

sweetness in the face, entirely free from sentimentality. A severe

simplicity of drapery, and the absence of all unnecessary accessories,

are points of excellence worth noting. The composition was sometimes

varied by the introduction of different figures in the sky, other

cherubim, or the head of the Almighty, with the Dove. Only second in

popularity to this was Andrea's circular medallion of the Nativity,

with the Virgin and St. John in adoration. There are two copies of

this in the Florentine Academy, one in the Louvre, and one in Berlin.

The effect of crowding so many figures into a small compass is not so

pleasing as the classical simplicity of the former composition.

[Illustration: ANDREA DELLA ROBBIA.--MADONNA IN

ADORATION.]

Contemporary with the Della Robbias was another Florentine family of

artists equally numerous. Of the five Rossellini, Antonio is of

greatest interest to us, as a sculptor who had some qualities in

common with the famous porcelain workers. Like them, he had a special

gift for the Madonna in Adoration. We can see this subject in his best

style of treatment, in the beautiful Nativity in San Miniato, "which

may be regarded as one of the most charming productions of the best

period of Tuscan art."[5] The tourist will consider it a rich reward

for his climb to the quaint old church on the ramparts overhanging the

Arno. If perchance his wanderings lead him, on another occasion, to

the hill rising on the opposite side, he will find, in the Cathedral

of Fiesole, a fitting companion in the altar-piece by Mino da Fiesole.

This is a decidedly unique rendering of the Madre Pia. The Virgin

kneels in a niche, facing the spectator, adoring the Christ-child, who

sits on the steps below her, turning to the little Baptist, who kneels

at one side on a still lower step.

[Footnote 5: C.C. Perkins, in Tuscan Sculptors.]

[Illustration: LORENZO DI CREDI.--NATIVITY.]

Passing from the sculpture of Florence to its painting, it is fitting

that we mention first of all the friend and fellow-pupil of the

Umbrian Perugino, Lorenzo di Credi. The two had much in common.

Trained together in the workshop of the sculptor Verrocchio, in those

days of intense religious stress, they both became followers of the

prophet-prior of San Marco, Savonarola. Their religious earnestness

naturally found expression in the beautiful subject of the Madre Pia.

The Florentine artist, though not less devout than his friend,

introduces into his work an element of joy, characteristic of his

surroundings, and more attractive than the somewhat melancholy types

of Umbria. His Adoration, in the Uffizi, is an admirable example of

his best work. Following the fashion made popular by the Della

Robbias, the artist chose for his composition the round picture, or

\_tondo\_. By this elimination of unnecessary corners, the attention

centres in the beautiful figure of the Virgin, which occupies a large

portion of the circle. In exquisite keeping with the modest loveliness

of her face, a delicate, transparent veil is knotted over her smooth

hair, and falls over the round curves of her neck. In expression and

attitude she is the perfect impersonation of the spirit of humility,

joyfully submissive to her high calling, reverently acknowledging her

unworthiness.

This picture may be taken as a typical example of the subject in

Florentine painting. Lorenzo himself repeated the composition many

times, and numerous other works could be mentioned, strikingly similar

in treatment, by Ghirlandajo, in the Florence Academy; by Signorelli,

in the National Gallery; by Albertinelli, in the Pitti; by Filippo

Lippi, in the Berlin Gallery; by Filippino Lippi, in the Pitti; and so

on through the list.

In many cases the subject seems to have been chosen, not so much from

any devotional spirit on the part of the painter, as from force of

imitation of the prevailing Florentine fashion. This is especially

true in the case of Filippo Lippi, who does not bear the best of

reputations. Although a brother in the Carmelite monastery, his love

of worldly pleasures often led him astray, if we are to believe the

gossip of the old annalists. We may allow much for the exaggerations

of scandal, but still be forced to admit that his candid realism is

plain evidence of a closer study of nature than of theology.

Browning has given us a fine analysis of his character in the poem

bearing his name, "Fra Lippo Lippi." The artist monk, caught in the

streets of the city on his return from some midnight revel, explains

his constant quarrel with the rules of art laid down by ecclesiastical

authorities. They insist that his business is "to the souls of men,"

and that it is "quite from the mark of painting" to make "faces, arms,

legs, and bodies like the true." On his part, he claims that it will

not help the interpretation of soul, by painting body ill. An intense

lover of every beautiful line and color in God's world, he believes

that these things are given us to be thankful for, not to pass over or

despise. Obliged to devote himself to a class of subjects with which

he had little sympathy, he compromised with his critics by adopting

the traditional forms of composition, and treating them after the

manner of \_genre\_ painters, in types drawn from the ordinary life

about him. The kneeling Madre Pia he painted three times: two of the

pictures are in the Florence Academy, and the third and best is in the

Berlin Gallery.

[Illustration: FILIPPO LIPPI.--MADONNA IN ADORATION.]

In the Madonna of the Uffizi, he broke away somewhat from tradition,

and rendered quite a new version of the subject. The Virgin is seated

with folded hands, adoring her child, who is held up before her by two

boy angels. His type of childhood is by no means pretty, though

altogether natural. The Virgin cannot be called either intellectual or

spiritual, but "where," as a noted critic has asked, "can we find a

face more winsome and appealing?" Certainly she is a lovely woman, and

"If you get simple beauty and naught else,

That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed

Within yourself, when you return him thanks."

The idea of the seated Madre Pia, comparatively rare in Florentine

art, is quite frequent in northern Italy. Sometimes the setting is a

landscape, in the foreground of which the Madonna sits adoring the

babe lying on her lap. Examples are by Basaiti (Paduan), in the

National Gallery, and by a painter of Titian's school, in Berlin. Much

more common is the enthroned Madonna in Adoration, and for this we

may turn to the pictures of the Vivarini, Bartolommeo and Luigi, or

Alvise. These men were of Muranese origin, and in the very beginning

of Venetian art-history were at the head of their profession, until

finally eclipsed by the rival family of the Bellini. Among their

works, we find by each one at least three pictures of the type

described. As the most worthy of description, we may select the

altar-piece by Luigi, in the Church of the Redentore. As it is one of

the most popular Madonnas in Venice, no collection is complete without

it. A green curtain forms the background, against which the plain

marble throne-chair is brought into relief. The Virgin sits wrapt in

her own thoughts, an impersonation of tranquil dignity. A heavy wimple

falls low over her forehead, entirely concealing her hair, and with

its severe simplicity accentuating the chaste beauty of her face.

Two fascinating little cherubs sit on a parapet in front, playing on

lutes; and, lulled by their gentle music, the sweet babe sleeps on,

serenely unconscious of it all.

[Illustration: LUIGI VIVARINI.--MADONNA AND CHILD.]

Before such pictures as this, gleaming in the dim light of quiet

chapels, many a heart, before unbelieving, may learn a new reverence

for the mysterious sanctity of motherhood.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MADONNA AS WITNESS.

In proportion to a mother's ideals and ambitions for her child does

her love take on a higher and purer aspect. The noblest mother is the

most unselfish; she regards her child as a sacred charge, only

temporarily committed to her keeping. Her care is to nurture and train

him for his part in life; this is the object of her constant endeavor.

Thus she comes to look upon him as hers and yet not hers. In one sense

he is her very own; in another, he belongs to the universal life which

he is to serve. There is no conflict between the two ideas; they are

the obverse sides of one great truth. Both must be recognized for a

complete understanding of life. What is true of all motherhood finds

a supreme illustration in the character of the Virgin Mary. She

understood from the first that her son had a great mission to fulfil,

that his work had somewhat to do with a mighty kingdom. Never for a

moment did she lose sight of these things as she "pondered them in her

heart." Her highest joy was to present him to the world for the

fulfilment of his calling.

As a subject of art, this phase of the Madonna's character requires a

mode of treatment quite unlike that of the Mater Amabilis or the Madre

Pia. The attitude and expression of the Virgin are appropriate to her

office as the Christ-bearer. Both mother and child, no longer

absorbed in each other, direct their glance towards the people to whom

he is given for a witness. (Isaiah 55:4.) These may be the spectators

looking at the picture, or the saints and votaries filling the

composition. The mother's lap is the throne for the child, from which,

standing or sitting, he gives his royal blessing.

It will be readily understood that so lofty a theme can not be common

in art. In our own day, it has, with the Madre Pia, passed almost

entirely out of the range of art subjects; modern painters do not try

such heights. Franz Defregger is alone in having made an honest and

earnest effort, not without success, to express his conception of the

theme. To his Enthroned Madonna at Dölsach, and his less well-known

Madonna in Glory, let us pay this passing word of honor.

To approach our subject in the most systematic way, we will go back to

the beginnings of Madonna art. Mrs. Jameson tells us that the group of

Virgin and Son was, in its first intention, a \_theological symbol\_,

and not a \_representation\_. It was a device set up in the orthodox

churches as a definite formalization of a creed. The first Madonnas

showed none of the aspects of ordinary motherhood in attitude,

gesture, or expression. The theological element in the picture was the

first consideration. We may take as a representative case the Virgin

Nike-peja (of Victory), supposed to be the same which Eudocia, wife of

the Emperor Theodosius II., discovered in her travels in Palestine,

and sent to Constantinople, whence it was finally brought to St.

Mark's, Venice. The Virgin--a half-length figure--holds the child in

front of her, like a doll, as if exhibiting him to the gaze of the

worshippers before the altar over which the picture hung. Both faces

look directly out at the spectator, with grave and stiff solemnity.

The progress of painting, and the growing love of beauty, at length

wrought a change. The time came when art saw the possibility of

uniting, with the religious conception of previous centuries, a more

natural ideal of motherhood. Thus, while the Madonna continues to be

preëminently a witness of her son's greatness, it is not at the

sacrifice of motherly tenderness.

In Venetian art-history, Giovanni Bellini stands at the period when

the old was just merging into the new. We have already seen how

greatly he and his contemporaries differed from the painters of a

later time. Taking advantage of all the progressive methods of the

day, they did not relinquish the religious spirit of their

predecessors, hence their work embodies the best elements of the old

and new. As we examine the Bellini Madonnas, one after another, we

can not fail to notice how delicately they interpret the relation of

the mother to her child.

Loving and gracious as she is, she is not the Mater Amabilis: she is

too preoccupied, though not too cold for caresses. Neither is she the

Madre Pia, though by no means lacking in humility. Her thoughts are of

the future, rather than of the present. True to a mother's instinct,

she encircles her child with a protecting arm, but her face is turned,

not to his, but to the world. Both are looking steadfastly forward to

the great work before them. Their eyes have the far-seeing look of

those absorbed in noble dreams. Their faces are full of sweet

earnestness, not of the ascetic sort, but joyful, with a calm,

tranquil gladness.

This description applies almost equally well to a half-dozen or more

of Bellini's Madonnas, in various styles of composition. For the sake

of definiteness, we may specify the Madonna between St. Paul and St.

George in the Venice Academy. The Virgin is in half-length, against a

scarlet curtain, supporting the child, who stands on the coping of a

balcony. In technical qualities alone, the picture is a notable one

for precision of drawing, breadth of light and shade, and brilliant

color. In Christian sentiment it is among the rare treasures of

Italian art. The National Gallery and the Brera contain others which

are very similar in style and conception.

The three enthroned Madonnas which have already been noticed are not

less remarkable for religious significance. There is a peculiar

freshness and vivacity in the San Giobbe picture. Both Virgin and

child are alert and eager, welcoming the future with smiling and

youthful enthusiasm. The Frari Madonna is of a more subdued type,

but is not less true to her ideal. The Virgin of San Zaccaria is more

thoughtful and reflective, but she holds her child up bravely, that he

may give his blessing to mankind.

[Illustration: GIOVANNI BELLINI.--MADONNA BETWEEN ST.

GEORGE AND ST. PAUL. (DETAIL.)]

It will have been noticed that the throne is an especially appropriate

setting for the Madonna as Witness. It is one of the functions of

royalty that the queen should show the prince to his people. We

therefore turn naturally to this class of pictures for examples. To

those of Bellini just cited we may add, from the others mentioned in

the second chapter, the Madonnas by Cima, by Palma, and by Montagna in

Venetian Art; and by Luini and by Botticelli in the Lombard and

Florentine schools respectively. Luini's picture is one which readily

touches the heart. The Virgin unites the sweetness of fresh, young

motherhood with womanly dignity of character. Her smile has nothing

of mystery in it; it is simply sweet and winning. The Christ-child is

a lovely boy, steadying himself against his mother's breast, and yet

with an air of self-reliance. The two understand each other well.

[Illustration: LUINI.--MADONNA WITH ST. BARBARA AND ST.

ANTHONY.]

One could hardly imagine two more dissimilar spirits than Luini and

Botticelli. To Luini's Virgin, the consciousness of her son's

greatness is a proud honor, accepted seriously, but gladly. To

Botticelli, on the other hand, it brings a profound melancholy. This

is so marked that at first sight almost every one is repelled by

Botticelli, and yields only after long familiarity to the mysterious

fascination of the sad-eyed Madonna, who holds her babe almost

listlessly, as her head droops with the weight of her sorrow. Her

expression is the same whatever her attitude, when she presses her

babe to her bosom as the Mater Amabilis (in the Borghese Gallery at

Rome, in the Dresden Gallery, and Louvre), or when, as witness to her

son's destiny, she holds him forth to be seen of men. It is in this

last capacity that her mood is most intelligible. She seems oppressed

rather than humbled by her honors; reluctant, rather than glad to

assume them; yet, with proud dignity, determined to do her part,

though her heart break in the doing. Her nature is too deep to accept

the joy without counting the cost, and her vision looks beyond

Bethlehem to Calvary. This is well illustrated in the picture of the

Berlin Gallery.[6] The queen mother rises with the prince to receive

the homage of humanity. The boy, old beyond his years, gravely raises

his right hand to bless his people, the other still clinging, with

infantile grace, to the dress of his mother. Lovely, rose-crowned

angels hold court on either side, bearing lighted tapers in jars of

roses.

[Footnote 6: The Berlin Gallery contains two Enthroned Madonnas

attributed to Botticelli. The description here, and on page 40 makes

it clear that the reference is to the picture numbered 102. This does

not appear in Berenson's list of Botticelli's works, but is treated as

authentic by Crowe and Cavalcaselle.]

The Madonna of the Pomegranate is another work by Botticelli which

belongs in this class of pictures. It is a \_tondo\_ in the Uffizi,

showing the figures in half length. The Virgin, encircled by angels,

holds the child half reclining on her lap. Her face is inexpressibly

sad, and the child shares her mood, as he raises his little hand to

bless the spectator. Two angels bear the Virgin's flowers, roses and

lilies; two others hold books. They bend towards the queen as the

petals of a rose bend towards the centre, with the serious grace

peculiar to Botticelli.

[Illustration: BOTTICELLI.--MADONNA OF THE

POMEGRANATE .]

In connection with the peculiar type of melancholy exhibited on the

face of Botticelli's Madonna, it will be of interest to refer to the

work of Francia. The two artists were, in some points, kindred

spirits; both felt the burden of life's mystery and sorrow. Francia,

as we have seen, imbibed from the works of Perugino something of the

spirit of mysticism common to the Umbrian school. But while there is a

certain resemblance between his Madonna and Perugino's, the former has

less of sentimentality than the latter, and more real melancholy. Like

Botticelli's Virgin, she acts her part half-heartedly, as if the sword

had already begun to pierce her heart. Francia's favorite Madonna

subjects were of the higher order, the Madre Pia and the Madonna as

Witness. In treating the latter, his Christ-child is always in keeping

with the mother, a grave little fellow who gives the blessing with

almost touching dignity. Enthroned Madonnas illustrating the theme are

those of the Hermitage at St. Petersburg, of the Belvedere at Vienna,

and the famous Bentivoglio Madonna in S. Jacopo Maggiore at Bologna.

The last-named is one of the works which enable us to understand

Raphael's high praise of the Bolognese master. It is a noble

composition, full of strong religious feeling.

[Illustration: MURILLO.--MADONNA AND CHILD.]

It is a long leap from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries,

taking us from a period of genuine religious fervor in art, into an

age of artificial imitation. In the midst of the decadence of old

ideals and the birth of art methods entirely new, arose one who seemed

to be the reincarnation of the old spirit in a form peculiar to his

age and race. This was Murillo, the peasant-painter of Spain, than

whom was never artist more pious, not even excepting the angelic

brother of San Marco. He alone in the seventeenth century kept

alive the pure flame of religious fervor, which had burned within the

devout Italians of the early school. Through all his pictures of the

Virgin and child we can see that the Madonna as the Christ-bearer is

the ideal he always has in view. He falls short of it, not through any

lack of earnestness, but because his type of womanhood is incapable of

expressing such lofty idealism. His virgins are modelled upon the

simple Andalusian maidens, sweet, timid, dark-eyed creatures. Their

faces glow with gentle affection as they look wistfully out of the

picture, or raise their eyes to heaven, as if dimly discerning the

heights which they have never reached.

The Pitti Madonna is one of this sweet company, and perhaps the

loveliest of them all. Both she and her beautiful boy are full of

gentle earnestness, and if they are too simple-minded to realize what

is in store for them, they are none the less ready to do the Father's

will.

One more picture remains for us to consider as an illustration of the

Madonna as Witness. Had we mentioned it first, nothing further could

have been said on the subject. The Sistine Madonna is the greatest

ever produced, from every point of view. We have already noted the

superiority of its artistic composition over all other enskied

Madonnas, and are the more ready to appreciate its higher merits; for

its strongest hold upon our admiration is in its moral and religious

significance. Its theme is the transfiguration of loving and

consecrated motherhood. Mother and child, united in love, move towards

the glorious consummation of the heavenly kingdom.

[Illustration: RAPHAEL.--SISTINE MADONNA.]

It has been said that Raphael made no preparatory studies for this

Madonna, but, in a larger sense, he spent his life in preparation

for it. He had begun by imitating the mystic sweetness of Perugino's

types, drawn by an intuitive delicacy of perception to this spiritual

idealism, while yet too inexperienced to express any originality.

Then, by an inevitable reaction, he threw himself into the creation of

a purely naturalistic Madonna, and carried the Mater Amabilis to its

utmost perfection. Having mastered all the secrets of woman's beauty,

he returned once more to the higher realm of idealism to send forth

his matured conception of the Madonna as the Christ-bearer.

The Sistine Madonna is above all words of praise; all extravagance of

expression is silenced before her simplicity. Hers is the beauty of

symmetrically developed womanhood; the perfect poise of her figure is

not more marked than the perfect poise of her character. Not one

false note, not one exaggerated emphasis, jars upon the harmony of

body, soul, and spirit. Confident, but entirely unassuming; serious,

but without sadness; joyous, but not to mirthfulness; eager, but

without haste; she moves steadily forward with steps timed to the

rhythmic music of the spheres. The child is no burden, but a part of

her very being. The two are one in love, thought, and purpose. Sharing

the secret of his sacred calling, the mother bears her son forth to

meet his glorious destiny.

Art can pay no higher tribute to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, than to

show her in this phase of her motherhood. We sympathize with her

maternal tenderness, lavishing fond caresses upon her child. We go

still deeper into her experience when we see her bowed in sweet

humility before the cares and duties she is called upon to assume.

But we are admitted to the most cherished aspirations of her soul,

when we see her oblivious of self, carrying her child forth to the

service of humanity. It is thus that she becomes one of his "witnesses

unto the people;" it is thus that "all generations shall call her

blessed."

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