

**LETTERS RELATING TO A
COLLECTION OF PICTURES
MADE BY MR. J.J. JARVES**

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CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

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COLLECTION OF PICTURES
MADE BY MR. J.J. JARVES**

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE following papers, relating to the collection of pictures formed by Mr. Jarves, are printed in order to present to those interested to obtain such a gallery for Boston the information necessary as a basis for action.

In compliance with a request to that effect from Mr. Jarves, I would beg those to whom this pamphlet may be sent to consider that part of his letter which relates to the value set upon his pictures, and the terms of his offer, as a private communication. If the proposal made by Mr. Jarves should be accepted, there would be no further need of privacy.

It is greatly to be hoped that such an opportunity of obtaining for Boston a gallery of specimens of the best Italian Art may not be lost, and that Mr. Jarves's very generous proposition may be at once accepted.

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON.

Sept. 27, 1859.

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LETTERS.

LETTER OF MR. JARVES.

FLORENCE, August 26, 1859.

MY DEAR SIR:

It has long been a pet scheme of mine to initiate in Boston a permanent gallery of paintings, with particular reference to the chronology, motives, and technical progress of Art, from the earliest development in Italy of the Christian idea, until its climax in the matured genius of its several illustrious schools. Masterpieces it was hopeless to expect to secure. Researches, however, made for my private studies, showed me that it was feasible for one on the spot to get together a valuable collection of pictures, covering the ground from the tenth to the sixteenth century, characteristic of the great masters and their schools, illustrating the history of Art, provided it were gone about promptly, quietly, and diligently. Unwilling to lose the opportunity, I decided on taking the responsibility upon myself of making such a collection and of its subsequent adoption by my townsmen. My own means being inadequate, I borrowed a sufficient sum to warrant the undertaking, being per-

suaded, that, should my project fail as regarded Boston, the pictures would always be valuable in the European market. I lost no time in going systematically to work to secure genuine specimens of Byzantine and Græco-Italian paintings, and so in chiefly following the current of the Florentine, Sienese, and Umbrian schools to the time of Raffael. My adventures in this pursuit were often curious and instructive. They involved an inquisition into the intricacies of numberless villas, palaces, convents, churches, and household dens, all over this portion of Italy; the employment of many agents to scout out my prey; many fatiguing journeyings; miles upon miles of wearisome staircases; dusty explorations of dark retreats; dirt, disappointment, fraud, lies, and money often fruitlessly spent; all compensated, however, by the gradual accumulation of a valuable gallery. It sometimes happened that the search for some indispensable master in the series cost more time and money than would have secured many more popular names, though of less true merit. On one occasion, to get nine pictures, I was obliged to purchase a gallery of upwards of two hundred; the unnecessary ones being sold at auction in England. On another, having discovered a fine old Pollajuolo, the owner would not let me have it, unless I bought all in the room, (forty-four in number,) which also went to auction. I discovered a hoard of four thousand pictures got together a century ago by an eccentric Abbé who bought everything brought to him. They had been inherited by an aged miser, from whom, with painful negotiation, I obtained a fine altar-piece by Ridolfo Ghirlandajo and other pictures. In the lumber-room of a famous con-

vent I chanced upon a beautiful Perugino, so smoked and dirtied as to be cast aside by the monks, who, for a consideration, gladly let me bear it away, and which, upon cleaning, proved to be untouched, and one of his finest compositions. It was a small easel picture. A beautiful full-length portrait of a Spanish grandee, by Velasquez, was found among the earth and rubbish of a noble villa, cut out from its frame, crusted with dirt, but beneath in fine preservation. But as I have written a chapter on the Acquisition and Authentication of Pictures in a History of the Italian Schools that I am preparing for the press, I will not prolong this part of my letter. Suffice it to say that the collection has become sufficiently interesting and valuable to attract the encomiums of distinguished amateurs from various countries and obtain proposals for advantageous sales. I will give a few details of the principal pictures.

A Byzantine Triptych, 12th century, containing Descent into Hades, Transfiguration and Wanderings of Israelites, etc., is for preservation and beauty a unique specimen, so far as my knowledge extends. It demonstrates a condition of Art greatly in advance of corresponding Italian, uniting the strength of Orgagna to the miniature delicacy of Fra Angelico.

An altar-piece, A. D. 1190, of Græco-Italian school, a mystic painting of rare beauty and singular excellence; engraved in Fumagalli's "*Museo di Pitture*," plate 1035, vol. 18, and fully described. A tripartite picture of the tenth century, very characteristic and rare, — nothing corresponding to it in collections here. Migliarini says, from the character of the cross on it (✠), it may date back as

far as the seventh century. Another curious Triptych anterior to Cimabue, containing nineteen compositions from Lives of Christ and St. John Baptist.

An altar-piece by Margaritone, (1240,) seven compositions, perfect, naïve, and curious. A beautiful specimen of Cimabue; Story of S. Nicolo di Bari. Annunciation, by Pietro Cavallini. Entombment, (altar-piece,) by Giotto. A magnificent Triptych, five feet high, painted for the noble Vecchietta family, with a document, ascribing it to Giotto, of the family from whom I purchased it; but the color is more like the Paduan *Giotteschi*, deep and rich, in fine preservation. Two fine specimens of Puccio Capanna; ditto of Taddeo and Agnolo Gaddi; ditto of Orgagna (for which an offer was made by Sir Charles Eastlake); ditto of Giottino, uncommonly fine, both in subjects and preservation, one of them from the Rinuccini Gallery. A small altar-piece, by Fra Angelico; a noble Duccio of Siena, a Diptych; Spinello Aretino, a Crucifixion; and numerous other pictures of importance, as illustrating some special Christian motive or local style.

Among the Sieneſe, a gem of an altar-piece by Simone di Martino (Memmi) an Epiphany, with *gradino*; the drawing of this is in the Uffizii. Of Sano di Pietro, the equal of Fra Angelico, two as fine specimens as Italy can show: the Coronation, thirty-six figures, and the Journey of the Magi.

Sassetto, Giovanni di Paolo, Matteo da Siena, Taddeo di Bartolo, a unique and magnificent Assumption of the Virgin, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, a gem of mystic art, etc., represent the Purists. For the Naturalists, tracing the progress of landscape, mythological and

historical painting, I have beautiful specimens by Paolo Uccello, Dello, Gozzoli, and a singular picture, a Bridal-Waiter, painted for the Piccolomini of Siena, by Pinturicchio; The Disarming of Cupid, a signed picture, by Gentile da Fabriano; Tabernacle picture by Masolino; fragment of a *gradino* by Masaccio, figures wonderful for their vigorous naturalness; a Botticelli, not excelled in beauty and perfection by any in Florence; Pollajuolo, Filippino, Fra Filippo, Lorenzo di Credi (an injured altar-piece, and a perfect easel-picture in his best manner); Piero di Cosimo, Andrea del Sarto (altar-piece and a fresco, the latter injured); Franciabigio, Pontormo, Beccafumi, Albertinelli, Granacci, Luca Signorelli; a fresco of Domenico Ghirlandajo, perfect; Giovanni Bellini; Squarcione; Giorgione, wonderful in color,—a Circumcision; Cesare da Sesto, etc., etc.

To you, who are familiar with these artists, their names will convey an adequate idea of the scope of the collection. In condition, they are, as a whole, purer than those of the galleries, and, are favorable specimens of the masters they represent, outside of their greatest works.

Authentic documents seldom accompany pictures; fictitious, often. I have piles of documentary evidence, opinions, etc., but my chief reliance is internal proof. My own judgment, after many years' conscientious study in the presence of acknowledged originals, and constant association with experienced artists and amateurs, has with myself considerable weight. Besides, I fortify it by the opinions and testimony of the best European judges,—my sole desire being historic truth, unbiased by any preconceived theory or enthusiasm for one specialty