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THE MEDIÆVAL MANIA

History is said to be a series of reactions. Society, like a pendulum, first drives one way, and then swings back in the opposite direction. At present, we may be said to be returning at full speed towards a taste for everything old, neglected, and for ages despised. Science and refinement have had their day, and now rude nature and the elemental are to be in the ascendant. In our boyhood, we learned the Roman alphabet; but youngsters now had need to add a knowledge of black-letter, which is rapidly getting back into fashion. Perfection is only to be found in the darkness and ignorance of the middle ages.

It is proper, no doubt, to get rid of what is tame and spiritless in art; and it must be owned that nearly everything that was done in architecture and decoration during the Georgian era was detestable. But it is one thing to reform, and another to revolutionise. Let us by all means go to nature for instruction; but

nature under the exercise of cultivated feeling—selecting what tends to ennoble and refine, not that which degrades and sends us back to forms and ideas totally out of place in the nineteenth century, and which, for that very reason, can have nothing but a temporary reign, to be followed in the succeeding age by a violent reaction.

On a former occasion, we drew attention to this tendency towards mediævalism as regards ornamental design, and took the Great Exhibition to witness the fact. We have also pointed to that strange phenomenon, the rise anew of monastic institutions among us, long after their object is accomplished, giving a spectre-like expression to an obsolete idea; we have exposed, likewise, the inclination of the working-classes to trust to the protection, and, on every emergency, claim as a matter of right the aid of the wealthy, thus wilfully and deliberately returning to the condition of serfdom: we have now to trace the mediæval mania in a department where, notwithstanding all this ominous conjunction of symptoms, its appearance is truly surprising—in the department of high art in painting.

Our readers need not fear that we are about to inflict on them a scientific dissertation. All we wish to do, is to explain to them a word, with the meaning of which many of them are very imperfectly acquainted, and by the mere explanation, to enable them to determine upon its claims to designate—not merely *a* school, but *the* school of art, destined, if founded in truth and nature, to overturn every other. This word—Pre-Raphaelitism—

is taken from the name of one of the Italian masters, and it is necessary, in order to understand the question, to ascertain what were the circumstances and the genius that have thus set him up as a landmark in the history of art.

After the fall of the Western Empire, the fine arts were lost, and their productions literally buried in the wreck. The minds of the composite nations that arose in Europe had no guide. Men were left to their own instincts, only faintly aided by the ruins and traditions of degenerate Rome; and each series of countries had its own style of art, framed or adopted by the genius of the people. During the middle ages, the style most general in Northern Europe was the Gothic; and by that term the whole system of art during the period is popularly known in England. The state of painting, under the Gothic régime, may be seen in the stained windows of the cathedrals; in which strong outlines and bright colours are laid down without any reference to chiaro-scuro, or the scientific arrangement of light and shadow. This seems a natural stage in art-development, and at the same moment it was seen in equal perfection in China and Europe. In the former region, the people are now beginning to advance a step beyond, through their imitation of English pictures; although, but a few years ago, they burst into fits of laughter on seeing the shadow of the nose in a portrait. In Europe, a gigantic and almost sudden stride was made, towards the close of the fifteenth century, under an influence from which the Chinese were debarred, and the nature of which we shall

presently explain.

Let us first, however, just notice, that the charms of gaudy inartistic colouring frequently exercise a powerful sway even over minds familiar with better things; although that sway is always indicative of the decay of intellectual or moral freshness. Thus, it is remarked by an old Greek author (Dionysius of Halicarnassus), that the perfection to which painting had been brought by Apelles, had degenerated under Augustus; the painters being so much fascinated by the new art of colouring, that they neglected design, and preferred the brilliant or gaudy to the solid, and counterfeit to natural beauty. What this 'perfection' of Apelles was, we cannot now tell; but the probability is, that it existed only in design, and that the union of this with artistic colouring was reserved for the modern masters.

Before these masters appeared, and before the influence we are about to refer to was felt in Europe, some efforts were made by unassisted genius to rise beyond the conventionalities of the time; in the latter half of the thirteenth century, Cimabue already surpassed his modern Greek preceptors; and his disciple Giotto was considered so natural and original, that his style could not be referred to any existing school, but was called the *maniera di Giotto*. 'Instead of the harsh outline,' says Vasari, 'circumscribing the whole figure, the glaring eyes, the pointed hands and feet, and all the defects arising from a total want of shadow, the figures of Giotto exhibit a better attitude; the heads have an air of life and freedom, the drapery is more natural, and there are even

some attempts at fore-shortening the limbs.' All this, however, although a decided improvement on mediæval art, was rude and imperfect—it was only the first faint dawn of a better light. 'As yet,' to use the words of Roscoe, 'the characters rarely excelled the daily prototypes of common life; and their forms, although at times sufficiently accurate, were often vulgar and heavy.... To everything great and elevated, the art was yet a stranger: even the celebrated picture of Pollajuolo exhibits only a group of half-naked and vulgar wretches, discharging their arrows at a miserable fellow-creature, who, by changing places with one of his murderers, might with equal propriety become a murderer himself.'

But the time at length came when that stimulus was to be communicated to taste which sent a thrill throughout the general heart of Europe. The pictures of the old Greeks were lost for ever, dead and gone; but their statues were only buried—buried alive—and now, at the command of wealth and genius, they were dug out of their tomb of ages, and came forth, unharmed, in their enchanted life and immortal beauty. Yes, unharmed; for in the head, the torso, the limb, the hand, the finger, the same principle of life existed as in the entire figure; and, owing to the sublime law of proportion, which bound all together, the minutest fragment indicated a perfect whole. The palace of Lorenzo de Medici was the assembling-place, and the ideal beauty of the Greeks found a new shrine in the groves of Florence. These became a true academia, where

genius studied and taught, and where the presiding spirit of the place was Michael Angelo Buonarotti,[A] the sculptor—painter—architect—poet, whose universal mind appeared to fit him, not so much to shine in any one department—although shine he did in all—as to give an impetus to the whole Revival. But Michael Angelo, as a painter, excelled chiefly in design; while one who was his contemporary, and being a few years later in the field, has been supposed by some to be his imitator, was the painter *par excellence* of the new era—the first great painter of the moderns. This was Raphael. He was the pupil of Perugino; and while such, contented himself with imitating, with the utmost fidelity, the works of that artist; till at length emancipating himself from tutelage, he went for inspiration to the cartoons of Michael Angelo, to the sculptures of the Medici gardens, and to nature herself. Vasari makes Michael Angelo the magnus Apollo of Raphael; but Quatremère de Quincy assigns to the latter artist a holier worship. In a letter from him, which he quotes, respecting his famous picture of the Galatea, Raphael says, that in order to paint a beautiful woman, he must see many, but that, after all, he must work upon a certain ideal image present in his mind. 'We thus see,' says the French critic, 'that he really sought after the beautiful which Nature presents to art, but which the imagination of the artist alone can seize, and genius alone realise.'

Raphael was the first of the moderns to idealise beauty, or, in other words, to represent nature in the form she is striving,

in her infinite progression, to attain, but which as yet she only indicates here and there in those hints and parts that prophetic genius combines and moulds into a whole. He softened the harsh outlines, mellowed the glaring colours, and harmonised the awkward proportions of mediæval art. With him, a new epoch commenced, adorned by many illustrious names, from Julio Romano, the poet of painters, to Titian, who clipped his pencil in the rainbow. The Lombard school of Titian was the third of the three first great schools of the Revival, in which taste, emancipated from the darkness of the middle ages, sought inspiration in nature and the Greek sculptures. What would be thought if a school were to arise three hundred years later, not merely discarding the experience and teachings of the great masters, but claiming by its very name to return into the gulf from which these had been emancipated? This school of decline has, in fact, made its appearance among the other symptoms of the mediæval mania, and we now gravely hang up in our exhibitions the productions of the *Pre*-Raphaelites! The name at first provoked so much ridicule in England, that their friends were at pains to inform the world, that it was assumed merely for the purpose of intimating their entire separation from the *schools* of Raphael and his successors, and their exclusive devotion to nature. The artists of Germany, however, with whom the mania commenced, were less scrupulous.[1] They imitated, purposely, the rudeness of the early painters, and even favourably

[1] See the *Moyen Age* of Du Sommirard.

distinguished the juvenile works of Raphael when he was as yet the mere copyist of Perugino. It is thus only the reformed schools the Pre-Raphaelists avoid; for Mr Ruskin's notion, that there were no schools at all before Raphael, is quite too wild for answer.[2] The name, however, is of little consequence. The nature returned to is obviously, to any one who has eyes in his head, the nature of the middle ages; and if our readers will look again at the quotations we have made above—which were not taken at random—they will find, in the words of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Vasari, and William Roscoe, a pretty accurate description of the genius and manner of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Nor could the fact be otherwise. We have noticed the identity of taste between the Chinese and the unawakened Europeans, as pointing to a natural stage in art-development; and if we allot to the new school a position one degree higher than that of Cimabue and Giotto, it is all that can be claimed by artists, who have even attempted to dismiss from their minds a later and nobler experience. Their rule is—to have no rule; to copy nature, just as she happens to be before them; to select nothing, reject nothing, subordinate nothing, and thus to have no composition and no chiaro-scuro. They recognise no inequality, no relationship of objects: a pin in a lady's dress, and the nose on the lady's face, are treated with the same even-handed justice. The harmony of colours is a mere dream: let them only be as bright as a stained-glass window, and all is well.

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[2] *Pre-Raphaelitism.* By the author of *Modern Painters.*

At this moment, there are two specimens of Pre-Raphaelitism to be seen at the Exhibition of the Scottish Academy in Edinburgh. They are both distinguished, like the philosopher in Andersen's Drop of Ditchwater, by having no name; but a quotation is appended to each of the numbers in the catalogue, and is to be supposed to indicate, the subject. No. 9, in the Great Room, has this quatrain from Tennyson—

> 'She only said: "My life is dreary—
> He cometh not!" she said;
> She said: "I'm aweary, aweary—
> I would that I were dead."'

In illustration of this awkwardly-constructed stanza, a female, uncomely and ungraceful, is represented as standing in the attitude of a yawn, not indicated by the gaping mouth, but by the contorted person, and arms twisted behind the back. She is close to a stained-glass window, whose gaudy colours are challenged by her own bright blue dress, the object of the artist throughout appearing to be violent opposition, not harmony. The picture, with its violent dislocations, both of bones and impressions, conveys the idea of anything but repose, although a mouse on the floor bids us notice, that notwithstanding appearances, the ungainly lady stretches herself in silence. There cannot well be anything more inelegant and untrue than this piece; yet there is clever painting here and there; and some of the accessories, if taken without reference to the design, in which they are blots, are

models of their kind. The thought belongs to the middle ages; the mechanical touch to the post-Raphaelite era.

The other picture, No. 93, in the same room, is larger and more ambitious. It represents a carpenter's workshop, with a mechanic at each end of the long bench; one of these, a half-starved, hideous wretch, with hardly a trace of the human anatomy in his composition; and the other, a respectable and rather sagacious-looking person, with immeasurable legs. Behind the bench is a frightful old woman, of the lowest class; and before it another, younger, but repulsively ugly and vulgar, examining, in conjunction with the respectable workman—and with her brow knotted in an awful congeries of wrinkles up to her fiery hair—the hand of a little boy. This little boy, though plebeian and red-haired, is not unpleasing: he has apparently cut his hand while playing with some of the edge-tools lying about the shop; while his brother, a better-figured as well as better-behaved boy, with a hairy apron round him, is making himself useful in carrying a basin of some dark-coloured stuff—probably carpenter's glue. But let us see what the legend attached to the number says: 'And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'—Zechariah, xiii. 6. What does this mean? It means, innocent reader, that the piece we have described in its principal features is the Holy Family of the Pre-Raphaelites! This is their mode of going to nature, selecting nothing but the mean and repulsive, and rejecting nothing but

poetical and religious feeling and common decency.

But if the theory of the Pre-Raphaelites is just as regards painting, it must be just as regards the other departments of taste. Suppose it applied to musical composition. Let us throw overboard everything that degrades music to a science, and 'go to nature,' as Mr Ruskin counsels, 'rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing.' What would be the result? The result would be the torture of everybody in the country who had the misfortune to possess a cultivated ear. And yet the music of that time would not be absolutely disagreeable in itself: it would merely involve the deprivation of what had become a necessary to the taste; for nature would still inspire simple sounds, connected more or less with the feelings. Nature, in fact, proceeds in music upon laws that are merely elaborated and carried out by science; while in painting, she offers an endless variety of objects and effects, to be selected, grouped, and made into a picture by the artist. We all feel this when gazing on natural scenery. We are actuated by an unconscious eclecticism, and make the composition for ourselves. To some natural scenes, no skill could impart interest of any kind; others attain to a certain character of the picturesque; while others, again, combine in themselves all the elements of a good picture. But even with these last, mere imitation will not do. Nature, as Hazlitt observes, 'has a larger canvas than man'—a canvas immensely larger; and the artist, since he cannot copy, must select. The same reasoning applies to figure and group-painting, and its accessories. Nature rarely

forms a perfect group, because it is not her purpose to embody a single expression. As for small accessorial objects, such as a pin or a leaf, being painted with the same care and accuracy as principal objects, this is a defect in drawing, that argues a singular want of reflection. In nature, we see distinctly the figure and its more prominent parts, but we see the minute accessorial parts so indistinctly, that sometimes we can scarcely tell what they are. The precise detailing of these objects, therefore, may have the truth of fact, but it is destitute of the truth of nature.

What would be the effect of the new system, if applied to romantic fiction? But the question is unnecessary; for the new system ignores romance, which is the truth of nature not of fact. A pre-Raphaelite story, taken from real life, might be romantic in its incidents and striking in its catastrophe; but it would want coherence in the design, and therefore produce no sustained emotion; and its characters being drawn, without selection, from vulgar prototypes, would excite more disgust than interest. The drama?—but there the new theory of art becomes too ridiculous: a tragedy on such a plan would be received with alternate yawns of ennui and shouts of laughter. All these are pertinent questions; for fine art, in literature, music, sculpture, painting, architecture, forms a homogeneous circle under one law of taste.

It may be supposed that we are ascribing too much importance to the department of the mediæval mania under examination; but, for our part, we 'scorn nothing' that presents a bar, however slight, to the progress of civilisation and refinement. Pre-

Raphaelitism is only one form of a degradation of taste which appears to keep pace with the utilities of the time, and we shall never be slow in lending our aid to cleanse the temple of its desecrators.

L.R.

A LEGEND OF AMEN-CORNER

About the time that every prince in Europe was sending a special embassy to London, to congratulate James I. on his book against witchcraft, which none of them ever professed to have read, a strange occurrence happened in an ancient house, situated in the Amen-Corner of Paternoster Row. Like most of the houses of old London, its lower half was brick, and its upper, English oak. It had been built in the time of the first Tudor, but, being still a substantial tenement, was purchased some ten years before the period of this narrative, by two brothers named Christopher and Hubert, who carried on their business there. They were of English blood, but had been born in Germany, their grandfather having fled thither in Queen Mary's day under strong suspicion of owning a Coverdale Bible; and in the good city of Augsburg his son and grandsons had been brought up to his own craft, then known as the singular art and mystery of printing. A separate and a thinly-scattered guild was that of the printer in those days. Their craft had nothing in common with the world's older arts, excepting those of the scribe and the scholar. The entire book-trade, now divided into so many branches, was in their hands—binder, engraver, printer and publisher, being generally the same person; and this, together with the laborious precision required in working the primitive press, made them throughout Christendom a sort of caste who acquired their trade by inheritance, and kept

it as such. Two generations of their family had transmitted the types to Christopher and Hubert; but not to them alone. There had been an elder brother, Gottleib, who printed with them at Augsburg. Their mother had died early: the plague summoned their father when they were little more than boys, and the man grieved sore to leave his sons so young, and an edition of the Latin Fathers, which he had calculated on finishing in five years with great praise and profit, just begun; but Gottleib promised him that he would finish the work in his name, and take care of his young brothers till they were old enough to be expert and prudent printers; so the old man died in peace.

Gottleib was the glory of his craft, and the praise of all Augsburg. Throughout Germany there was not a more skilful printer, nor in the city a more wise and virtuous youth. Old men asked his help in their difficulties, the young chose him as umpire in their disputes. He was charitable to the poor, a peacemaker among his neighbours, and a faithful and kindly guardian to his young brothers. Carefully he instructed them in all the mysteries of their art, though it lengthened his own labour by many a toilsome hour. Patiently he bore with the waywardness and inexperience of their youth. At hearth, and board, and labour, Gottleib was their blithe companion; in hard work, their help; in times of trouble, their comforter; and when disputes came between them, he was the ready arbitrator, on whose justice both could rely. At the church, they sat one on either side of him; on festival and holiday, they walked out with

each an arm of Gottleib, and the burgomaster's son was not more confident in his father. Thus they lived and laboured cheerfully together, in the old house their father left them, for five years. The complete edition of the Latin Fathers went forward, and the boys grew to man's estate, till Gottleib was no longer the tallest of the three. Neighbours remarked, too, that he looked no longer the strongest. His once ruddy cheek at times grew pale and wan; still, there was no complaint of sickness in the house, and the edition was completed. All men praised, and some printers envied the work, though it was finished in the name of their dead father.

One evening, Gottleib rejoiced over it greatly, saying his promise was fulfilled, and Christopher and Hubert were now as good printers as himself: he bade them a kindly and glad good-night, and the young brothers talked long together, for Gottleib slept alone; but in the morning he did not come as usual to call them, and when they went to wake him, their brother was kneeling at his bedside, with his hands clasped as if in prayer—an earlier summons had reached him, and the great soul was gone!

Honour and profit followed the work they had printed with him. Their craft grew proud of them, and friends began to say they might be burgomasters in time; but the light of their days had gone down with Gottleib. The old house had grown so dreary without him, that they could not live in it. Every street and corner of the city brought their loss to mind; and hearing that there was peace and room for printers in their father's country, the young men sold their German dwelling to a wealthy burgher,

collected their money, chattels, and types, and came with them to London. Paternoster Row was even in those days the resort of traders in books; and happening to see the antiquated house in Amen-Corner, the strangers thought it had a pleasant likeness to their old home; so they purchased it at the expense of nearly all they possessed, except their printing-press, with which they established themselves there, determined never to part, but live together in the country of their fathers.

Hard by there lived a widow of German parentage, whose husband had been a printer; but he and his seven children were all dead. Gunhilde, for such was her name, was old, poor, and lonely, and she became their housekeeper. Years of resolute toil and prudent frugality passed over the brothers, till they were no longer strangers in old London, nor inconsiderable among the inhabitants of the Row. Their press had done its part in the work of the times. They had printed the 'Book of Sports' and the 'Westminster Confession;' broadside ballads concerning Robin Hood and Maid Marian; and heavy folios on Free-will and Predestination. Christopher and Hubert had increased in substance also to a degree never dreamed of in their German home. The dealers in books began to talk of them as somewhat notable men; but cares and causes of division had come with property and importance. In some respects, the brothers were of the same temper: both were earnest, brave, and high-spirited —strong to will, and steady to work. They had been faithful friends and loving brethren through many a change and trial;

but there was a grievous fault in both. Each was given to exact from the other's friendship, though in a different fashion; for Christopher expected too much of inward affection, and Hubert had too much respect to outward observances. Alike, on the ground of resemblance and of difference, sprang up the roots of bitterness which troubled their days. At first, their strangership, their strivings to live and thrive in the English land, and, above all, the memory and loving counsels of their lost Gottleib, had bound them heart and hand together; but as the years of manhood hardened heart and mind, as increasing gains brought leisure and anxious looks on life, differences of opinion, of tastes, and of inclinations, gradually crept in between them, and their elder brother waned away from their remembrance, far off among the scenes and familiars of youth.

Time brought further occasion of discord: the house of an English bookseller at the foot of the Row had grown more attractive than his own to Hubert, because of a certain Mistress Margaret who lived there with her father. The bookseller was old, narrow-minded, and stiff for presbytery; he approved of no people but Englishmen, and had a special prejudice against German Lutherans. His daughter believed firmly in his wisdom, and had been from infancy the old man's darling. She was fair, good, and clever; but the girl had a wayward pride, and a wit that was too ready for her judgment. Nevertheless, Hubert had found favour in her eyes as well as in those of her father, perhaps because he endeavoured earnestly to win it; while Christopher

was composing tender verses, addressed to a young and very pious Catholic widow in the neighbourhood, who held fast her then persecuted faith.

The bookseller hesitated on giving his daughter to a Lutheran, and the widow remained undecided; but under their influence, Christopher and Hubert learned to contemn each other's choice, and dispute over creeds which neither acknowledged. Thus the controversies of the age, with all their bigotry and uncharitableness, found entrance to their home. Christopher lost no opportunity of throwing scorn on the Puritans, on account of the bookseller; and Hubert never spared to testify against Popish errors, by way of reflection on the widow. The loving brotherhood, which had been to them a rampart against the world's sins and follies, was broken down, and all manner of petty jealousies, vanities, and mistakes, flowed in to swell the flood of strife. There had been fierce debates and bitter words between them, wrath that overcame the friendship of years, hard misjudging of each other's motives, and mighty magnifying of small offences. One evening they sat in sullen pride and anger by the fire. It was the same hearth at which for ten years they had met when the work of the day was done. Their early difficulties in the great, strange city had been debated there. The gains of their prosperous days had been reckoned, their risks and speculations discussed, but now their seats were pushed to the most distant corners, and between them stood a table covered with papers and account-books; for they had at last determined to divide

their possessions to the uttermost farthing, and part company for ever. With merchant-like exactness, every tittle was reckoned up and shared. The old house was to be sold to a Jew for a sum already agreed on, and one item only remained which they could not divide, an heirloom's value being fixed upon it. That was the Coverdale Bible with which their grandfather had fled to Germany.

Neither would consent to take the book, or receive anything in its stead, for a savage pride was in their hearts; and there lay the large worn folio, with its brazen clasps, between them. The day's work had been hard, for though comparatively rich, Christopher and Hubert were laborious men from habit, and the elder at length leaned his head on the table to rest a moment, and think what could be done. Hubert also leaned his brow on his hand, and it might be the sight of that old volume, in spite of themselves, brought faraway memories crowding back on both. They thought of the German city where they had been born; of their long-dead father; and, last of all, of Gottleib. They knew the grass was long upon his German grave; but suddenly, as wild and vague regrets for all that had come and gone began to rise upon them, the door of their room was opened, and there entered a stranger of most noble presence and aspect, who, without a word, drew back the table and seated himself between them.

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