

**MORNINGS IN FLORENCE: BEING
SIMPLE STUDIES OF CHRISTIAN
ART, FOR ENGLISH TRAVELLERS;
V. THE STRAIT GATE; PP. 121-154**

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JOHN RUSKIN

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MORNINGS IN FLORENCE:
BEING
SIMPLE STUDIES
OF
CHRISTIAN ART,
FOR ENGLISH TRAVELLERS.

BY
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V.
THE STRAIT GATE.

SECOND EDITION. (REVISED BY THE AUTHOR.)

GEORGE ALLEN,
SUNNYSIDE, ORPINGTON, KENT.

1882.

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THE FIFTH MORNING.

THE STRAIT GATE.

[I have revised the text of this edition with care ; holding it one of the most important minor letters I have written, in its aphorisms of principle with respect to education. Some valuable observations and corrections, made for me by Mr. G. Collingwood, at Florence, this year, are subjoined in the notes at the bottom of the pages.—J. RUSKIN. *Lucca, October 12th, 1882.*]

AS you return this morning to St. Mary's, you may as well observe—the matter before us being concerning gates,—that the western façade of the church is of two periods. Your Murray refers it all to the latest of these,—I forget when, and do not care,—in which the largest flanking columns, and the entire effective mass of the walls, with their riband mosaics and high pediment, were built in front of, and above, what the barbarian renaissance designer chose to leave of the pure old Dominican church. You may see his ungainly jointing at the pedestals of the great columns, running through the pretty, parti-coloured base, which, with the 'Strait' Gothic doors, and the entire lines of the fronting and flanking tombs, [where not restored by the devil-begotten brood of

modern Florence), is of pure, and exquisitely severe and refined, fourteenth century Gothic, with superbly carved bearings on its shields. The small detached line of tombs on the left, untouched in its sweet colour and living weed ornament, I would fain have painted, stone by stone : but one can never draw in front of a church in these republican days ; for all the blackguard children of the neighbourhood come to howl, and throw stones, on the steps, and the ball or stone play against these sculptured tombs, as a dead wall adapted for that purpose only, is incessant in the fine days when I could have worked.*

If you enter by the door most to the left, or north, and turn immediately to the right, on the interior of the wall of the façade is an Annunciation, visible enough because well preserved, though in the dark ; and extremely pretty in its way,—of the decorated and ornamental school following Giotto :—I can't guess by whom, nor does it much matter ; but it is well to look at it by way of contrast with the delicate, intense, slightly decorated design of Memmi,—in which, when you return into the Spanish chapel, you will feel the dependence for its effect on broad masses of white and pale amber, where the decorative school would have had mosaic of red, blue, and gold.

* I have since bought for St. George's Museum a drawing of these three arches, carried out with more patience than I possessed, by Mr. Henry R. Newman.

Our first business this morning must be to read and understand the writing on the book held open by St. Thomas Aquinas, for that informs us of the meaning of the whole picture.

It is this text from the Book of Wisdom VII. 6.

"Optavi, et datus est mihi sensus.
 Invocavi, et venit in me Spiritus Sapientiae,
 Et preposui illam regnis et sedibus."

"I willed, and Sense was given me.
 I prayed, and the Spirit of Wisdom came upon me
 And I set her before, (preferred her to,) kingdoms
 and thrones."

The common translation in our English Apocrypha loses the entire meaning of this passage, which—not only as the statement of the experience of Florence in her own education, but as universally descriptive of the process of all noble education whatever—we had better take pains to understand.

First, says Florence, "I willed, (in sense of resolutely desiring,) and Sense was given me." You must begin your education with the distinct *resolution* to know what is true, and choice of the strait and rough road to such knowledge. This choice is offered to every youth and maid at some moment of their life; choice between the easy downward road, so broad that we can dance down it in companies, and the steep narrow

way, which we must enter alone.* Then, and for many a day afterwards, they need that form of persistent Option, and Will : but day by day, the 'Sense' of the rightness of what they have done, deepens on them, not in consequence of the effort, but by gift granted in reward of it. And the Sense of difference between right and wrong, and between beautiful and unbeautiful things, is confirmed in the heroic, and fulfilled in the industrious, soul.

That is the process of education in the earthly sciences, and the morality connected with them. Reward given to faithful *Volition*.

Next, when Moral and Physical senses are perfect, comes the desire for education in the higher world, where the senses are no more our Teachers ; but the Maker of the senses. And that teaching, we cannot get by labour, but only by petition.

"Invocavi, et venit in me Spiritus Sapientiæ"—
 "I prayed, and the Spirit of Wisdom," (not, you observe, *was given*, † but,) "*came upon me*." The *personal* power of Wisdom: the "*σοφία*" or Santa Sophia, to whom the first great Christian temple was dedicated. This higher wisdom, governing by her presence, all earthly conduct, and by her

* 'Alone' is too strong a word for what I meant, namely, that however helped or guided by our friends, masters, and predecessors, each of us determines for himself, in the critical moments, what his life is to be, when it is right. To the wrong, we may always flow with the stream.

† I, in careless error, wrote "was given" in '*Fors Clavigera*.'

teaching, all earthly art, Florence tells you, she obtained only by prayer.

And these two Earthly and Divine sciences are expressed beneath, in the symbols of their divided powers ;—Seven terrestrial, Seven Celestial, whose names have been already indicated to you :—in which figures I must point out one or two technical matters before attempting their interpretation. They are all by Simon Memmi originally ; but repainted, many of them all over, some hundred years later,—(certainly after the discovery of America, as you will see)—by an artist of considerable power, and some feeling for the general action of the figures ; but of no refinement or carefulness. He dashes paint in huge spaces over the subtle old work ; puts in his own chiaro-oscuro where all had been shadeless, and his own violent colour where all had been pale ; and repaints the faces, so as to make them, to his notion, prettier and more human : some of this upper work has, however, come away since, and the original outline, at least, is traceable ; while in the face of the Logic, the Music, and, one or two others, the original work is very pure. Being most interested myself in the earthly sciences, I had a scaffolding put up, made on a level with them, and examined them inch by inch, and the following report will be found accurate until next repainting.

For interpretation of them, you must always take the central figure of the Science, with the

little medallion above it, and the figure below, all together. Which I proceed to do, reading first from left to right for the earthly sciences, and then from right to left the heavenly ones, to the centre, where their two highest powers sit, side by side.

We begin, then, with the first in the list given above, (*Vaulted Book*, page 118): Grammar, in the corner farthest from the window.

SECTION I.

The Seven Earthly Sciences ; read from right to left, from the corner opposite the window, to the centre of the side wall.

I. GRAMMAR: more properly *Grammaticè*, "*Grammatic Art*," the Art of *Letters* or "*Literature*," or—using the word which to some English ears will carry most weight with it,—"*Scripture*," and its use. The Art of faithfully reading what has been written for our learning; and of clearly writing what we would make immortal of our thoughts. Power which consists first in recognizing letters; secondly, in forming them; thirdly, in the understanding and choice of words which, errorless, shall express our thought. Severe exercises all, reaching—very few living persons know, how far; beginning properly in childhood, and then only to be truly acquired. It is wholly impossible—this I say from too sorrowful experience—to conquer by any effort or time, habits of the hand (much more of head, and soul,) with which the vase of flesh has