

**THE HISTORY OF THE SPANISH
SCHOOL OF PAINTING: TO WHICH IS
APPENDED, AN HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE
ART OF MINIATURE ILLUMINATION**

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The History of the Spanish School of Painting: To Which Is Appended, an Historical Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Art of Miniature Illumination by Thomas Ashe

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MINIATURE ILLUMINATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"TRAVELS THROUGH SICILY AND THE LIPARI ISLANDS;"
"THE HISTORY OF THE AZORES;"
AND "THE HISTORY OF THE VARIOUS STYLES
OF ARCHITECTURE."

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1843.

TO
THE VISCOUNT DE CUSSY,

ST. MAURÉ, NEAR VINCENNES.

MY DEAR VISCOUNT,

It would appear bold in me to inscribe a work of Art to one so profoundly versed in every branch of that department as yourself, did I not feel assured of the indulgence with which you would peruse the following pages. Under this impression, therefore, I venture to prefix your name to my unpretending little work, not only as a trifling token of my admiration and respect for your exquisite taste and talents, but also as a memorial of the many agreeable hours I have spent with you in discussing the subjects of its contents; in addition to which, I readily embrace the opportunity thus afforded of publicly expressing the pleasure I feel in subscribing myself

Your sincere Friend,

THE AUTHOR.

HISTORY

OF THE

SPANISH SCHOOL OF PAINTING.

It appears somewhat astonishing, that in the present advanced state of knowledge relative to the Arts so little research should have been made, and so little notice taken of, the Spanish school of painting; for within a very few years it has remained as a sealed book to the rest of Europe, which I can only account for in the lamentably convulsed condition of the Peninsula through a long series of years, added to the extreme jealousy the Spaniards have ever manifested in allowing the masterpieces of native art to be taken out of the country. The recent state of anarchy, however, produced by a succession of political disasters, has given considerable facility for the purchase and exportation of objects of art; which, in consequence of increased communication by steam, has recently been taken advantage of by numerous individuals in our own country, but on a grander and more munificent scale by the French nation, which has, within the last few years, made the most important acqui-

sitions, and has now established a gallery in the Louvre* for the exclusive exhibition of the works of Spanish painters, little of whom has been known with the exception of a few works of Murillo and a portrait or two of Velasquez. Spain, however, has rendered herself illustrious in this department; for, of all the liberal arts, painting has been the most cultivated by her; and the following sketch is attempted solely with a view to awaken the attention of amateurs as well as artists in favour of a school that, I think, ranks second only to the masters of Italian art: it has produced men of the rarest genius and merit, worthy, in every respect, to be signalled as leaders and models for the imitation of modern aspirants. The Spanish style is very peculiar; it partakes of that of Flanders and Venice, both in point of tone, colour, and touch; and is remarkable for its dark tones, the beauty of its *chiaro oscuro* effects, its extreme fidelity to nature, and for the exquisite finish of its accessories.

I have elsewhere observed that Montanus traced to the Peninsula the first use of paintings in Christian churches, a system that has indubitably originated the cultivation of subsequent art in every country of northern Europe. The first Christians of Spain,

* To this series has just been added a most valuable collection made by Mr. Standish, an Englishman, during his residence at Seville, where he spent a large sum in procuring them, almost at any cost; and it is said, in consequence of some indignation and disappointment caused by the British government, to which he had offered them, he willed the whole away to Louis Philippe, who is about to embody them with the royal collection of the Louvre.

under the Roman dominion, were zealots in the cause of religion,—a characteristic that, from a combination of causes, has been handed down through a series of ages to the nineteenth century; and their love of transcribing their sentiments of devotion to canvass, or the walls of their temples, has kept pace with their enthusiasm: but the ravages of time, of wars, and revolutions, have left us nothing more than traditional testimony whereby to form our judgment, either of the taste or style that marked their early career of art. The Arabian dominion created a long and dreary void, and kept the art of painting for several centuries in a state of abeyance; for although that magnificent people introduced science, refinement, and luxury, and raised so many gorgeous edifices to perpetuate their greatness, they virtually discouraged the cultivation of painting, in consequence of their peculiar doctrines forbidding the use or representation of human, or even animal forms. But no sooner did the Christians begin to recover territory from their Mahomedan invaders, than they raised up churches to their faith, and invariably adorned them with paintings illustrative of their own creed. The Arabians, however, must be considered the chief possessors of Spain until the middle of the thirteenth century, at which period the Christian kingdoms gained the ascendancy under the reign of Alphonso the Wise, which was distinguished by the protection and encouragement it afforded the arts and sciences. The first authentic proof that Spanish sovereigns appreciated the noble profession of painting, and already attached royal

painters to the court, is a document existing in the royal library at Madrid, which contains a statement of various disbursements of King Sanchez IV. in 1291 and 1292, and amongst them one to the following effect: "To Roderigo Esteban, painter of the king, for many paintings done by the king's orders in the bishop's palace, 100 maravedis d'oro." The next we can find any account of is in the archives of Barcelona, where it is recorded, that Jean Cesilles, painter of history, engaged, the 16th of March, 1382, to paint, for the grand altar of the parish church at Reus, and for the price of 330 florins, the "History of the Twelve Apostles," &c. &c., a fragment of which is said to have been in existence until within the last few years. There is, also, notice of a Gonzales Ferran, who died in 1399, after having obtained reputation as a wood-engraver as well as painter. In the fifteenth century we have abundant testimony of the progress of painting; for the church dignitaries, seeing the wonderful influence of pictorial representations on the minds of the ignorant in Italy, every where encouraged the practice by their generous patronage of artists, and thus rendered the cathedrals and large churches the cradles of modern art in Spain. The earliest to distinguish itself was the affluent see of Toledo, where works of sculpture and painting were produced long before the Spaniards had any communication with Flanders, and is justly supposed to have imbibed the taste from Italy, after the conquest of Naples, in 1441, by Alphonso V. of Aragon, which first made Spaniards familiar with Italian

genius, and sowed the seeds of art on the shores of Valencia and at Toledo. The Valencians speedily profited by this conquest, which brought them in communication with the opposite coast of Italy, and gave rise to a system of commerce, which enlarged their minds and inspired them with a love of science, and a taste for the arts of Latium, that has ever since distinguished them. They were the first to introduce printing into Spain (in 1474); and at an early period established a school of painting, where high rewards were offered for the encouragement of artists, producing innumerable excellent scholars by their liberality. The first known great master of Toledo was Juan Alfon, who was employed by the chapter to adorn the cathedral with various subjects illustrative of the Romish doctrines.

It was about the middle of this century that the dominion of Spain became consolidated by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, which revived the name and finally established the power of modern Spain, one of the most brilliant periods of Spanish history, when the whole force of the kingdom for the first time united in the chivalrous expulsion of the Arabians, and thus paved the way for the more tranquil cultivation of the arts of peace. Ferdinand was a zealous bigot in religion, a slave to priestcraft, and by thus early establishing the monstrous power of the Inquisition, laid the foundation of that gloomy style which to this day marks the character of Spanish art. Isabella, however, endowed with a more elevated soul and great intelligence, assembled round her men of distinguished talent and genius,