

in their efforts to render the expression of the beautiful more and more perfect. They set apart buildings wherein might be placed the relics of the past, and constructed new ones to house the hopes of the future.

Then rose those imposing structures, those grand old churches and cathedrals that are still the marvels of our own time; those massive piles of architecture,—Corinthian in the South, Gothic in the North, and Moorish in the West: then rose the chisel of a Michael Angelo, the brush of a Raphael and a Fra Angelico to decorate them. "Giovanni covered the churches of Italy with artistic ornamentation; Giotto infused new life into the fine arts all over Europe; Giotto, Thaddeo and Andria adorned the churches, chapels and monasteries with frescoes, paintings and portraits of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, the saints, gospel scenes and biblical subjects."

The Transfiguration by Raphael, the Sacrifice of Mary by Fra Angelico and the Ascension of St. John by Giotto, which rival in artistic finish and far surpass in sublimity of conception the greatest productions of antiquity, are only a few of the transcendent marvels of art that sprang up under the fostering hand of the Catholic Church.

"The pulpits of the churches of Pisa were carved by Nicolo Pisano, while the majestic beauties worked in the doors of the baptistery of St. John of Florence owe their existence to his brother, Andrea. Luca della Robbia is renowned for his sculpture of the Christ and the Virgin; Donatello for his magnificent statues of St. Mark and St. George."

And all these great masters of Sculpture and painting were devout sons of our Holy Mother; all of them were men remarkable for their piety, as well as for their genius; all of them were inspired by the sublime teachings of Catholicity. The Catholic Church improved art not only by cultivating and protecting it, but also by raising it up from the degradation into which it had fallen during the two centuries preceding the coming of Christ, and by giving it an immortal soul.

Art, we have already said, consists in the expressing of the beautiful by means of sensible forms.

As a rule, whenever nature is imitated, there is always some beauty found in the

imitation. The reason of it is that, in nature, God the source of all beauty, has deigned to manifest himself—"not wholly now, but through a veil, then fully—face to face."

The ancients, who possessed only the truth they discovered in nature, had but a small portion of it—if, indeed, truth may be properly spoken of as having parts. They drank in what flowed from the natural fountains around them, and attained no small degree of perfection in the body of art, or the form,—for art, as well as man, has a body and a soul, which are the form and the ideal.

But here, they were obliged to come to a stand-still. Beauty and truth were one. They lacked divine truth, and consequently, a correct notion of beauty. They had an obscure idea of it as it came to them through the mists of matter; and this obscure and limited ideal, they clothed in oriental garb. A very meagre soul in a very handsome body was the chef-d'oeuvre of the greatest artists of pagan times. The Greeks, we have seen—the Jews were forbidden to make images—surpassed all other nations of antiquity in aesthetic celebrity. The most probable reason that can be given for it is that they approached truth nearer than any other nation. They observed the natural law to a certain extent; and, hence, their art was preserved from the fantastic hideousness that displayed itself in the works of the Egyptians, Hindoos and Persians. Those among them who, like Phidias and Lysippus, were fortunate enough to choose the human form for their models, succeeded best; for in man they found a more complete conception of the One Great Beauty to whose image he was created, than in any other animate object.

The moral and spiritual side of beauty was not fully brought to light, until the Son of God, coming down from heaven, revealed what the Creator left hidden behind the curtain of matter. Still it was not altogether concealed. "Mens agitat molem," wrote Virgil, and Bossuet likewise expressed the very same idea, only more elegantly, when he said: "Une âme forte est maitresse du corps qu'elle anime," which may be translated, in the words of a celebrated writer, to mean "that the soul exercises an action, an influence upon the form, which it embellishes or disfigures,