

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

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649029921

Mornings in Florence: Being Simple Studies of Christian Art, for English Travellers by John Ruskin

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

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FINE ART, OXFORD.

I.—SANTA CROCE.

II.—THE GOLDEN GATE.

III.—BEFORE THE SOLDAN.

IV.—THE VAULTED BOOK.

V.—THE STRAIT GATE.

VI.—THE SHEPHERD'S TOWER.

NEW YORK:

JOHN WILEY & SONS,

15 ASTOR PLACE.

1877.

KE 9531



## PREFACE.

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IT seems to me that the real duty involved in my Oxford professorship cannot be completely done by giving lectures in Oxford only, but that I ought also to give what guidance I may to travellers in Italy.

The following letters are written as I would write to any of my friends who asked me what they ought preferably to study in limited time; and I hope they may be found of use if read in the places which they describe, or before the pictures to which they refer. But in the outset let me give my readers one piece of practical advice. If you can afford it, pay your custode or sacristan well. You may think it an injustice to the next comer; but your paying him ill is an injustice to all comers, for the necessary result of your doing so is that he will lock up or cover whatever he can, that he may get his penny fee for showing it; and that, thus exacting a small tax from everybody, he is thankful to none, and gets into a sullen passion if you stay more than a-quarter of a minute to look at the object after it is uncovered. And you will not find it possible to examine anything properly under these circumstances. Pay your sacristan well, and make friends with him: in nine cases out of ten an Italian is really grateful for the money, and more than grateful for human courtesy; and

will give you some true zeal and kindly feeling in return for a franc and a pleasant look. How very horrid of him to be grateful for money, you think! Well, I can only tell you that I know fifty people who will write me letters full of tender sentiment, for one who will give me tenpence; and I shall be very much obliged to you if you will give me tenpence for each of these letters of mine, though I have done more work than you know of, to make them good ten-pennyworths to you.



## MORNINGS IN FLORENCE.

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### THE FIRST MORNING.

#### SANTA CROCE.

IF there is one artist, more than another, whose work it is desirable that you should examine in Florence, supposing that you care for old art at all, it is Giotto. You can, indeed, also see work of his at Assisi; but it is not likely you will stop there, to any purpose. At Padua there is much; but only of one period. At Florence, which is his birthplace, you can see pictures by him of every date, and every kind. But you had surely better see, first, what is of his best time and of the best kind. He painted very small pictures and very large—painted from the age of twelve to sixty—painted some subjects carelessly which he had little interest in—some carefully with all his heart. You would surely like, and it would certainly be wise, to see him first in his strong and earnest work,—to see a painting by him, if possible, of large size, and wrought with his full strength, and of a subject pleasing to him. And if it were, also, a subject interesting to you yourself,—better still.

Now, if indeed you are interested in old art, you cannot but know the power of the thirteenth century. You know

that the character of it was concentrated in, and to the full expressed by, its best king, St. Louis. You know St. Louis was a Franciscan, and that the Franciscans, for whom Giotto was continually painting under Dante's advice, were prouder of him than of any other of their royal brethren or sisters. If Giotto ever would imagine anybody with care and delight, it would be St. Louis, if it chanced that anywhere he had St. Louis to paint.

Also, you know that he was appointed to build the Campanile of the Duomo, because he was then the best master of sculpture, painting, and architecture in Florence, and supposed to be without superior in the world.\* And that this commission was given him late in life, (of course he could not have designed the Campanile when he was a boy;) so therefore, if you find any of his figures painted under pure campanile architecture, and the architecture by his hand, you know, without other evidence, that the painting must be of his strongest time.

So if one wanted to find anything of his to begin with, especially, and could choose what it should be, one would say, "A fresco, life size, with campanile architecture behind it, painted in an important place; and if one might choose one's subject, perhaps the most interesting saint of all saints—for *him* to do for us—would be St. Louis."

\*"Cum in universo orbe non reperiri dicatur quenquam qui sufficientior sit in his et aliis multis artibus magistro Giotto Bondonis de Florentia, pictore, et accipiendus sit in patriâ, velut magnus magister."—(Decree of his appointment, quoted by Lord Lindsay, vol. ii., p. 247.)

Wait then for an entirely bright morning; rise with the sun, and go to Santa Croce, with a good opera-glass in your pocket, with which you shall for once, at any rate, see an opus; and, if you have time, several opera. Walk straight to the chapel on the right of the choir ("k" in your Murray's guide). When you first get into it, you will see nothing but a modern window of glaring glass, with a red-hot cardinal in one pane—which piece of modern manufacture takes away at least seven-eighths of the light (little enough before) by which you might have seen what is worth sight. Wait patiently till you get used to the gloom. Then, guarding your eyes from the accursed modern window as best you may, take your opera-glass and look to the right, at the uppermost of the two figures beside it. It is St. Louis, under campanile architecture, painted by—Giotto? or the last Florentine painter who wanted a job—over Giotto? That is the first question you have to determine; as you will have henceforward, in every case in which you look at a fresco.

Sometimes there will be no question at all. These two grey frescos at the bottom of the walls on the right and left, for instance, have been entirely got up for your better satisfaction, in the last year or two—over Giotto's half-effaced lines. But that St. Louis? Re-painted or not, it is a lovely thing,—there can be no question about that; and we must look at it, after some preliminary knowledge gained, not inattentively.

Your Murray's Guide tells you that this chapel of the Bardi della Libertà, in which you stand, is covered with