

BYZANTINE ART.

The following is a full report of the lecture on Byzantine Art recently delivered by Miss Eliza Allen Starr, at the Art Institute, in Chicago.

With the independence of Greece, art fled from the Acropolis. But Rome, even as a conqueror, was preservative in her policy, and when her successful armies trod exultingly her *Via Triumphalis*, it was her pride to count, not only royal captives, and inestimable merchandise, among her spoils, but the choicest works of art from civilized nations, above all, from Greece. In this way not only her galleries and palaces were enriched by works that were regarded as unsurpassable until the wonders of the antique periods were unearthed from her ruined temples, but, so early as 150 B.C., the brushes and chisels of Greek artists were demanded by Rome and, indeed, by all the principal Italian cities. These artists, while lacking the inspiration given by national freedom and a genuine belief in their tutelar deities which marked the age of Phidias, were masters of technique, and their reproductions of ancient sculpture were thoroughly Greek in their fineness of perception and execution. It is not, therefore, surprising, that they supplanted the comparatively rude representations by the native Etruscan artists, of heroes and their exploits. They were copyists of the highest possible rank, although not inventors.

With the coming of Christianity, a new element entered into this Greek art. The subjects were new, and thus prevented the falling back upon old types. For this reason, the earliest paintings in the catacombs are, invariably, the most beautiful—as in the Catacomb of Santa Priscilla, Santa Domitilla and Proxotatus, uniting a classic elegance of forms to the charm of Christian expression. We may also say, with safety, that the mosaics of Rome from the year 100 to the thirteenth century, were from the hands of Greek artists: and yet the most beautiful one of all—in the apse of Santa Pudenziana, and belonging to the fourteenth century, has not a trace of what is popularly called the Byzantine influence, either in its forms, which are altogether noble, or in its coloring, which has the harmoniousness of fifteenth century art.

Heaphy, in his remarkable book, entitled "The Likenesses of Our Lord," gives many examples of the beauty of the Christian Greek or Byzantine School in the catacombs, and the religious charm of the early science and Florentine art, bears witness to the grandeur of ideas which belonged to the Byzantine School in its integrity; by which we mean, when in the hands of artists, not mere artisans.

Ruskin, in his "Mornings in Florence," pays a tribute to the "Enthroned Madonna," by Cimabue, still adorning the Church of Santa Maria Novella, in Florence, which gives the characteristics of the true Byzantine School. "There is, he says, literally, not a square inch of all that panel—some ten feet high by six or seven wide—which is not wrought in gold and color with the fineness of a Greek manuscript. There is not such an elaborate piece of ornamentation in the first page of any gothic king's missal, as you will find in that Madonna's throne—the Madonna herself is meant to be grave and noble only; and to be attended only by angels." p. 88, II.

Both Ducio, of Lima, and Cimabue, of Florence, studied living forms, and felt the stirring of the Etruscan instinct which had been repressed—intimidated we might say—by the brilliancy of Greek technique, but which broke forth in all its freshness with Giotto. And yet, something was lost which never came back; as Ruskin intimates when speaking of

the Mater Dolorosa, by Cimabue, in the lower church of St. Francis at Assisi. "I saw," he writes, "Cimabue's own work at Assisi, in which he shows himself at heart as independent of his gold as Giotto—even more intense, capable of higher things than Giotto, though of none, perhaps, so keen and sweet. But to this day, among all the Mater Dolorosas of Christianity, Cimabue's at Assisi is the noblest; nor did any painter after him add one link to the chain of thought with which he summed the creation of the earth and praised its redemption."—II., pp. 88, 81.

We should never wish to roll back the wheels of time or ask the hand of the dial to be reversed; but in the enjoyment of the lovely efflorescence of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading up to the grandest epoch of Italian art, we may well pause before the works of the Byzantine school, and trace, with a reverent eye, the spiritual continuity which it ensured to all succeeding schools.

For the first time, we had an opportunity to study genuine productions of the Byzantine school on American soil; an opportunity which is the near fruit of "The World's Columbian Exposition." This collection which was deposited among the treasures of La Rabida, gives as fair specimens of Byzantine thought and technique as would be allowed to leave the sacred enclosures of ancient monastic churches, of which they are the inalienable treasures, creating an atmosphere of meditation to which modern art is a stranger.

No occasion could arouse such an incentive as was necessary to make a collection of this degree of excellence, like that of "The World's Columbian Exposition," in as much as it would challenge the critical eyes of those familiar with the best productions of Byzantine pencils, and which would not brook, for an instant, the bringing forward, at such a time, under such circumstances, those distorted, distressful delineations, popularly known under the title of Byzantine art.

For this reason the collection is of inestimable value, supplementing, as it does, a link absolutely missing, in any American museum, in the history of Christian art, and making known the processes of development from the earliest Christian centuries to the present.

There is no reason why our city of Chicago, which has shown its in touch with the noblest eras of civilization and has actually given a new impulse to the highest expression of the noblest sentiments of our own age, should not open to the art student those profound sources of thought and inspiration which have ennobled the best schools of Europe under its greatest masters. For these masters paused long before those grand mosaics which Rome cherishes on the apses of her most venerated Basilicas; and a Leonardo da Vinci, a Michael Angelo, a Raphael, still give evidence—to one who has studied their works, and is familiar, also, with the ancient Christian types—example after example, of the fruits of their meditative study of the Christian-Greek ages of art; the effect of such studies being, not an imitation of them, but rather a sinking deeper of the wells of erudition, so as to bring to the imagination a more profound sense of spiritual things, and formulate in the mind of the artist, which, of all others, should be a reverent mind, exalted types of spiritual beauty.

It may well be a matter of pride to the patrons of art in Chicago to be able to call the attention of the great educators of America to the fact that she has in her hands the fullest collection of noble Byzantine art this side of the Atlantic.

The selections made for the slides, now to be shown, were made with the intention of giving as fair a representation as possible, of the collection itself.

Wagner's "Parsifal."

Our readers may wish to have some account of the musical drama called "Parsifal," by Richard Wagner, which will enable them to decide how far it is a bringing on the stage of Gospel incidents and the ritual of the Mass, in such a fashion as to have scandalized even Max Nordau, who glories in his unbelief. We will content ourselves with pointing out the following details: "Parsifal" himself—the "Sir Percival" of our Arthurian legends, though reduced to a "guileless Fool" by the modern playwright is called throughout, "the Redeemer," and he accomplishes the work of "redemption" on Good Friday, at midday (from the sixth hour, in Scripture language) with the help of the spear of Longinus, which pierced the side of Amfortas, Guardian of the Holy Grail which contains the Precious Blood—Amfortas being vowed to chastity, and having broken his vow. Those two characters share between them the traits of our Lord as Redeemer, and the Catholic priest as celebrating the Eucharistic rite and keeping watch over the Blessed Sacrament. Allusions which are unmistakable to various scenes in the Gospels scattered through the work. It opens with the disciples sleeping in the garden. It ends with "a white dove" descending and hovering over "Parsifal's head," while he "waves the Grail gently to and fro before the upgazing knights," and "all" acclaim him with these words "Wondrous work of mercy; redemption to the Redeemer!"

This "Redeemer" undergoes a "temptation" on the part of Kundry, who combines in her own person St. Mary Magdalene and the Wandering Jew. In a scene which is marked with all Wagner's well-known "passion," she fails to overcome the "Guileless Fool," and, by and by, at the fountain of the grail region, she not only bathes his feet but anoints them from a golden box, and wipes them with her hair, "quickly unbound for the purpose." Parsifal is again "anointed" by Gurnamanz (we think the meaning of the name "Christ") and, in clear reference to our Lord's forgiveness of Magdalene, he says: "I first fulfil my office thus: Be thou baptized and trust in the Redeemer." Kundry "bows her head to the earth and appears to weeps bitterly." Is not all this what Nordau calls it, "a precipitate and confused reminiscence from the Gospel?"

And now as to parodying the Mass. The libretto, page 21, has the stage direction, "approaching peals of bells are heard," "from the R. enter slowly the Knights of the Grail in solemn procession, and range themselves at two long covered tables . . . only cups—no dishes—stand on them." The Knights sing what Nordau describes as a sort of Introit, "The Last Supper prepare we day by day," etc. Young men and boys continue: "His Body, given our sins to shrieve, may it, by His death, become in us alive," and "Take the wine red, for you 'twas shed; let Bread of Life be broken"—as the English version has it Amfortas is borne in; "before him march boys bearing a shrine covered with a purple-red cloth." The boys place the covered shrine on "an altar-like, longish table." And then follows an extraordinary mixture of the rites of Mass and Benediction, enacted by Amfortas, with a Communion of the laity—the Knights—under both kinds.

Titorel begs his son, the sin-stained guardian of the Precious Blood, to "uncover the Grail." Amfortas declines in a long confession of his guilt the *Comptois*, says Nordau, ends with a *Kyrie Eleison*, "Have mercy! Have mercy! God of pity, oh, have mercy." Titorel again cries, "Uncover the Grail," which the boys proceed to do; whereupon Titorel demands "The Blessing," and the boys sing, as Nordau remarks, the Offertory, which is

nothing less than the words of consecration—"Take and drink my blood; thus be our love remembered. Take my body and eat: do this and drink of me!" Then "a blinding ray of light shoots down upon the Cup, which glows with purple lustre." Amfortas "raises the Grail aloft and waves it gently about on all sides. . . . All have sunk on their knees." Here is the rite of Benediction. But likewise the dogma of Transubstantiation, as in a figure. For when Amfortas sets down the Grail, "the cups on the table are seen to be filled with wine, and by each is a piece of bread," and "during the Supper," the boys and youths sing what might be mistaken for strophes of the *Lauda Sion*, "Wine and Bread the Grail's Lord changed." The actual German word for Transubstantiation is here used. And again, "Blood and Body which He offered, changed to food for you are proffered, by the Saviour ye revere. The Knights communicate: there is a short "Post communion," which concludes by praising the blessedness of faith; and almost the last words of the scene, uttered by Gurnamanz to Parsifal, are "Go forth, on thy road begone"—which reminds Nordau of the *Its Missa Kat.* Supposing it were desired to represent on the stage before a mixed and modern audience, the Mass, the Maunday-Thursaday Procession to the altar of Repose, the lifting of the monstrance at Benediction, Communion under both kinds, and all this enacted by the only legal and consecrated person, vowed to chastity—in other words, by a priest—how could it be more effectively done? A parody need not be a bare reproduction. It is an imitation, more or less complete, the effect of which is to profane or trifle with the thing parodied. Perhaps it is not unseasonable that a critic of the stamp of Nordau should make it clear as regards *Parsifal*, that the sacred beliefs and characteristic rites of Christians have been, in this instance, made use of simply to produce a stage effect.—*London Tablet*.

Guelph.

One of the most beautiful spectacles to be seen all the year in the Roman Catholic church is the First Communion of the children. On the 3d ult. this pretty and impressive ceremony was performed in the Church of Our Lady at early mass. The edifice was packed to the doors. Seats were reserved near the altar for the little ones, and into these they marched two by two before mass began. The little girls presented a most charming sight in their white dresses and veils and wreaths—emblematical in their spotlessness of the purity and innocence of the little hearts, who on that day approached, for the first time, the most august Sacrament of the church. The boys wore bouquets and white sashes. At the end of mass Rev. Father Kavanaugh, S. J., who has had charge of the instruction of the little ones, spoke to them briefly. In the terno they re-assembled in the church where, after instruction, they renewed their baptismal vows and were enrolled in the scapular. The boys were all publicly received into the juvenile branch of the league of the cross by the director, Rev. Father O'Loane, S. J.

At solemn high mass Rev. Father Kenney, S. J. spoke eloquently on the responsibilities of parents in the training of their children. He made a fervid appeal to fathers and mothers to give nothing but good example to their little ones for it was natural in the child to believe that what his father or mother did or said was perfectly right.

The young ladies from Loretto convent contributed the musical service at early mass. The solos taken by Miss Rose Gallagher were very sweetly and pathetically sung.

Revenge is a more punctual paymaster than gratitude.

Half the ills we hoard in our hearts are ills because we hoard them.