

CLASSICAL PAINTING

In speaking of Classical painting, I intend to give you not a complete or systematic history of the practice of painting in Greece ~~nor~~ that is in the Encyclopedie wh. are always with us nor an archaeo~~logical~~ discussion of the remains of Classical painting in various parts of Italy, but rather my impressions as an artist of ~~those~~ unprejudiced by any ~~knowledge~~ previous knowledge of ~~the~~ the views of German ~~archae~~ antiquarians, and looking at them from a purely artistic point of view. I make this statement to disarm the criticism of any Classical Tripos, Part II. section ^B members of the Society who may be present. When we read the accounts of Classical pictures in Pliny Pausanias and Lucian we cannot help feeling a strong desire to reconstruct in imagination some of

Some of those great works which to those² who saw them appeared at least as great as the masterpieces of Classical sculpture. Add to this the fact that with us colour plays an increasingly important part in our delight in art and we cannot doubt that the complete destruction of Greek painting is one of ~~our greatest charges~~ ~~against the sin~~ ~~of Time~~, the greatest loss which Time has inflicted on us.

~~At Naples~~ In the Naples Museum there are some 2000 works of Classical painting which range from large and magnificently drawn frescoes of the Augustan and even pre-Augustan period and in which there is still some sense of the vigour of the great Greek master to the mean little daubs of the jerry builders workman, badly drawn, badly coloured insignificant and frivolous in design. But in all the work ~~that~~ bad and good there is a certain graceful ease & fluency of ^{execution} ~~execution~~ that is very remarkable but natural when we remember that the badness is the badness of ^{the} decay of a great art and not the ~~stagnation~~ ^{aphasia} inefficiency of an early art, and that technical skill & self-confidence are ^{always} the

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both to arise and
last excellences to disappear.

The number of pictures which ~~are~~ belong
~~to~~ to the Augustan age is small compared
with the later works but they are naturally
more interesting as having closer connection
with the traditions of Greek art under
the Diadochi wh. is of course the only
period of Greek art ~~with~~ wh. we can
have any direct communication. ~~since it is~~
~~the echo of the traditions of that time~~
~~that~~ These pictures of the Augustan age
are mostly large pictures with a group of
heroic or divine figures which fills up the
whole picture there being no landscape
or background. The figures are finely drawn
and composed with great dignity and though
the modelling is not very full there is a
~~good deal of solid~~ much feeling for
solidity & relief. The colours are very
beautiful but entirely decorative, the
chief harmonies being a warm deep red
in the flesh colour and pale mauve &
green, & yellow draperies.

The works of the Neronian period
 are usually smaller, and rather
 richer in colour & more complete in
 modelling. We miss the large dignity
 & grandeur of the statuesque simplicity
 of pose of the Earlier work, the
 choice of subject too, changes - instead
 of scenes from the Hercules ^{+ Theseus} cycles
 we get mythology studied chiefly for
 its erotic possibilities. Numerous
 Narcissus pose ^{with} ~~in~~ effeminate grace above
 their water reflexions, Endymion and Selene
 Bacchus & Ariadne, Poseidon & Amphitrite
 & Perseus & Andromeda are subjects
 wh. continually recur. For I ought
 to have said that in the Augustan
 age there arose the habit of
 having on the walls of private houses
 cheap reproductions of celebrated

pictures. I fear the taste cannot
 have been very discriminating that
 was content with such copies of what
 probably were really great pictures, and
 one cannot help wishing that ~~we had~~ ^{the Romans}
~~had been satisfied with~~ the autotypes of the great Greek masters
 which ~~is the~~ ^{is} instead of insisting on
 coloured reproductions. Whenever we find
 then a number of pictures of the same
 subject with only slight variations
 of the pose + composition I think -
 we may consider we have the descendant
 of a Greek masterpiece.
 & Some of these traditional groups
 can be recognized as ~~the same as~~
~~those~~ as being copies of pictures of
 which we have descriptions. Lucian
 somewhere I've forgotten where describes
 an imaginary picture of Selene +
 Endymion which exactly suits the copies

we have at Naples ~~some of the~~ ~~are~~
 by the ~~to~~ Then again we have description
 of pictures of Medea about to
 slay her children. by Timone Timomachos
 of Byzantium who was a painter of
 the 3rd. century & seems to have delighted
 in ^{the} dramatic effects, he did a raving Ajax
 a Medea an Orestes and an Iphigeneia
 in Tauris. As his pictures ~~were~~ we have
 a great many allusions in literature to
 his pictures it is probable that his
 works were very popular and that this
 accounts for our having so many ^{copies} of them.

Then ~~we~~ there is a very badly drawn
 picture of Iphigeneia in Aulis with
 Agamemnon reeling his head ^{with} which we
 may compare the account of Timanthes
 picture Pliny says of his Eius summa est
 Iphigeneia, ~~and~~ oratorum laudibus celebrata
 qua stanti ad aras pictura, cum maestis
 pinxisset aures, praecipue patrum, cum
 tristitia omnem ingiem consumpsisset,
 patris ipsius vultum velavit quem digne

non potius ostendere." It was then as it
 is now - the pictures which ~~we~~ made a
 sensation, which made good "copy" were those
 that ~~had~~ ^{prompted} some salient ~~and~~ appeal to
 the emotions rather than those whose
 merit was artistic. ^{for the greatest pictures can only be seen with respect and awe} Or if the problem
 was purely artistic what seems to have
 pleased the Roman critics was the ~~most~~
~~philistine~~ ^{was} was realism. The ostriches
 birds that pecked fruit or wds that peck
 fruit because of ^{a painter} the boy or curtains
 that would not draw aside because they
 were painted and so forth are enough
 to show chiefly the ~~stupid~~ gossiping, ^{fine-} ~~art~~
 repositing a kind of criticism which we
 have to rely on. One amusing description
 of this sort is that of Theon of Samos
 who painted a soldier hoplite charging
 who ~~stood out~~ ^{was} so sharply foreshortened
 & so ~~exa~~ ^{no doubt} drawn with such exaggeration
 that he seemed making at of his
 picture at the spectator whose
 emotions were further worked upon
 by music for martial music

played while he ~~had~~ sat waiting for
the curtain to rise. One might almost
believe there ^{truly} ~~was~~ Gustave Doré in
those days, has had more than one incarnation.

But the stories are at all events of
use in showing how complete was the
~~power in~~ technical power in the hands
of the great masters for realizing
effects of solid relief.

But let us return to the paintings
in the Museum at Naples. I have
said that the sensuous and exotic
pictures of the Neonian period were
often ^{fuller} ~~richer~~ in their modeling & richer
in action than the earlier Augustan
work - are we to suppose then that
this shows a growth in the power
of representing natural forms ~~or~~
and that we must not due to Roman
influence & that the Augustan pictures
show the extreme limit of ~~the~~ power
of representation attained ^{to} by the

For one thing

Greeks. I think not. ~~In the first~~
~~place~~ the whole of literature is against.
 such a view. ^{Pliny & g. speaks of ~~partly~~ are as unmodern} And ~~possibly~~ we may we
 rather ~~not~~ suppose that the revival by Positives
 of a taste for the pure & earlier
 forms of Greek art still had an
 effect on the taste of the Augustan
 age wh. in many ways was ~~severer~~
~~than that of the following period.~~ and
 more chaste & severe than that of the
 following period. And with the love of
 & sensuous & erotic subjects under Nero
 the ^{copyists} ~~artists~~ went for their originals
 to the works of a later and ~~more~~
 period of Greek art in wh. rationalization
 was ^{at the expense of} ~~more and~~ plastic repose. ~~we~~
 less sought after.

In these Neonian ~~sub~~ mythological
 subjects landscape takes a more
 prominent part and there is great
 unity of construction & general plan
 the figures being for the most part

rightly placed in the landscape.

There is often extreme beauty of pose though the attitudes tend to be effeminate rather than shy. But for grace of pose and tenderness of tone and beauty of colour ~~the~~ some of these pictures are really unequalled. I remember one in particular of Perseus & Andromeda where Andromeda stands ^{in on a rock} ~~gracefully reaching her hand to her deliverer~~ in the centre of the picture - ~~the beautiful purple grey flesh tones melting into the vaporous blue haze which hangs over the sea~~ ^{in front of Andromeda stand} gracefully languidly somewhat indifferently sketching her hand to an equally graceful equally untrodden Perseus who is in no ^{hurry} to alter a situation in which they ^{are conscious of} ~~both~~ are being seen to perfection by slaying a monster who is by no means obtrusive or exact. There is no dramatic or intellectual interest in any of these pictures the sentiment is one of pure delight

in graceful forms and delicate poses.

Perhaps I ought to except the Medea which ~~has~~ ~~not~~ ~~is~~ there is a genuine attempt to depicting a psychological crisis.

That much of Greek painting did depend on psychological & dramatic motives rather than purely artistic ones cannot I think be doubted if one reads the titles of the masterworks of the Alexandrian period.

But these for the most part the Pausanian copyists eschewed such subjects as ~~not~~ also again they neglected for the most part purely artistic work such as ~~the~~

which characterized the Sikyonian school by wh. the technique of it was brought to its highest pitch. I mean such works as Pausias one of the masterpieces of that school ~~and~~ executed

A lady's face seen through a glass out of wh. she was drinking. A bull marvellous form horned & so on, &c.

All his subjects being in themselves trivial
 & depending for interest entirely on the
 solution of technical problems - no
 doubt the later Roman copyists wisely
 left untouched works wh. would lose
 all charm by inadequate copying,
 but it is unfortunate as giving us
 no idea of true side of Greek painting
 wh. seems to have been further
 removed from Greek Art as we understand
 it from sculpture -

It is curious that what we know
 of the Sicyonian school of painting
~~the~~ severity of its training in perspective
 & proportions Eupompas its founder
 insisting on a twelve years course
 of study of which mathematics
 & geometry were an essential part
 that this school had the same
 sort of relation to the Athenian
 school in wh. intellectual &

sentimental motives were more prominent
 than the Sicyonian sculpture ~~had~~ ^{for a}
 to Athenian, that Polykleitos ~~as~~ Doryphoros
 bears to Pheidias the sculptures of the
 Parthenon. It was even to the Greeks
 themselves "Classical" and compared
 with it all other schools were
 "romantic".

But of ~~this~~ works of this school
 we have no existing traces - the still
 to life studies wh. might be possibly
 compared naturally belong to its tradition
 being too bad in workmanship to throw
 any light on Greek painting.

I have spoken chiefly of the distinctly
 picture subjects so far & have left
 out the figures of style Gods like
~~Prof. Miel~~ - and the floating figures
 on black grounds and other decorative
 work because I think there is less
 of Greek & more of Roman possibly
 Etruscan influence in this work.

But there is one class of paintings
 which are quite sui generis and of my
 mind entirely of Roman origin and
 that is a number of decorative
 landscapes ~~of a~~ of a very peculiar
 composition. They are scenes of wide
 views over a rocky landscape; streams
 dash down the deep ravines and are
 bridged by quaint spanned by quaint
 bridges - paths lead up the rocks to
 little temples with curious pagoda
 like roofs, ^{past} shrines, ^{shaded} with the ~~background~~
 tree and the statue of Priapus,
 goatheads drive their flocks along
 the mountain paths, fishermen fish
 in the torrents and worshippers cross
 the bridges to the temples. The
 perspective is with the colour
 is purely decorative but there is
 a delightful sense about the
 execution and marvellous skill
 of a slapdash & spontaneity in the

composition. & the whole effect is
ridiculously like a that of a Japanese
landscape. ^{in composition is want of perspective was in the 3 bold lines of} There are some ^{shady, wh. suggest the glacial} low hills ^{the hills}
in plaster lately discovered at Rome
in the ~~Tiber~~ excavations along the
Tiber in wh. this resemblance is equally
strong. It is a curiously, fantastic
world ^{into} wh. they take us, & full of
invention, full of incidents, utterly frivolous
^{utterly} untrained by the trammels of ~~truth~~
~~to nature~~ ^{or} probability, ^{delightfully} irresponsible.
Now listen to Pliny's description of
Ludius who lived in the reign of the
Divine Augustus & must not be
defrauded of his fame, who first
introduced a cheap ^{scheme of} wall decoration,
villas and porticos and ~~with~~ ^{talked about} woods
meadows, hills, fish ponds, bays, rivers, shores
whatever a man can desire, and then, we
see all ~~can~~ sorts of people walking about
on ~~or~~ riding, or approaching the villas on
asses or by carriage, some fishing, some
hunting ~~some~~ ^{or} even gathering in the
vineyards grapes. Then too we sometimes see
~~to~~ noble villas with approaches ~~through~~ by a
marsh ~~though~~ wh. women are carried ~~decently~~

on men's shoulders, trembling for fear of slipping into the water and many other clever and witty inventions. The same artists fresh painted sea coast towns with terrace walks, with the most charming effect and very cheap.

I know that this is generally thought to be a mistake of Pliney's & this landscape work ~~was~~ is regarded as originally with the late Alexandrian school ~~but~~ because of the passage in Vitruv. to the effect that the ancients by whom we are probably to understand the Alexandrian school painted woods, bays, hills &c. also large drawings of images of the gods & landscapes with wanderings of Ulysses in landscape scenes. but that the moderns have corrupted the practice and decorate their walls with impossible & unreal constructions. Now if this seems to me to indicate rather that there was a marked change of tradition in Augustan times & more fantastic less ~~natural~~ truthful style of wall decoration came in. The want of perspective the complete neglect of all realism ~~which~~ would entirely fit in with this ~~of~~ view. while his mention of the wanderings of Ulysses as typical of the landscape paintings of the ancients at once recalls to us

the works now in the Vatican & wh. from
internal evidence we shd. naturally have
referred to an earlier style. There are
a series of pictures representing the
wanderings of Ulysses framed in a
simple architectural scheme of bright
red pilasters wh. are drawn in perspective.
They are the nearest approach we have
to ^{such} classical landscape, and show great
knowledge of & observation of certain
points and equal ignorance & carelessness
with regard to others. As in the later
landscapes I spoke of the scenery is
seen from above & is wild & romantic
but by no means so impossible. In
the ~~un~~ ~~the~~ ~~case~~ ~~for~~ unity of light effect

in the observation of the change of
color & tone of the sky and the
generally atmospheric character of
these paintings we see signs of ab-
solute earnestness & care
& a great deal more for relations to
the laws of art & the
of realistic and power of attaining to it
than in the factitious landscapes.

But these ~~is complete~~ forms are
constructed, self-contained there is
no perception of them as masses.
None of the grandeur of Greek
shadow-masses ^{sketched} ~~seen~~ against light-
or strong illumination of a figure against
mysterious forms which make up so
much of the imaginative effect of
the late Italian Venetian & Dutch
painters. The forms are illuminated
^{with} ~~by~~ an of even subdued light which
serves to explain the form. But light
& dark are not studied for their own
sake. There is much appearance of
~~the~~ atmosphere Paolo Veronese.
Landscape greater ~~than~~ of time than
Præraphæelites.

wh. I have suggested ~~belong~~ are to
be ascribed to the influence of Indians.

a greater preoccupation with naturalistic
as opposed to decorative necessities and
this is really the essence of the
comparison made by Vitruvius to the
disadvantage of his contemporaries.

~~But as we~~

I think the best way to give any one
who has never seen these classical
pictures an idea of their effect
they produce will be ^{to} compare them
with the paintings of the Renaissance
where we are all familiar with
the gradual growth of our art
from the stammerings of great ^{mind} genius
without the faculty of speech to the
fluent eloquent nonsense of ~~men~~
~~who had~~ speech ~~but~~ ^{without} ~~no~~ ^{mind} ~~had~~.
We can And to see to what point is
the development of these art the

works ~~to~~ at Naples had attained.
I was first struck with the exceedingly
small scale of the employment - then with
a certain flatness and want of relief
~~but~~ the modelling is subtle rather than
strong - ~~I think~~ ^{then} we have none of
the startling effects of solidity of a
Leonardo or Vinci or a Rembrandt.
The drawing too is delicate and refined
well selected the forms well selected but
~~no~~ details of anatomy are never insisted
on, it is never ~~fantastic~~ or exaggerated.
Then of course we might expect from
our knowledge of Classical sculpture
Haydon's phrase slip of the ^{sternocleidomastoid} pectoral,
Gastrocnemius the peck neck, chest
calf. The colour harmonies are more
like those that find favour with us
than with the poor Raphaeletes the
main scheme being mauve & green
rather than red & blue.

There is greater truth of tone & greater
unity of effect than in the poor Raphael
pictures.