

**MORNINGS IN FLORENCE BEING
SIMPLE STUDIES OF CHRISTIAN
ART, FOR ENGLISH TRAVELLERS.
II, THE GOLDEN GATE; PP. 25-52**

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Mornings in Florence being simple studies of christian art, for english travellers. II, the Golden Gate; pp. 25-52 by John Ruskin

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JOHN RUSKIN

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BEING

SIMPLE STUDIES

OF

CHRISTIAN ART,

FOR ENGLISH TRAVELLERS.

BY

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II.

THE GOLDEN GATE



GEORGE ALLEN,

SUNNYSIDE, ORPINGTON, KENT

1875.

175 g. 77^b

THE SECOND MORNING.

THE GOLDEN GATE.

TO-DAY, as early as you please, and at all events before doing anything else, let us go to Giotto's own parish-church, Santa Maria Novella. If, walking from the Strozzi Palace, you look on your right for the 'Way of the Beautiful Ladies,' it will take you quickly there.

Do not let anything in the way of acquaintance, sacristan, or chance sight, stop you in doing what I tell you. Walk straight up the church, into the apse of it;—(you may let your eyes rest, as you walk, on the glow of its glass, only mind the step, half way;)—and lift the curtain; and go in behind the grand marble altar, giving anybody who follows you anything they want, to hold their tongues, or go away.

You know, most probably, already, that the frescos on each side of you are Ghirlandajo's. You have been told they are very fine, and if you know anything of painting, you know the portraits in them are so. Nevertheless, somehow, you don't really enjoy these frescos, nor come often here, do you?

The reason of which is, that if you are a nice person, they are not nice enough for you; and if a vulgar person, not vulgar enough. But, if you are a nice person, I want you to look carefully, to-day, at the two lowest, next the windows, for a few minutes, that you may better feel the art you are really to study, by its contrast with these.

On your left hand is represented the birth of the Virgin. On your right, her meeting with Elizabeth.

You can't easily see better pieces—(nowhere more pompous pieces)—of flat goldsmiths' work. Ghirlandajo was to the end of his life a mere goldsmith, with a gift of portraiture. And here he has done his best, and has put a long wall in wonderful perspective, and the whole city of Florence behind Elizabeth's house in the hill-country; and a splendid bas-relief, in the style of Luca della Robbia, in St. Anne's bedroom; and he has carved all the pilasters, and embroidered all the dresses, and flourished and trumpeted into every corner; and it is all done, within just a point, as well as it can be done; and quite as well as Ghirlandajo could do it. But the point in which it *just* misses being as well as it can be done, is the vital point. And it is all simply—good for nothing.

Extricate yourself from the goldsmiths' rubbish of it, and look full at the Salutation. You will

say, perhaps, at first, 'What grand and graceful figures!' Are you sure they are graceful? Look again, and you will see their draperies hang from them exactly as they would from two clothes-pegs. Now fine drapery, really well drawn, as it hangs from a clothes-peg, is always rather impressive, especially if it be disposed in large breadths and deep folds; but that is the only grace of their figures.

Secondly. Look at the Madonna, carefully. You will find she is not the least meek—only stupid,—as all the other women in the picture are.

'St. Elizabeth, you think, is nice'? Yes; 'And she says, "Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" really with a great deal of serious feeling?' Yes, with a great deal. Well, you have looked enough at those two. Now—just for another minute—look at the birth of the Virgin. 'A most graceful group, (your Murray's Guide tells you,) in the attendant servants.' Extremely so. Also, the one holding the child is rather pretty. Also, the servant pouring out the water does it from a great height, without splashing, most cleverly. Also, the lady coming to ask for St. Anne, and see the baby, walks majestically, and is very finely dressed. And as for that bas-relief in the style of Luca della Robbia, you might really almost think it *was* Luca! The very best plated goods, Master

Ghirlandajo, no doubt—always on hand, at your shop.

Well, now you must ask for the Sacristan, who is civil and nice enough; and get him to let you into the green cloister, and then into the less cloister opening out of it on the right, as you go down the steps; and you must ask for the tomb of the Marchesa Stiozzi Ridolfi; and in the recess behind the Marchesa's tomb—very close to the ground, and in excellent light, if the day is fine,—you will see two small frescos, only about four feet wide each, in odd-shaped bits of wall—quarters of circles; representing—that on the left, the Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate; and that on the right, the Birth of the Virgin.

No flourish of trumpets here, at any rate, you think! No gold on the gate; and, for the birth of the Virgin—is this all! Goodness!—nothing to be seen, whatever, of bas-reliefs, nor fine dresses, nor graceful pourings out of water, nor processions of visitors?

No. But there's one thing you can see, here, which you didn't in Ghirlandajo's fresco, unless you were very clever and looked hard for it—the Baby! And you are never likely to see a more true piece of Giotto's work in this world.

A round-faced, small-eyed little thing, tied up in a bundle!

Yes, Giotto was of opinion she must have

appeared really not much else than that. But look at the servant who has just finished dressing her;—awe-struck, full of love and wonder, putting her hand softly on the child's head, who has never cried. The nurse, who has just taken her, is—the nurse, and no more: tidy in the extreme, and greatly proud and pleased; but would be as much so with any other child.

Ghirlandajo's St. Anne (I ought to have told you to notice that,—you can, afterwards) is sitting strongly up in bed, watching, if not directing, all that is going on. Giotto's, lying down on the pillow, leans her face on her hand; partly exhausted, partly in deep thought. She knows that all will be well done for the child, either by the servants, or God; she need not look after anything.

At the foot of the bed is the midwife, and a servant who has brought drink for St. Anne. The servant stops, seeing her so quiet; asking the midwife, Shall I give it her now? The midwife, her hands lifted under her robe, in the attitude of thanksgiving, (with Giotto distinguishable always, though one doesn't know how, from that of prayer,) answers, with her look, "Let be—she does not want anything."

At the door a single acquaintance is coming in, to see the child. Of ornament, there is only the entirely simple outline of the vase which the servant carries; of colour, two or three masses