

**MORNINGS IN FLORENCE
BEING SIMPLE STUDIES OF
CHRISTIAN ART FOR ENGLISH
TRAVELLERS, PP. 58 - 95**

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Mornings in Florence being simple studies of Christian Art for english travellers, pp. 58 - 95 by
John Ruskin

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MORNINGS IN FLORENCE:

BEING

SIMPLE STUDIES

OF

CHRISTIAN ART

FOR ENGLISH TRAVELLERS.

BY

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III.

BEFORE THE SOLDAN.

SECOND EDITION.

GEORGE ALLEN,
SUNNYSIDE, ORPINGTON, KENT.

1882.

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THE THIRD MORNING.

BEFORE THE SOLDAN.

I PROMISED some note of Sandro's Fortitude, before whom I asked you to sit and read the end of my last letter ; and I've lost my own notes about her, and forget, now, whether she has a sword, or a mace ;—it does not matter. What is chiefly notable in her is—that you would not, if you had to guess who she was, take her for Fortitude at all. Everybody else's Fortitudes announce themselves clearly and proudly. They have tower-like shields, and lion-like helmets—and stand firm astride on their legs,—and are confidently ready for all comers.

Yes ;—that is your common Fortitude. Very grand, though common. But not the highest, by any means.

Ready for all comers, and a match for them,—thinks the universal Fortitude ;—no thanks to her for standing so steady, then !

But Botticelli's Fortitude is no match, it may be, for any that are coming. Worn, somewhat ; and not a little weary, instead of standing ready for all comers, she is sitting,—apparently in

reverie, her fingers playing restlessly and idly—nay, I think—even nervously, about the hilt of her sword.

For her battle is not to begin to-day; nor did it begin yesterday. Many a morn and eve have passed since it began—and now—is this to be the ending day of it? And if this—by what manner of end?

That is what Sandro's Fortitude is thinking, and the playing fingers about the sword-hilt would fain let it fall, if it might be: and yet, how swiftly and gladly will they close on it, when the far-off trumpet blows, which she will hear through all her reverie!

There is yet another picture of Sandro's here, which you must look at before going back to Giotto: the small Judith in the room next the Tribune, as you return from this outer one. It is just under Lionardo's Medusa. She is returning to the camp of her Israel, followed by her maid carrying the head of Holofernes. And she walks in one of Botticelli's light dancing actions, her drapery all on flutter, and her hand, like Fortitude's, light on the sword-hilt, but daintily—not nervously, the little finger laid over the cross of it.

And at the first glance—you will think the figure merely a piece of fifteenth-century affectation. 'Judith, indeed!—say rather the daughter of Herodias, at her mincingest.'

Well, yes—Botticelli *is* affected, in the way that all men in that century necessarily were. Much euphuism, much studied grace of manner, much formal assertion of scholarship, mingling with his force of imagination. And he likes twisting the fingers of hands about, just as Correggio does. But he never does it like Correggio, without cause.

Look at Judith again,—at her face, not her drapery,—and remember that when a man is base at the heart, he blights his virtues into weaknesses; but when he is true at the heart he sanctifies his weaknesses into virtues. It is a weakness of Botticelli's, this love of dancing motion and waved drapery; but why has he given it full flight here?

Do you happen to know anything about Judith yourself, except that she cut off Holofernes' head; and has been made the high light of about a million of vile pictures ever since, in which the painters thought they could surely attract the public to the double show of an execution, and a pretty woman,—especially with the added pleasure of hinting at previously ignoble sin?

When you go home to-day, take the pains to write out for yourself, in the connection I here place them, the verses underneath numbered from the book of Judith; you will probably think of their meaning more carefully as you write.

Begin thus :

“ Now at that time, Judith heard thereof, which was the daughter of Merari, * * * the son of Simeon, the son of Israel.” And then write out consecutively, these pieces—

Chapter viii., verses 2 to 8 (always inclusive,) and read the whole chapter.

Chapter ix., verses 1 and 5 to 7, beginning this piece with the previous sentence, “ Oh God, oh my God, hear me also, a widow.”

Chapter ix., verses 11 to 14.

” x., ” 1 to 5.

” xiii., ” 6 to 10.

” xv., ” 11 to 13.

” xvi., ” 1 to 6.

” xvi., ” 11 to 15.

” xvi., ” 18 and 19.

” xvi., ” 23 to 25.

Now, as in many other cases of noble history, apocryphal and other, I do not in the least care how far the literal facts are true. The conception of facts, and the idea of Jewish womanhood, are there, grand and real as a marble statue,—possession for all ages. And you will feel, after you have read this piece of history, or epic poetry, with honourable care, that there is somewhat more to be thought of and pictured in Judith, than painters have mostly found it in them to show you : that she is not merely the Jewish Dalilah to the Assyrian Samson ; but the mightiest, purest, brightest type of high passion

in severe womanhood offered to our human memory. Sandro's picture is but slight; but it is true to her, and the only one I know that is; and after writing out these verses, you will see why he gives her that swift, peaceful motion, while you read in her face, only sweet solemnity of dreaming thought. "My people delivered, and by my hand; and God has been gracious to His handmaid!" The triumph of Miriam over a fallen host, the fire of exulting mortal life in an immortal hour, the purity and severity of a guardian angel—all are here; and as her servant follows, carrying indeed the head, but invisible—(a mere thing to be carried—no more to be so much as thought of)—she looks only at her mistress, with intense, servile, watchful love. Faithful, not in these days of fear only, but hitherto in all her life, and afterwards for ever.

After you have seen it enough, look also for a little while at Angelico's Marriage and Death of the Virgin, in the same room; you may afterwards associate the three pictures always together in your mind. And, looking at nothing else to-day in the Uffizii, let us go back to Giotto's chapel.

We must begin with this work on our left hand, the Death of St. Francis; for it is the key to all the rest. Let us hear first what Mr. Crowe directs us to think of it. "In the