

A Seeker of Pagan Perfection

Being the Life of Domenico Neroni, Pictor Sacrilegus

By Vernon Lee

Every time, of late years, of my being once more in Rome, I have been subject to a peculiar mental obsession: retracing my steps, if not materially, in fancy at least, to such parts of the city as bear witness to the strange meeting of centuries, where the Middle Ages have altered to their purposes, or filled with their significance, the ruined remains of Antiquity.

Such places are scarcer than one might have expected, and for that reason perhaps more impressive, more fragmentary and enigmatic. There are the colossal columns—great trickles and flakes of black etching as with acid their marble—of the temple of Mars Ultor, with that Tuscan palace of Torre della Milizia rising from among them. There is, inside Ara Cœli—itsself commemorating the legend of Augustus and the Sibyl—the tomb of Dominus Pandulphus Sabelli, its borrowed vine-garlands and satyrs and Cupids surmounted by mosaic crosses and Gothic inscriptions; and outside the same church, on a ground of green and gold, a Mother of God looking down from among gargoyles and escutcheons on to the marble river-god of the yard of the Capitol below. Then also, where pines and laurels still root in the unrifled tombs, the skeleton feudal fortress, gutted as by an earthquake, alongside of the tower of Cæcilia Metella. These were the places to which my thoughts were forever recurring; to them, and to nameless other spots, the street corner, for instance, where an Ionic pillar, with beaded and full-horned capital, is walled into the side of an insignificant modern house. I know not whether, in consequence of this straining to see the meeting-point of Antiquity and the Middle Ages (like the fancy, sometimes experienced, to reach the confluence of rivers), or rather as a cause thereof, but a certain story has long lurked in the corners of my mind. Twenty years have passed since first I was aware of its presence, and it has undergone many changes. It is presumably a piece of my inventing, for I have neither read it nor heard it related. But by this time it has acquired a certain traditional veracity in my eyes, and I give to the reader rather as historical fact than as fiction the study which I have always called to myself: *Pictor Sacrilegus*.

I

Domenico, the son of Luca Neroni, painter, sculptor, goldsmith, and engraver, about whom, owing either to the scarcity of his works or the scandal of his end, Vasari has but a few words in another man's biography, must have been born shortly before or shortly after the year 1450, a contemporary of Perugino, of Ghirlandaio, of Filippino Lippi, and of Signorelli, by all of whom he was influenced at various moments, and whom he influenced by turns.

He was born and bred in the Etruscan town of Volterra, of a family which for generations had exercised the art of the goldsmith, stimulated, perhaps, by the sight of ornaments discovered in Etruscan tombs, and carrying on, peradventure, some of the Etruscan traditions of two thousand years before. The mountain city, situate on the verge of the malarious seaboard of Southern Tuscany, is reached from one side through windings of barren valleys, where the dried-up brooks are fringed, instead of reed, with the gray, sand-loving tamarisk; and from the other side, across a high-lying moorland of stunted heather and sere grass, whence the larks rise up scared by only a flock of sheep or a mare and her foal, and you journey for miles without meeting a house or a

clump of cypresses. In front, with the white road zigzagging along their crests, is a wilderness of barren, livid hillocks, separated by huge fissures and crevassed by huge cracks, with here and there separate rocks, projecting like Druidic stones from the valley of gaping ravines; and beyond them all a higher mountain, among whose rocks and ilexes you doubtfully distinguish the walls and towers of the Etruscan city. A mass of Cyclopean wall and great black houses, grim with stone brackets and iron hooks and stanchions, all for defense and barricade, Volterra looks down into the deep valleys, like the vague heraldic animal, black and bristly, which peers from the high tower of the municipal palace. One wonders how this could ever have been a city of the fat, voluptuous Etruscans, whose images lie propped up and wide-eyed on their stone coffin-lids. The long wars of old Italic times, in which Etruria fell before Rome, must have burned and destroyed, as one would think, the land as well as the inhabitants, leaving but gray cinders and blackened stone behind. Siena and Florence ruined Volterra once more in the Middle Ages, isolating it near the pestilential Maremma and checking its growth outward and inward. The cathedral, the pride of a medieval commonwealth, is still a mean and unfinished building of the twelfth century. There is no native art, of any importance, of a later period what the town possesses has come from other parts, the altar-pieces by Matteo di Giovanni and Signorelli, for instance, and the marble candelabra, carried by angels, of the school of Mino da Fiesole.

In this remote and stagnant town, the artistic training of Domenico Neroni was necessarily imperfect and limited throughout his boyhood to the paternal goldsmith's craft. Indeed, it seems likely that some peculiarities of his subsequent life as an artist, his laboriousness disproportionate to all results, his persistent harping on unimportant detail, and his exclusive interest in line and curve, were due not merely to an unhappy and laborious temperament, but also to the long habit of an art full of manual skill and cunning tradition, which presented the eye with ingenious patterns, but rarely attempted, save in a few church ornaments, more of the domain of sculpture, to tell a story or express a feeling.

Besides this influence of his original trade, we find in Domenico Neroni's work the influence of his early surroundings. His native country is such as must delight, or help to form, a painter of pale anatomies. The painters of Southern Tuscany loved as a background the arid and mountainous country of their birth. Taddeo di Bartolo placed the Death of the Virgin among the curious undulations of pale clay and sandy marl that stretch to the southernmost gates of Siena; Signorelli was amused and fascinated by the odd cliffs and overhanging crags, unnatural and grotesque like some Druidic monument, of the valleys of the Paglia and the Chiana; and Pier della Francesca has left, in the allegorical triumphs of Frederick of Urbino and his duchess, studies most exquisite and correct, of what meets the traveler's eyes on the watersheds of the central Apennine, sharp-toothed lines of mountain peaks pale against the sky, dim distant whiteness of sea, and valleys and roads and torrents twisting intricately as on a map. The country about Volterra, revealing itself with rosy lividness at dawn, with delicate periwinkle blue at sunset, through an open city gate or a gap between the tall black houses, helped to make Neroni a lover of muscle and sinew, of the strength and suppleness of movement, of the osseous structure divined within the limbs; and made him shrink all his life long, not merely from drapery or costume that blunted the lines of the body, but from any warmth and depth of color; till the figures stood out like ghosts, or people in faded tapestries, from the pale lilacs and grays and washed out cinnamons of his backgrounds. For the bold peaks and swelling mountains of the valleys of the Arno and the Tiber, and the depths of color among vegetation and rivers, seemed crude and emphatic to a man who carried in his memory those bosses of hill, pearly where the waters have washed the sides, pale golden buff where a little sere grass covers the rounded top;

those great cracks and chasms, with the white road snaking along the narrow table-land and the wide valleys; and the ripple of far-off mountain chains, strong and restrained in curves, exquisite in tints, like the dry white and purpled hemlock, and the dusty lilac scabius, which seem to flower alone in that arid and melancholy and beautiful country.

“Color,” wrote Domenico Neroni, among a mass of notes on his art, measurements, and calculations, “is the enemy of noble art. It is the enemy of all precise and perfect form, since where color exists form can be seen only as juxtaposition of color. For this reason it has pleased the Creator to lend color only to the inanimate world, as to senseless vegetables and plants, and to the lower kinds of living creatures, as birds, fishes, and reptiles; whereas nobler creatures, as lions, tigers, horses, cattle, stags, and unicorns, are robed in white or dull skins, the noblest breeds, indeed, both of horses, as those of the Soldans of Egypt and Numidia, and of oxen, as those of the valleys of the Clitumnus and Chiana, being white; whence, indeed, the poet Virgil has said that such latter are fittest for sacrifice to the immortal gods; ‘hinc albi, Chitumne, greges,’ and what follows. And man, the masterpiece of creation, is white; and only in the less noble portions of his body, which have no sensitiveness and no shape (being, indeed, vegetative and deciduous), as hair and beard, partaking of color. Wherefore the ancient Romans and Greeks, portraying their gods, chose white marble for material, and not gaudy porphyry or jasper, and portrayed them naked. Whence certain moderns, calling themselves painters, who muffle our Lord and the Holy Apostles in many-colored garments, thinking thereby to do a seemly and honorable thing, but really proceeding basely like tailors, might take a lesson if they could.”

The quotation from Virgil, and the allusion to the statues of the immortal gods, shows that Neroni must have written these lines in the later part of his career, when already under the influence of that humanist Filarete, who played so important a part in his life, and when possessed already by those notions which brought him to so strange and fearful an end. But from his earliest years he sought for form, despising other things. He passed with contempt through a six months’ apprenticeship at Perugia, railing at the great factory of devotional art established there by Perugino, of whom, with his rows of splay-footed saints and spindle-shanked heroes, he spoke with the same sweeping contempt as later Michelangelo. At Siena, which he described (much as its earlier artists painted it) as a town of pink toy-houses and scarlet toy-towers, he found nothing to admire save the marble fountain of Jacopo della Quercia, for the antique group of the Three Graces, later to be drawn by the young Raphael, had not yet been given to the cathedral by the nephew of Pius II. The sight of these noble reliefs, particularly of the one representing Adam and Eve driven out of Paradise, with their strong and well-understood nudities, determined him to exchange painting for sculpture, and made him hasten to Florence to see the works of Donatello and of Ghiberti.

Domenico Neroni must have spent several years of his life— between 1470 and 1480—in Florence, but little of his work has remained in that city—little, at least, that we can identify with certainty. For taking service, as he did, with the Pollaiolos, Verrocchio, Nanni di Banco, and even with Filippino and Botticelli, wherever his inquisitive mind could learn, or his restless, fastidious, laborious talent gain him bread, it is presumable that much of his work might be discovered alongside that of his masters, in the collective productions of the various workshops. It is possible thus that he had a hand in much metal and relief work of the Pollaiolos, and perhaps even in the embroidering and tapestries of which they were undertakers; also in certain ornaments, friezes of Cupids and dolphins, and exquisite shell and acanthus carving of the monuments of Santa Croce; and it may be surmised that he occasionally assisted Botticelli in his perspective and anatomy, since that master took him to Rome when commissioned to paint in the

chapel of Pope Sixtus. Indeed, in certain little-known studies for Botticelli's Birth of Venus and Calumny of Apelles one may discover, in the strong sweep of the outline, in the solid fashion in which the figures are planted on their feet—all peculiarities which disappear in the painted pictures, where grace of motion and exquisite research take the place of solid draftsmanship—the hand of the artist whom the restless desire to confront ever new problems alone prevented from attaining a place among the great men of his time.

For there was in Domenico Neroni, from the very outset of his career, a curiosity after the hidden, a passion for the unattainable, which kept him, with greater power than many of his contemporaries, and vastly greater science, a mere student throughout his lifetime. He resembled in some respects his great contemporary Leonardo, but while the eager inquisitiveness of the latter was tempered by a singular power of universal enjoyment, a love of luxury and joyousness in every form, the intellectual activity of Neroni was exasperated into a kind of unhappy mania by the fact that its satisfaction was the only happiness that he could conceive. He would never have understood, or understanding would have detested, the luxurious *dilettante* spirit which made Leonardo prefer painting to sculpture, because whereas the sculptor is covered with a mud of marble dust, and works in a place disorderly with chips and rubbish, the painter “sits at his easel, well dressed and at ease, in a clean house adorned with pictures, his work accompanied by music or the reading of delightful books, which, untroubled by the sound of hammering and other noises, may be listened to with very great pleasure.” The workshop of Neroni, when he had one of his own, was full of cobwebs and dust, littered with the remains of frugal and unsavory meals, and resolutely closed to the rich and noble persons in whose company Leonardo delighted. And if Neroni, in his many-sided activity, eventually put aside sculpture for painting, it was merely because, as he was wont to say, a figure must needs look real when it is solid and you can walk round it; but to make men and women rise out of a flat canvas or plastered wall, and stand and move as if alive, is truly the work of a god.

Men and women, said Neroni; and he should have added men and women nude. For the studies which he made of the anatomy of horses and dogs were destined merely to shed light on the construction of human creatures: and his elaborate and exquisite drawings of undulating hills and sinuous rivers, nay, of growths of myrtle and clumps of daffodils, were intended as practice towards drawing the more subtle lines and curves of man's body. And as to clothes, he could not understand that great anatomists like Signorelli should huddle their figures quite willingly in immense cloaks and gowns; still less how exquisite draftsmen like his friend Botticelli (who had the sense of line like no other man since Frate Lippo, although his people were oddly out of joint) could take pleasure in putting half-a-dozen veils atop of each other, and then tying them all into bunches and bunches with innumerable bits of tape! As to himself, he invariably worked out every detail of the nude, in the vain hope that the priests and monks for whom he worked would allow at least half of those beautiful anatomies to remain visible; and when, with infinite difficulties and bad language, he gradually gave in to the necessity of some sort of raiment, it was of such a nature—the hose and jerkins of the men-at-arms like a second skin, the draperies of the wornankind as clinging as if they had been picked out of the river, that a great many pious people absolutely declined to pay the agreed on sum for paintings more suited to Pagan than to Christian countries; and indeed Fra Girolamo Savonarola included much work of Domenico's in his very finest burnings.

Such familiarity with nude form was not easily attained in the fifteenth century. Medieval civilization gave no opportunities for seeing naked or half-naked people moving freely as in the antique palæstra; and there had yet been discovered too few antique marbles for the empiric

knowledge of ancient sculptors to be empirically inherited by modern ones. Observation of the hired model, utterly insufficient in itself, required to be supplemented by a thorough science of the body's mechanism. But physiology and surgery were still in their infancy; and artists could not, as they could after the teachings of Vesalius, Fallopius, and Cesalpinus, avail themselves of the science accumulated for medical purposes. Verrocchio and the Pollaiolos most certainly, and Donatello almost without a doubt, practiced dissection as a part of their business, as Michelangelo, with the advantage of twenty years of their researches behind him, practiced it passionately in his turn. Of all the men of his day, Domenico Neroni, however, was the most fervent anatomist. He ran every risk of contagion and of punishment in order to procure corpses from the hospital and the gibbet. He undermined his constitution by breathing and handling corruption, and when his friends implored him to spare his health, he would answer, although unable to touch food for sickness, by paraphrasing the famous words of Paolo Uccello, and exclaiming from among his grisly and abominable properties, "Ah! how sweet a thing is not anatomy!"

There was nothing, he said—for he spoke willingly to any one who questioned him on these subjects—more beautiful than the manner in which human beings are built, or indeed living creatures of any kind; for, in the scarcity of corpses and skeletons, he would pick up on his walks the bones of sheep that had died on the hillsides, or those of horses and mules furbished up by the scavenger dogs of the river-edge. It was marvelous to listen to him when he was in the vein. He sat handling horrible remains and talking about them like a lover about his mistress or a preacher about God; indeed, bones, muscles, and tendons were mistress and god all in one to this fanatical lover of human form. He would insist on the loveliness of line of the scapula, finding in the sweep of the *acromion* ridge a fanciful resemblance to the pinion, and in the angular shape of the *coracoid* process to the neck and head of a raven in full flight. Following with his finger the triangular outline of the bone, he went on to explain how its freedom of movement is due to its singular independence; laid loosely on the flat muscles behind the upper ribs, it moves with absolute freedom, backwards and forwards, up and down, unconnected with any other bone, till, turning the corner of the shoulder, it is hinged rather than tied to the collar-bone; the collar-bone itself free to move upwards from its articulation in the sternum. And then talk of the great works of man! Talk of Brunellesco and his cupola, of the engineers of the Duke of Calabria! Look at the human arm: what engineer would have dared to fasten anything to such a movable base as that? Yet an arm can swing round like a windmill, and lift weights like the stoutest crane without being wrenched out of its sockets, because the muscles act as pulleys in four different directions. And see, under the big *deltoid*, which fits round the shoulder like an epaulet and pulls the arm up, is the scapular group, things like tidily sorted skeins, thick on the shoulder-blades, diminished to a tendon string at their insertion in the arm; their business is to pull the arm back, in opposition to the big pectoral muscle which pulls it forwards. Here you have your arm working up, backwards or forwards; but how about pulling it down? An exquisite little arrangement settles that. Instead of being inserted with the rest on the outside of the arm-bone, the lowest muscle takes another road, and is inserted in the under part of the bone, in company with the great *latissimus dorsi*, and these tightening while the *deltoid* slackens, pull the arm down. No other arrangement could have done it with so little bulk; and an additional muscle on the under-arm or the ribs would have spoiled the figure of Apollo himself.

Among the paintings of contemporary artists, the one which at that time afforded Domenico the most unmingled satisfaction was Pollaiolo's tiny panel of Hercules and the Hydra. There! You might cover it with the palm of your hand; but in that hand you would be holding the

concentrated strength and valor of the world, the true son of Jove, the most beautiful muscles that ever were seen! At least the most beautiful save in the statues of Donatello; for, of course, Donato was the greatest craftsman that had ever lived; and Domenico spoke of him as, in Vasari's day, men were to speak of Michelangelo.

For I ask you, who save an angel in human shape could have modeled that David, so young and triumphant and modest, treading on Goliath's head, with toes just slightly turned downwards, and those sandals, of truly divine workmanship? And that St. John in the Wilderness—how beautiful are not his ribs, showing under the wasted pectoral muscles; and how one sees that the *radius* rolls across the *ulna* in the forearm; surely one's heart, rather than the statue, must be made of stone if one can contemplate without rapture the exquisite rendering of the texture where the shin-bone stands out from the muscles of the leg. Such must have been the works of those famous Romans and Greeks, Phidias and Praxiteles.

Such were the notions of Domenico of Volterra in the earlier part of his career. For a change came gradually upon him after his first visit to Rome, whither, about 1480, he accompanied Botticelli, Rosselli, and Ghirlandaio, whom His Beatitude Pope Sixtus had sent for to decorate the new chapel of the palace.

II

We must not be deluded, like Domenico Neroni during his Florentine days, into the easy mistake of considering mere realism as the veritable aim of the art of his days. Deep in the life of that art, and struggling forever through whatever passion for scientific accuracy, technical skill, or pathetic expression, is the sense of line and proportion, the desire for pattern, growing, steadily till its triumph under Michelangelo and Raphael.

This reveals itself earliest in architecture. The men of the fifteenth century had lost all sense of the logic of construction. Columns, architraves, friezes, and the various categories of actual stone and brick work, occurred to them merely as so much line and curve, applicable to the surface of their buildings, with not more reference to their architecture than a fresco or an arras. The Pazzi Chapel, for instance, is one agglomeration of architectural members which perform no architectural function; but, taken as a piece of surface decoration, say as a stenciling, what could be more harmonious? Or take Alberti's famous church at Rimini; it is but a great piece of architectural veneering, nothing that meets the eye doing any real constructive duty, its exquisite decoration no more closely connected with the building than the strips of damask and yards of gold braid used in other places on holidays. As the fifteenth century treats the architectural detail of Græco-Roman art, so likewise does it proceed with its sculptured ornament; all meaning vanishes before the absorbing interest in-pattern. For there is in antique architectural ornament a much larger proportion of significance than can strike us at first. Thus the garlands of ivy and fruit had actually hung round the tomb before being carved on its sides; before ornamenting its corners the rams' heads and skulls of oxen had lain for centuries on the altar. The medallions of nymphs, centaurs, tritons, which to us are so meaningless and irrelevant, had a reference either to the divinity or to the worshipers; and there is probably almost as much spontaneous symbolism in the little cinerary box in the Capitol (of a person called Felix), with its variously employed genii, making music, carrying lanterns and torches, burning or extinguished under a trellis hung with tragic masks, as in any Gothic tomb with angels drawing the curtains of the deathbed. There has been, with the change of religion, an interruption in the symbolic tradition; yet, though we no longer interpret with readiness this dead language of paganism, we feel, if we are the least

attentive, that it contains a real meaning. We feel that the sculptors cared not merely for the representation, but also for the object represented. These things were dear to them, a part of their life, their worship, their love; and they put as much observation into their work as any Gothic sculptor, and often as much fancy and humor (though both more beautiful), as one may judge, with plenty of comparison at hand, by a certain antique altar in Siena Cathedral, none of whose Gothic animals come up to the wonderful half-human rams' heads and bored, cross griffins of this forlorn fragment of paganism. The significance of classic ornament the men of the fifteenth century straightway overlooked. They laid hold of it as merely so much form, joining sirens, griffins, garlands, rams' heads, victories, without a suspicion that they might mean or suggest anything. They do, in fact, mean nothing, in most Florentine work, besides exquisite pattern; in the less subtle atmosphere of Venice they reach that frank senselessness which has moved the wrath of Ruskin. But what a charm have not even those foolish monuments of doges and admirals, tier upon tier of triumphal arch, of delicately flowered column and scalloped niche, and then rows of dainty warriors and virtues; how full of meaning to the eye and spirit is not this art so meaningless to the literary mind!

Of course the painting of that age never became an art of mere pattern like the architecture. The whole life and thought of the time was poured into it; and the art itself developed in its upward movement a number of scientific interests—perspective, anatomy, expression—which counteracted that tendency to seek for mere beauty of arrangement and detail. Yet the perfection of Renaissance art never lies in any realism in our modern sense, still less in such suggestiveness as belongs to our literary age; and its triumph is when Raphael can vary and co-ordinate the greatest number of heads, of hands, feet, and groups, as in the School of Athens, the Parnassus, the marvelous little Bible histories of the Loggie; above all, in that "Vision of Ezekiel," which is the very triumph of compact and harmonious composition; when Michelangelo can tie human beings into the finest knots, twist them into the most shapely brackets, frameworks, and key-stones. Even throughout the period of utmost realism, while art was struggling with absorbing problems, men never dreamed of such realism as ours. They never painted a corner of nature at random, merely for the sake of veracity; they never modeled a modern man or woman in their real everyday dress and at their real everyday business. In the midst of everything composition ruled supreme, and each object must needs find its echo, be worked into a scheme of lines, or, with the Venetians, of symmetrically arranged colors. There is an anatomical engraving by Antonio Pollaiuolo, one of the strongest realists of his time, which sums up the tendencies of fifteenth-century art. It is a combat of twelve naked men, extraordinarily hideous and in hideous attitudes, but they are so arranged that their ungainly and flayed-looking limbs form with the background of gigantic ivy tendrils an intricate and beautiful pattern, such as we find in Morris's paper and stuffs.

This hankering after pattern, this desire for beauty as such, became manifest in Domenico Neroni after his first sojourn in Rome.

The Roman basilicas, with their stately rows of columns, Corinthian and Ionic, taken from some former temple, and their sunken floor, solemn with Byzantine patterns of porphyry and serpentine, had impressed with their simplicity and harmony the mind of this Florentine, surrounded hitherto by the intricacies of Gothic buildings. They had formed the link to those fragments of ancient architecture, more intact but also more hidden than in our days, whose dignity of proportion and grace of detail—vast rosetted arches and slender rows of fluted pillars—our modern and Hellenicized taste has treated with too ready contempt. For this Vitruvian art, unoriginal and bungling in the eyes of our purists, was yet full of the serenity, the

ampleness which the Middle Ages lacked, and affected the men of the fifteenth century much like a passage of Virgil after a canto of Dante. It formed the fit setting for those remains of antique sculpture which were then gradually beginning to be drawn from the earth. Of such statues and reliefs—which the men of the Renaissance regarded as the work rather of ancient Rome than of Greece—a certain amount was beginning to be carried all over Italy, and notably to the houses of the rich Florentine merchants, who incrustated their staircase walls with inscriptions and carvings, and set statues and sarcophagi under the columns of their courtyards. But such sculpture was chosen rather for its portable character than its excellence; and although single busts and slabs were diligently studied by Florentine artists, there could not have existed in Florence a number of antiques sufficient to impress the ideal of ancient art upon men surrounded on all sides by the works of medieval painters and sculptors.

To the various sights of Rome must be due that sudden enlarging of style, that kind of new classicism, which distinguishes the work of fifteenth-century masters after their visit to the Eternal City, enabling Ghirlandaio, Signorelli, Perugino, and Botticelli to make the Sistine Chapel, and even the finical Pinturicchio, the Vatican library, into centers of fresh influence for harmony and beauty.

The result upon Domenico Neroni was a momentary confusion in all his artistic conceptions. Too much of a seeker for new things, for secret and complicated knowledge, to undergo a mere widening of style like his more gifted or more placid contemporaries, he fell foul of his previous work and his previous masters, without finding a new line or new ideals. The frescos of Castagno, the little panels of the Pollaiolos, nay, even the works of Donatello, were no longer what they had seemed before his Roman journey, and even what he had remembered of them in Rome; for it is with more noble things, even as with the rooms which we inhabit, which strike us as small and dingy only on returning from larger and better lighted ones.

It is to this period of incipient but ill-understood classicism that belongs the only work of Domenico Neroni—at least the only work still extant nowadays—which possesses, over and above its artistic or scientific merit, that indefinable quality which we must simply call *charm*; to this time, with the one exception of the famous woodcuts done for Filarete. Domenico began about this time, and probably under the stress of necessity, to make frontispieces for the books with which Florentine printers were rapidly superseding the manuscripts of twenty years before: collections of sermons, of sonnets, lives of saints, editions of Virgil and Terence, quaint versified encyclopedias, and even books on medicine and astrology. From these little woodcuts, groups of saints round the Cross, with Giotto's tower and Brunellesco's dome in the distance, pictures of Fathers of the Church or ancient poets seated at desks in neatly paneled closets—always with their globes, books, and pot of lilies, and a vista of cloisters; or battles between chaste viragos, in flying Botticellian draperies, and slim, naked Cupids; from such frontispieces Domenico passed on to larger woodcuts, destined to illustrate books never printed, or perhaps, like the so-called *playing cards of Mantegna* and certain prints of Robetta, to be bought as cheap ornaments for walls. Some of those that remain to us have a classical stiffness, reminding one of the Paduan school; others, and these his best, remind one of the work of Botticelli. There is, for instance, the figure of a Muse, elaborately modeled under her ample drapery, seated cross-legged by a playing fountain, on a carpet of exquisitely designed ground-ivy, a little bare trellis behind her, a tortoise lyre in her hand; which has in it somewhat of that odd, vague, questioning character, half of eagerness, half of extreme lassitude, which we find in Botticelli. Only that in Neroni's work it seems not the outcome of a certain dreamy spiritual dissatisfaction—the dissatisfaction which makes us feel that Botticelli's flower-wreathed nymphs may end in the pool under the willows

like Ophelia—but rather of a torturing of line and attitude in search of grace. Grace! Unclutchable phantom, which had appeared tantalizingly in Neroni's recollections of the antique, a something ineffable, which he could not even see clearly when it was there before him, accustomed as he had been to all the hideousness of anatomized reality. In these woodcuts he seems hunting it forever; and there is one of them which is peculiarly significant, of a nymph in elaborately wound robes and veils, striding, with an odd, mad, uncertain swing, through fields of stiff grass and stunted rushes, a baby faun in her bosom, another tiny goat-legged creature led by the hand, while she carries uncomfortably, in addition to this load, a silly trophy of wild-flowers tied to a stick; the personification almost, this lady with the wide eyes and crazy smile, of the artist's foolishly and charmingly burdened journey in quest of the unattainable. The imaginative quality, never intended or felt by the painter himself, here depends on his embodying longings after the cairn and stalwart goddesses on sarcophagus and vase, in the very thing he most seeks to avoid, a creature borrowed from a Botticelli allegory, or one of the sibyls of the unspeakable Perugino himself! The circumstances of this quest, and the accidental meeting in it of the antique and the medieval, the straining, the Quixote-riding or Three-King pilgrimaging after a phantom, gives to such work of Domenico's that indefinable quality of *charm*; the man does not indeed become a poet, but in a measure a subject for poetry.

III

In order to understand what must have passed in the mind of one of those Florentines of the fifteenth century, we must realize the fact that, unlike ourselves, they had not been brought up under the influence of the antique, and, unlike the ancients, they had not lived in intimacy with Nature. The followers of Giotto had studied little beyond the head and hands, and as much of the body as could be guessed at under drapery or understood from movement; and this achievement, with no artistic traditions save those of the basest Byzantine decay, was far greater than we easily appreciate. It remained for the men of the fifteenth century, Donatello, Ghiberti, Masaccio, and their illustrious followers, to become familiar with the human body. To do so is easy for everyone in our day, when we are born, so to speak, with an unconscious habit of antique form, diffused not merely by ancient works of art in marble or plaster, but by more recent schools of art, painting as well as sculpture, themselves the outcome of classical imitation. The early Italian Renaissance had little or none of these facilitations. Fragments of Greek and Roman sculpture were still comparatively uncommon before the great excavations of the sixteenth century; nor was it possible for men so unfamiliar, not merely with the antique, but with Nature itself, to profit very rapidly by the knowledge and taste stored up even in those fragments. It was necessary to learn from reality to appreciate the antique, however much the knowledge of the antique might later supplement, and almost supplant, the study of reality. So these men of the fifteenth century had to teach themselves, in the first instance, the very elements of this knowledge. And here their position, while yet so unlike ours, was even more utterly unlike that of the ancients themselves. The great art of Greece undoubtedly had its days of ignorance; but for those ancient painters and sculptors, who for generations had watched naked lads exercising in the school or racecourse, and draped, half-naked men and women walking in the streets and working in the fields, their ignorance was of the means of representation, not of the object represented. It is the hand, the tool which is at fault in those constrained, simpering warriors of the schools of Ægina, in those slim-waisted demonic dancers of the Apulian vases; the eye is as familiar with the human body, the mind as accustomed to select its beauty from its ugliness, as

the eye and mind of such of us as cannot paint are familiar nowadays with the shapes and colors, with the charm of the trees and meadows that we love. The contemporaries, on the contrary, of Donatello had received from the sculptors of the very farthest Middle Ages, those who carved the magnificent patterns of Byzantine coffins and the exquisite leafage of Lungobard churches, a remarkable mastery over the technical part of their craft. The hand was cunning, but the eye unfamiliar. Hence it comes that the sculpture of the earlier Renaissance displays perfection of workmanship, which occasionally blinds us to its poverty of form, and even to its deficiency of science. And hence also the rapidity with which every additional item of knowledge is put into practice that seems to argue perfect familiarity. But these men were not really familiar with their work. The dullest modern student, brought up among casts and manuals, would not be guilty of the actual anatomical mistakes committed every now and then by these great anatomists, so passionately curious of internal structure, so exquisitely faithful to minute peculiarity, let alone the bunglings of men so certain of their pencil, so exquisitely keen to form, as Botticelli. As a matter of fact, every statue or drawn figure of this period represents a hard fight with ignorance and with unfamiliarity worse than ignorance. The grosser the failure hard-by, the more splendid the real achievement. For every limb modeled truthfully from the life, every gesture rendered correctly, every bone or muscle making itself felt under the skin, every crease or lump in the surface, is so much conquered from the unknown.

So long as this study, or rather this ignorance, continued, the antique could be appreciated only very partially, and almost exclusively in the points in which it differed least from the works of these modern men. It must have struck them by its unerring science, its great truthfulness to nature, but its superior beauty could not have appealed to artists too unfamiliar with form to think of selecting it.

The study of antique proportion, the reproduction of antique types, so visible in the sculptures of Michelangelo, of Cellini, and of Sansovino, and no less in the painting of Raphael, of Andrea, and even of the later Venetians, was very unimportant in the school of Donatello; and it is probable that he and his pupils did not even perceive the difference between their own works and the old marbles, which they studied merely as so many realistic documents.

During his Florentine days Domenico Neroni, like his masters, was unconscious of the real superiority of the antique, and blind to its difference from what his contemporaries and himself were striving to produce. He did not perceive that the David of Donatello and that of Verrocchio were unlike the marble gods and heroes with whom he would complacently compare them, nor that the bas-reliefs of the divine Ghiberti were far more closely connected with the Gothic work of Orcagna, even of the Pisans, than with those sculptured sarcophagi collected by Cosimo and Piero dei Medici. It was only when his insatiate curiosity had exhausted those problems of anatomy which had still troubled his teachers that he was able to see what the antique really was, or rather to see that the modern was not the same thing. Ghirlandaio, Filippino, Signorelli, and Botticelli undoubtedly were affected by a similar intuition of the Antique; but they were diverted from its thorough investigation by the manifold other problems of painting as distinguished from sculpture, and by the vagueness, the unconsciousness of great creative activity: the antique became one of the influences in their development, helping very quietly to enlarge and refine their work.

It was different with Domenico, in whom the man of science was much more powerful than the artist. His nature required definite decisions and distinct formulas. It took him some time to understand that the school of Donatello differed absolutely from the antique, but the difference once felt, it appeared to him with extraordinary clearness.

He never put his thoughts into words, and probably never admitted even to himself that the works he had most admired were lacking in beauty; he merely asserted that the statues of the old Romans and Greeks were astonishingly beautiful. In reality, however, he was perpetually comparing the two, and always to the disadvantage of the moderns. It is possible in our day to judge justly the comparative merits of antique sculpture and of that of the early Renaissance; or rather to appreciate them as two separate sorts of art, delightful in quite different ways, letting ourselves be charmed not more by the actual beauty of form and nobility of movement of the one than by the simplicity, the very homeliness, the essentially human quality of the other. To us there is something delightful in the very fact that the Davids of Donatello and Verrocchio are mere ordinary striplings from the street and the workshop, that the singers of Luca della Robbia are simple unfledged choir-boys, and the Virgins of Mino Florentine fine ladies; we have enough of antique perfection, we have had too much of pseudo-antique faultlessness, and we feel refreshed by this unconsciousness of beauty and ugliness. A contemporary could not enter into such feelings, he could not enjoy his own and his fellows' *naïveté*; besides, the antique was only just becoming manifest, and therefore triumphant. To Domenico, Donatello's David became more and more unsatisfactory, faulty above the waist, positively ungainly below, weak and lubberly; how could so divine an artist have been satisfied with that flat back, those narrow shoulders and thick thighs? He felt freer to dislike the work of Verrocchio, his own teacher, and a man without Donatello's overwhelming genius; that David of his, with his immense head and wizened face, his pitiful child's arms and projecting clavicles, straddling with hand on hip; was it possible that a great hero, the slayer of a giant (Domenico's notions of giants were taken rather from the romances of chivalry recited in the market than from study of Scripture) should have been made like that? And so, like his great contemporary Mantegna in far-off Lombardy, Domenico turned that eager curiosity with which he had previously sought for the secret of flayed limbs and fleshless skeletons, to studying the mystery of proportion and beauty which was hidden, more subtly and hopelessly, in the broken marbles of the Pagans.

It happened one day, somewhere about the year 1485, that he was called to examine a group of Bacchus and a Faun, recently brought from Naples by the banker Neri Altoviti, of the family which once owned a charming house, recently destroyed, whose triple row of pillared balconies used to put an odd Florentine note into the Papal Rome, turning the swirl of the Tiber opposite Saint Angelo's into a reach of the Arno. The houses of the Altovitis in Florence were in that portion of the town most favored by the fifteenth century, already a little way from the market: the lion on the tower of the Podestà, and the Badia steeple printing the sky close by; while not far off was the shop where the good bookseller Vespasiano received orders for manuscripts, and conversed with the humanists whose lives he was to write. The Albizis and Pandolfinis, illustrious and numerous families, struck in so many of their members by the vindictiveness of the Medicis, had their houses in the same quarter, and at the corner of the narrow street hung the carved escutcheon—two fishes rampant—of the Pazzis: their house shut up and avoided by the citizens, who had so recently seen the conspirators dangling in hood and cape from the windows of the public palace. The house of the Altovitis was occupied on the ground floor by great warehouses, whose narrow, grated windows were attainable only by a steep flight of steps. The court was surrounded on three sides by a cloister or portico, which repeated itself on the first and second floors, with the difference that the lowest arches were supported by rude square pillars, ornamented with only a carved marigold, while the uppermost weighed on stout oaken shafts, between which ropes were stretched for the drying of linen; and the middle colonnade consisted of charming Tuscan columns, where Sirens and Cupids and heraldic devices replaced the

acanthus or rams' horns of the capitals. It was to this middle portion of the house that Domenico ascended up a noble steep-stepped staircase, protected from the rain by a vaulted and rosetted roof, for it was external and occupied the side of the yard left free from cloisters. The great banker had bidden Domenico to his midday meal, which was served with a frugality now fast disappearing, but once habitual even among the richest Florentines. But though the food was simple and almost scanty, nearly forty persons sat down to meat together, for Neri Altoviti held to the old plan, commended by Alberti in his dialogue on the governing of a household, that the clerks and principal servants of a merchant were best chosen among his own kinsfolk, living under his roof, and learning obedience from the example of his children. Despite this frugality, the dining-room was, though bare, magnificent. There were none of those carpets and Eastern stuffs which surprised strangers from the North in the voluptuous little palaces of contemporary Venetians, and the benches were hard and narrow. But the ceiling overhead was magnificently arranged in carved compartments, great gold sunflowers and cherubs projecting from a dark blue ground among the brown rafters; in the middle of the stenciled wall was one of those high sideboards so frequently shown in old paintings, covered with gold and silver dishes and platters embossed by the most skillful craftsmen; and at one end a great washing trough and fountain, such as still exist in sacristies, ornamented with groups of dancing children by Benedetto da Maiano; while behind the high seat of the father of the family a great group of saints, emerging from blooming lilies and surrounded by a glory of angels, was hanging in a frame divided into carved compartments: the work, panel and frame, of the late Brother Filippo Lippi. At one end of the board sat all the men, arranged hierarchically, from the father in his black loose robe to lads in short plaited tunic and striped hose; the womankind were seated together, and the daughters, even the mother of the house, modest and almost nunlike in apparel and headdress, would rise and help to wait on the men, with that silent and grave courtesy which, according to Vespasiano, had disappeared from Florence and Alessandra dei Bardi. There was little speech, and only in undertones; a Franciscan said a long grace, and afterwards, and in the middle of the meal, a young student, educated by the frequent munificence of the Altovitis, read out loud a chapter of Cicero's "De Senectute;" for Neri, although a busy banker, with but little time for study, was not behind his generation in the love of letters and philosophy.

After meat Messer Neri dismissed the rest of the company to their various avocations; the ladies silently retired to superintend the ironing and mending of the house linen, and Domenico was escorted by his host to see the newly arrived piece of statuary. It had been placed already in the banker's closet, where he could feast his eyes on its perfection while attending to his business or improving his mind by study. This closet, compared to the rest of the house, was small and low-roofed. At its end, as we see in the pictures of Van Eyck and Memling, opened out the conjugal chamber, reflecting its vast, red-covered bed, raised several steps, its crucifix and praying-stool, and its latticed window in a circular mirror framed in cut facets, which hung opposite on the wall of the closet. The latter was dark, a single trefoiled window admitting on either side of its column and through its greenish bottle-glass but little light from the narrow street. The chief furniture consisted of shelves carrying books, small antique bronzes, some globes, a sand-glass, and panel cupboards, ornamented with pictures of similar objects, and with ingenious perspectives of inlaid wood. An elaborate iron safe, painted blue and studded with beautiful metal roses, stood in a corner. There were two or three arm-chairs of carved oak for visitors. The master sat upon a bench behind an oaken counter or desk, very much like St. Jerome in his study. On the wall behind, and above his head, hung a precious Flemish painting (Flemish paintings were esteemed for their superior devoutness) representing the Virgin at the

foot of the Cross, with a Nativity and a Circumcision on either of the opened shutters. It made a glowing patch of vivid geranium and wine color, of warm yellow glazing on the oak of the wall. On the counter or writing-table stood a majolica pot with three lilies in it, a pile of manuscript and ledgers, and a human skull alongside of a crucifix, beautifully wrought of bronze by Desiderio da Settignano. A Latin translation of Plato's "Phædo" was spread open on the desk, together with one of the earliest printed copies of the "Divine Comedy."

Messer Neri did not take his seat at the counter, but, after a pause, and with sonic solemnity, drew a curtain of dark brocade which had been spread across one end of the closet, and displayed his new purchase.

"I have it from the king, for the settling of a debt of a thousand crowns contracted with my father, when he was Duke of Calabria," said the banker, with due appreciation of the sum. "'Tis said they found it among the ruins of that famous palace of the Emperor Tiberius of which Tacitus has told us."

The two marble figures, to which time and a long sojourn underground had given a brownish yellow color, reddish in places with rust stains, stood out against a background of Flemish tapestry, whose emaciated heads of kings and thin bodies of warrior saints made a confused pattern on the general dusky blue and green. The group was in wonderful preservation: the figure of Bacchus intact, that of the young faun lacking only the arm, which had evidently been freely extended.

It exists in many repetitions and variations in most of our museums; a work originally of the school of Praxiteles, but in none of the copies handed to us of excellence sufficient to display the hand of the original sculptor. Besides, we have been spoiled by familiarity with an older and more powerful school, by knowledge of a few great masterpieces, for complete appreciation of such a work. But it was different four hundred years ago; and Domenico Neroni stood long and entranced before the group. The principal figure embodied all those beauties which he had been striving so hard to understand: it was, in the most triumphant manner, the absolute reverse of the figures of Donatello.

The young god was represented walking with leisurely but vigorous step, supporting himself upon the shoulder of the little satyr as the vine supports itself, with tendrils trailed about branches and trunk, on the propping tree from which the child Ampelos took his name. Like the head with its elaborately dressed curls, the beautiful body had an amplex and tenderness that gave an impression almost womanly till you noticed the cuirasslike sit of the chest on the loins, and the compressed strength of the long light thighs. The creature, as you looked at him, seemed to reveal more and more, beneath the roundness and fairness of surface, the elasticity and Strength of an athlete in training. But when the eye was not exploring the delicate, hard, and yet supple depressions and swellings of the muscles, the slender shapeliness of the long legs and springy feet, the back bulging with strong muscles above, and going in, tight, with a magnificent dip at the waist; all impressions were merged in a sense of ease, of suavity, of full-blown harmony. Here was no pomp of anatomical lore, of cunning handicraft, but the life seemed to circulate strong and gentle in this exquisite effortless body. And the creature was not merely alive with a life more harmonious than that of living men or carved marbles, but beautiful, equally in simple outline if you chose that, and in subtle detail when that came under your notice, with a beauty that seemed to multiply itself, existing in all manners, as it can only in things that have life, in perfect flowers and fruits, or high-bred Oriental horses. Of such things did the under-strata of consciousness consist in Neroni—vague impressions of certain bunches of grapes with their great rounded leaves hanging against the blue sky, of the flame-like tapered petals of

wild tulips in the fields, of the golden brown flanks of certain horses, and the broad white foreheads of the Umbrian bullocks; forming as it were a background for the perception of this god, for no man or woman had ever been like unto him.

Domenico remained silent, his arms folded on his breast; it was not a case for talking.

But the young man who had read Cicero aloud at table had come up behind him, and thought it more seemly to praise his patron's new toy, while at the same time displaying his learning; so he cleared his throat, and said in a pompous manner:—

“It is stated in the fifth chapter of the Geography of Strabo that the painter Parrhasius, having been summoned by the inhabitants of Lindos to make them an image of their tutelary hero Hercules, obtained from the son of Jupiter that he should appear to him in a dream, and thus enable him worthily to portray the perfections of a demigod. Might we not be tempted to believe that the divine son of Semele had vouchsafed a similar boon to the happy sculptor of this marble?”

But Domenico only bit his thumb and sighed very heavily.

IV

To the men of those days, which have taken their name from the revival of classical studies, Antiquity, although studied and sped till its phrases, feelings, and thoughts had entered familiarity into all life, remained, nevertheless, a period of permanent miracle. It was natural, therefore, to the contemporaries of Poggius and Æneas Sylvius, of Ficinus and Politian, that the art of the Romans and Greeks should, like their poetry, philosophy, and even their virtues, be of transcendent and unqualified splendor. Why it should be thus they asked as little as why the sun shines, medieval men as they really were, and accepting quite simply certain phenomena as the result of inscrutable virtues. Even later, when Machiavelli began to examine why the ancients had been more valorous and patriotic than his contemporaries, nay, when Montaigne expounded with skeptical cynicism the superior sanity and wisdom of Pagan days, people were satisfied to think—when they thought at all—that antique art was excellent because it belonged to antiquity. And it was not till the middle of the eighteenth century that the genius of Winkelmann brought into fruitful contact the study of ancient works of art, and that of the manners and notions of antiquity, showing the influence of a civilization which cultivated bodily beauty as an almost divine quality, and making us see behind that beautiful nation of marble the generations of living athletes, among whom the sculptor had found his critics and his models.

To a man like Domenico Neroni, devoid of classical learning and accustomed to struggling with anatomy and perspective, the problem of ancient art was not settled by the fact of its antiquity. He had gone once more to Rome on purpose to see as many old marbles as possible, and he brought to their study the feverish curiosity with which in former years he had flayed and cut up corpses and spent his nights in calculations of perspective. To such a mind, where modern scientific methods were arising among medieval habits of allegory and mysticism, the statues and reliefs which he was perpetually analyzing became a sort of subsidiary nature, whose riddles might be read by other means than mere investigation; for do not the forces of Nature, its elemental spirits, give obedience to wonderful words and potent combinations of numbers?

Certain significant facts had flashed across his mind in his studies of that almost abstract, nay, almost cabalistic thing, the science of bodily proportions. It was plain that the mystery of antique beauty—the ancient symmetry, *symmetria prisca* as a humanist designs it in his epitaph for Leonardo da Vinci—was but a matter of numbers. For a man's length, if he stand with

outstretched arms, is the same from finger tip to finger tip as his length when erect from head to feet, namely, eight times the length of his head. Now eight heads, if divided into halves, give four as the measure of throat and thorax; and four heads to the length of the leg from the acetabulum to the heel, divided themselves into two heads going to the thigh and two heads to the shank; while in the cross measurement two heads equal the breadth of the chest, and three measure the length from the shoulder to the middle finger. These measures—a mere rough rule of thumb in our eyes—contained to this medieval mind the promise of some great mystery. To him, accustomed to hear all the occurrences of Nature, and all human concerns referred to astrological calculations, and conceiving the universe as governed by spirits—in shape, perhaps, like the Primum Mobile, the Mercurius and Jupiter of Mantegna's playing cards, crowned with stars and poised upon globes—it was as if the divine rod were turning pertinaciously to one spot in the earth, where, had he but the necessary tools, he must strike upon veins of the purest gold, or cause water to spurt high in the air. This number *eight*, and the pertinacity of its recurrence, puzzled him intensely.

It seemed to point so clearly, much as in music the sensitive seventh points to the tonic, to a sort of resolution on the number nine. And if only nine could be established, it would seem to explain so much. . . . For five being man's numeral in creation (and is not the measurement of his face also *five eyes?*), it makes, when added to four, the number of the material elements over which he dominates, *nine*, which would thus represent the supremacy or perfection of man. Man's power of reproduction being represented by three, its multiple nine would be still more obviously important. How to turn this eight into nine became Domenico's study, and he took measurement after measurement for this purpose. At length he remembered that man's body is a unity, therefore represented by the number one, and that will, judgment, and supremacy are also comprised in the unit. Now one and eight make nine beyond all possibility of doubt, and the formula—"man's body is a unity—or one"—composed of harmonies of eight, would give the formula *nine* meaning *man's supremacy is expressed in his body*. The importance of working round to this famous nine will be clear when we reflect that, according to the Kabbala and the lost sacred book of Hermes Trismegistus—the Pimandra, doubtless, which he is represented, on the floor of Siena Cathedral, as offering to a Jew and a Gentile—nine represents the sun and all beautiful bright things that draw their influence from it, as the gleam of beaten gold, the rustle of silken stuffs, the smell of the flower heliotrope, and all such men as delineate human beings with colors, or make their effigy in stone or metal; moreover, Phoebus Apollo, whom the poets describe as the most beautiful of the gods, as indeed he is represented in all statues and reliefs.

Domenico would often discuss these matters with a learned man who greatly frequented his company. This was the humanist Niccolò Feo, known as Filarete. Filarete was a native of Southern Apulia, a bastard of the house of the Counts of Sulmona, who, in order to prevent any plots against the legitimate branch, had handsomely provided for him in an abbey of which they enjoyed the patronage. But his restless spirit drove him from the cloister, and impelled him to long and adventurous journeys. He had traveled in India and the East, and in Greece, returning to Italy only when Constantinople fell before the Turks. During these years he had acquired immense learning, considerable wealth, and a vaguely sinister reputation. He had been persecuted by Paul II for taking part in the famous banquets, savoring oddly of Paganism, of Pomponius Lætus; but the late Pontiff Sixtus IV had taken him into his favor together with Platina, one of his fellow-sufferers in the castle of St. Angelo. He was now old, and, after a life of study, adventure, and possibly of sin, was living in affluence in a house given him by the illustrious Cardinal at St. Peter ad Vinculas, who had also obtained him a canonry of St. John

Lateran. He was busying his last year in a great work of fancy and erudition, for which he required the assistance of a skillful draftsman and connoisseur of antiquities, than whom none could suit him so well as Domenico Neroni.

The book of Filarete, of which the rare copies are among the most precious relics of the Renaissance, was a strange mixture of romance, allegory, and encyclopedic knowledge, such as had been common in the Middle Ages, and was still fashionable during the revival of letters, which merely added the element of classical learning. Like the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of Francesco Colonna, of which it was doubtless the prototype, the *Alcandros* of Filarete, though never carried beyond the first volume, is an amazing and wearisome display of the author's archaeological learning. It contains exact descriptions of all the rarities of ancient art, and of things Oriental which he had seen, amid pages of transcripts from obscure Latin and Greek authors, descriptive of religious ceremonies; varied with Platonic philosophy, Decameronian obscenities, in labored pseudo-Florentine style, and Dantesque visions, all held together by the confused narrative of an allegorical journey performed by the author. It is protusely ornamented with woodcuts, representing architectural designs of a fantastic, rather Oriental description, restorations of ancient buildings, reproductions of antique inscriptions and designs, and last, but far from least, a certain number of small compositions, of Mantegnesque quality, but Botticellian charm, showing the various adventures of the hero in terrible woods, delicious gardens, and in the company of nymphs, demigods, and allegorical personages. These latter are undoubtedly from the hand of Domenico Neroni; and it was while discussing these delightful damsels seated with lutes and psalteries under vine-trellises, these scholars in cap and gown, weeping in quaint chambers with canopied beds and carnations growing on the window, these processions—suggesting Mantegna's Triumph of Julius Cæsar— of priests and priestesses with victories and trophies, that the painter from Volterra and the Apulian humanist would discuss the secret of antique beauty—discuss it for hours, surrounded by the precious manuscripts and inscriptions, the fragments of sculpture, the Eastern rarities, of Filarete's little house on the Quirinal hill, or among the box-hedges, clipped cypresses, and fountains of his garden; while the riots and massacres, the fanatical processions and feudal wars, of medieval Rome raged unnoticed below. For Pope Sixtus and his Riarios, and Pope Innocent and his Cybos, thirsting for power and gold, drunken with lust and bloodshed, were benign and courteous patrons of all art and all learning.

V

But that number nine, attained with so much difficulty, although it put the human proportion into visible connection with the sun, with beaten gold, the smell of the heliotrope, and the god Apollo, and opened a vista of complicated astral influences, did not in reality bring Domenico one step nearer the object of his desires. It had enabled those ancient men to make statues that were perfectly beautiful, that was obvious; but it did not make his own figures one tittle less hideous, for he felt them now to be absolutely hideous. One wintry day, as he was roaming amongst the fallen pillars and arches, thickly covered with myrtle and ilex, of the desolate region beyond what had once been the Forum and was now the cattle-market, there came across Domenico's mind, while he watched a snake twisting in the grass, the remembrance of a certain anecdote about a Greek painter, to whom Hercules had shown himself in a vision. He had heard it, without taking any notice, two years before, from the young scholar who read Cicero at table for Messer Neri Altoviti; and although he had thought of it several times, it had never struck him except as one of the usual impudent displays of learning of the parasitic tribe of humanists.

But at this moment the remembrance of this fact came as a great light into Domenico's soul. For what were these statues save the idols of the heathens; and what wonder they should be divinely beautiful, when those who made them might see the gods in visions?

This explanation, which to us must sound far-fetched and fantastic, knowing, as we do, the real reason that made a people of athletes into a people of sculptors, savored of no strangeness to a man of the Middle Ages. Visions of superhuman creatures were among the most undisputed articles of his belief, anti among the commonest subjects of his art. Had not the Blessed Virgin appeared to St. Bernard, the Savior among His cherubim to St. Francis—the very stones shown at La Vernia where it had happened—the Divine Bridegroom to Catherine of Siena? Had not St. Anthony of Padua held the Divine Child in his arms? And all not so long ago? Besides, every year there was some nun or monk claiming to have conversed with Christ and His court; and the heavens were opening quite frequently in the walls of cells and the clefts of hermitages. And did not Dante relate a journey into Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise? It was perfectly natural that what was constantly happening to holy men and women nowadays should have happened in Pagan times also; and what men could so well have deserved a visit from gods as those who spent their lives faithfully portraying them? The story of Parrhasius and his vision was familiar ground to a man accustomed to see, in all corners of Italy, portraits of the Savior painted by St. Luke, or finished, like the famous Holy Face of Lucca, by angels. For an absolute contempt for the artistic value of such miraculous images did not, in the mind of Neroni, throw any doubt on their authenticity; in the same way that the passion for antiquity, the hankering after Pagan beliefs, did not probably interfere with the orthodoxy of so many of the humanists. Domenico, besides, remembered that Virgil and Ovid, whom he had not read, but whose fables he had sometimes been asked to illustrate, were constantly talking of visions of gods and goddesses, nay, of their descending upon earth to unite themselves with mortals in love or friendship, for he had had to furnish designs for woodcuts representing Diana and Endymion, Jupiter and Ganymede, the gods coming to Philemon and Baucis, and Apollo tending the herds of Admetus. Neither did it occur to Domenico's mind that the existence of the old gods might be a mere invention, or a mere delusion of the heathen. For all their classic culture, the men of the fifteenth century, as the men of the thirteenth for all their scholasticism, were in an intellectual condition such as we rarely meet with nowadays among educated persons; and Domenico, a mere handicraftsman, had not learned from the study of Cicero and Plato to examine and understand the difference between reality and fiction. To him a scene which was frequently painted, an adventure which was written down and could be read, was necessarily a reality. Dante had spoken of the gods, and what Dante said was evidently true, the allegorical meaning, the metaphor, entirely escaping this simple mind; and Virgil, Homer, Ovid told the most minute details about gods and goddesses, and they themselves were grave and learned men. Domenico did not even think that the ancient gods were dead. Of course heaven was now occupied by Christ and His saints, those heavenly hosts of whom he would think, when he thought of them at all, as seated stepwise on a great stand, blue and pink and green in dress, golden discs about their heads, and an atmosphere of fretted gold, of swirling stenciled golden angels' wings all round them, and God the Father, a great triangle blazing with Alpha and Omega, above Jesus enthroned, and His mother; and it was they who ruled things here, and to them he said his prayers night and morning, and knelt in church. But *here*, somehow did not cover the whole universe, nor did that pink and blue and gold miniature painter's heaven extend everywhere, although, of course, somehow or other it did. Anyhow, it was certain that not so very far off there were Saracens and Turks—why he had seen some of the Duke of Calabria's Turkish garrison—who believed in Macomet, Trevigant, and Apohhinis;

these to be sure were false gods (the word *false* carried no clear meaning to his mind, or if any, one rather equivalent to *wrong*, *objectionable* rather than to non-existent), but they certainly worked wonderful miracles for their people. And indeed—here Domenico’s placid contemplation of the kingdom of Macomet, Tregiant, and Apohhinis was exchanged for a vague horror, shot with gleams of curiosity—the devil also had his place in the world, a place much nearer and universal, and did marvelous things, pointing out treasures, teaching the future, lending invulnerable strength to the men and women who worshiped him, of whom some might be pointed out to you in every town—yes, grave and respectable men, priests and monks among them, and even Cardinals of Holy Church, as every one knew quite well. . . . So that, in a confused manner, rather negative than positive, Domenico considered that the Pagan gods must be somewhere or other. The past and present not very clearly separated in his mind, or rather the past existing in a peculiar simultaneous manner with the present, as a sort of St. Brandan’s isle, in distant, unattainable seas; or as Dante’s mountain of Purgatory, a very solid mountain indeed, yet which, for some mysterious and unquestioned reason, people never stumbled upon except after death. All this was scarcely an actual series of arguments; it was rather the arguments which, with much effort, Domenico might have fished out of his obscure consciousness had you summoned him to explain how the ancient gods could possibly be immortal. As to him, he had always heard of them as immortal, and although he had not been taught any respect or love for them as for Christ, the Madonna, and the saints, they must be existing somewhere since *immortal* means that which cannot die.

But now he began to feel a certain shyness about immortal gods, for they had begun to occupy his thoughts, and it was with much cunning that he put questions to his friend Filarete, desirous to gain information on certain points without actually seeming to ask it. The humanist, summoned to explain what the Fathers of the Church—those worthies crowned with miters and offering rolls of manuscript, whom Domenico had occasionally to portray for his customers—said about the ancient gods, answered with much glibness but considerable contempt, for the Greek and Latin of these saintly philosophers inspired the learned man with a feeling of nausea. He got out of a chest several volumes covered with dust, and began to quote the “Apology” of Justin Martyr, the “Legation” of Athenagoras, the “Apology” of Tertullian and Lactantius, whose very name caused him to writhe with philological loathing. And he told Domenico that it was the opinion of these holy but ill-educated persons that demons assumed the name and attributes of Jupiter, of Venus, of Apollo and Bacchus, lurking in temples, instituting festivals and sacrifices, and were often allowed by Heaven to distract the faithful by a display of miracles.

“Then they are devils?” asked Domenico, trying to follow.

A smile passed over the beautifully cut mouth, the noble, wrinkled face—like that of the marble Seneca—of the old humanist.

“Talk of devils to the barefoot friar who preaches in the midst of the market-place,” he said, “not to Filarete. The whole world, air, fire, earth, water, the entire universe is governed by demons, and they inspire our noblest thoughts. Hast never heard of the familiar demon of Socrates, whispering to him superhuman wisdom? Yes, indeed, Venus, Apollo, Æsculapius, Jove, the stars and planets, the winds and tides are demons. But thou canst not understand such matters, my poor Domenieo. So get thee to Brother Baldassare of Palermo, and ask him questions.

But Filarete’s expression was very different when, one day, Domenico shyly inquired concerning the truth of that story of Parrhasius and the Hercules of Lindos. Strange rumors were current in Rome of unholy festivities in which Filarete and other learned men—some of those

whom Paul II had thrown into prison—had once taken part. They had not merely laid their tables and spread their couches according to descriptions contained in ancient authors; but, crowned with roses, laurel, myrtle, or parsley, had sung hymns to the heathen gods, and, it was whispered, poured out libations and burned incense in their honor. Their friends, indeed, had answered scornfully that these were but amusements of learned men; not to be taken more seriously than the invocations to the gods and muses in their poems, than the mythological subjects which the Popes themselves selected to adorn their dwellings. And doubtless this explanation was correct. Yet the pleasure of these little pedantic and artistic mummeries, which took place in suburban gardens,- while the townsfolk streamed in the hot June nights, decked with bunches of cloves and of lavender, to make bonfires in the empty places near the Lateran, little guessing that their ancestors had once done the same in honor of the neighboring Venus—the innocent childishness of these learned men was perhaps spiced, for some individuals at least, by a momentary belief in the gods of the old poets, by a sudden forbidden fervor for the exiled divinities of Virgil and Ovid, under whose reign the world had been young, men had been free to love and think, and Rome, now the object of the world's horror and contempt, had been the world's triumphant mistress. But these had been mere mummeries, mere child's play, and the soul of Filarete had thirsted for a reality. He could not have answered had you asked whether he believed in the absolute existence and power of the old gods, any more than whether he disbelieved in the power of Christ and His avenging angels; his cultivated and skeptical mind was, after all, in a state of disorder similar to that of Domenico's ignorance. All that he knew with certainty was that Christ and His worship represented to him all that was unnatural, cruel, foolish, and hypocritical; while the gods were associated with every thought of liberty, of beauty, and of glory. And so, one evening, after working up still further the enthusiasm, the passionate desire of his friend, he told Domenico that, if he chose, he too perhaps might see a god.

In his antiquarian rambles Filarete had discovered, a mile or two outside the southern gates of Rome, a subterranean chamber, richly adorned with stuccoes—known nowadays as the tomb of certain members of the Flavian family, but which, thanks to the defective knowledge of his day and the habit of seeing people buried in churches, the humanist had mistaken for a temple—intact, and scarcely desecrated, of the Eleusinian Bacchus. Above its vaults, barely indicated by a higher mound in the waving ground of the pasture land, had once stood a Christian church, as ancient almost as the supposed temple below, whose Byzantine columns lay half hidden by the high grass, and the walls of whose apse had become overgrown by ivy and weeds, the nest of lazy snakes. The Gothic soldiers, Arians or heathens, who had burned down, in some drunken bout, the little church above-ground, had penetrated at the same time into the tomb beneath in search of treasure, and finding none, dispersed the bones in the sarcophagi they had opened. They had left open the aperture leading downward, which had been matted over by a thick growth of ivy and wild clematis. One day, while surveying the remains of the Christian church, always in hopes of discovering in it a former temple of the Pagans. Filarete had walked into that tuft of solid green, and found himself, buried and half stunned, in the mouth of the tomb below. It was through this that he bade Domenico follow him, bearing a certain mysterious package in his cloak, one January day of the year fourteen hundred and eighty-eight.

Above-ground it had frozen in the night; here below, when they had descended the rugged sepulchral stairs, the air had a damp warmth, an odd feel of inhabitation. Above-ground, also, everything lay in ruins, while here all was intact. As the light of the torches moved slowly along the vaulted and stuccoed ceilings, it showed the delicate lines of a profusion of little reliefs and ornaments, fresh as if cast and colored yesterday. Slender garlands of leaves, and long knotted

ribbons and veils in lowest relief partitioned the space; and framed by them, now round, now oval, now oblong, were medallions of naked gods banqueting and playing games, of satyrs and nymphs dancing, nereids swinging on the hacks of hippocamps, tritons curling their tails and blowing their horns, Cupids fluttering among griffins and chimeras; a life of laughter and love, which mocked the eye, starting into vividness in one place, dying away in a mere film where the torchlight pressed on too closely in others. All along the walls, below the line of the stuccoes, were excavated shelves, on which stood numbers of small cinerary boxes, each bearing a name. In the middle of the vaulted chamber was a huge stone coffin, carved with reveling Bacchantes, and grim tragic masks at its corners; and all round the coffin, broken in one of its flanks by the tools of the treasure-seeker, lay bones and skulls, dispersed on the damp ground even as the Goths had left them.

It was this sarcophagus which, with its Dionysiac revels, and the name of one Dionysius carved on it, a freedman of the Flavians, had led Filarete to consider the tomb as a kind of temple consecrated to Bacchus.

Filarete bade Domenico stick the pointed end of his torch into the mouth of an amphora standing erect in a corner, and began to unpack the load they had brought on a mule. It looked like the preparation for a feast: there were loaves of bread, fruit, a flask of choice wine; and Domenico, for a moment, thought the old man mad. But his feelings changed when Filarete produced a set of silver lamps, and bade him trim and light them, placing them on the ledges alongside of the cinerary urns: and when he lit some strange incense and filled the place with its smoke. Despite the many descriptions of ancient sacrifices with which the humanist had entertained him, Domenico had brought a vague notion of a raising of devils, and felt relieved at the absence of brimstone fumes, and of the magic books that accompanied them.

Although more passionately longing—he knew not, he dared not tell himself for what—Domenico did not come with the curious exaltation of spirits of his companion, all whose antiquarian lore had gone to his head, and who really imagined himself to be a genuine Pagan engaged in Pagan rites. For Filarete the ceremony was everything; for Domenico it was merely a means, a sort of sacrilegious juggling, into which he had not inquired more particularly, which was to give him the object of his wishes at the price of great peril to his soul. But when the subterranean chamber was filled with a cloud of incense, through which, in the dim yellow light of the lamp, the naked gods and goddesses on the vault, the satyrs and nymphs, the Tritons and Bacchantes seemed to float in and out of sight, a feeling of awe, of an unknown kind of reverence and rapture, began to fill his soul, and his eyes became fixed on the lid of the carved sarcophagus—vague images of Christian resurrections mingling with his hopes—Would the god appear?

Filarete, meanwhile, had enveloped his head in a long linen veil, and, after washing his hands thrice in a golden basin brought for the purpose, he placed some faggots on the sarcophagus, lit them, and throwing grains of incense and of salt alternately into the flames, began to chant in an unknown tongue, which Domenico guessed to be Greek. Then beckoning to the painter, who was kneeling, as at church, in a corner, he bade him unpack a basket matted over with leaves, whose movements and sounds had puzzled Domenico as he carried it down. In great surprise, and with a vague sense of he knew not what, he handed its contents to Filarete. It was a miserable little lamb, newly born, its long, soft lees tied together, its almost sightless, pale eyes half-started from its sockets. As the humanist took it, it bleated with sudden shrill strength, and Domenico could not help thinking of certain images he had seen on monastery walls of the Good Shepherd carrying the lame lamb on his shoulders. This was very different. For, with an odd ferocity,

Filarete placed the miserable young creature on the stone before the fire, and slit its throat and chest with a long knife.

The god did not appear. They extinguished the lamps, left the carcass of the lamb half charred in a pool of blood on the stone, and slowly reascended into the daylight, leaving behind them, in the vaulted chamber, a stifling fume of incense, of burnt flesh, and mingled damp.

Up above, among the ruins of the Christian church, where they had left their mules, it was cold and sunny, and the light seemed curiously blue, almost gray and dusty, after the yellow illumination below. Before them, interrupted here and there by a mass of ruined masonry, or a few arches of aqueduct, waved the gray-green, billowy plain, where the wind, which rolled the great winter cloud-balls overhead, danced and sang with the tall, dry hemlocks and sere white thistles, shining and rattling like skeletons. And on to it seemed to descend cloud-mountains, vague blueness and darkness—cloud or hill, you could not tell which—out of whose flank, ever and anon, a sunbeam conjured up a visionary white resplendent city.

The short winter day was beginning to draw in when they approached silently the city walls, solemn with their towers and gates, endless as it seemed, and enclosing, one felt vaguely, an endless, distant, invisible city.

The sound of its bells came as from afar to meet the sacrilegious men.

VI

The culminating sacrilege was yet to come. The place that witnessed it remains unchanged—a half-deserted church among the silent grass-grown lanes, the crumbling convent walls, and ill-tended vineyards of the Aventine; a hill that has retained in Christian times a look of its sinister fame in Pagan ones. Among the cypresses, which seem to wander up the hillside, rises the square belfry, among whose brickwork, flushed in the sunset, are inlaid discs of porphyry torn from some temple pavement, and plates of green majolica brought from the East, it is said, by pilgrims or Crusaders. The arum-fringed lane widens before the outer wall of the church, overtopped by its triangular gable. Behind this wall is a yard or atrium, the pavement grass-grown, the walls stained with great patches of mildew, and showing here and there in their dilapidation the shaft and capital of a bricked-up Ionic pillar. The place tells of centuries of neglect, of the gradual invasion of resistless fever; and it was fitly chosen, some fifty years ago, for the abode of a community of Trappists. In the reign of Innocent VIII it was still nominally in the hands of certain Cistercians; but the fever had long driven these monks to the more wholesome end of the hill, where they had erected a smaller church; and the convent had served for years as a fortress of the turbulent family of the Capranicas, one of whose members was always the nominal abbot, with the Cardinal's hat, and title Jervase and Protasius. And now, at the end of the fifteenth century, a Cardinal Ascanio Capranica, famous for his struggle in magnificence and sinfulness with the magnificent and sinful young nephews of Pope Sixtus, had determined to restore the fortified monastery, to combat the fever by abundant plantations, and to make the church a monument of his splendor. And, in order to secure some benefit by his own munificence, he had begun by commissioning Domenico Neroni to design and execute a sepulcher three stories high, full of carvings, and covered with statues, so that his soul, if sent untimely to heaven, might not be dishonored by the unworthy resting-place of its trusty companion, the Cardinal's handsome and well-tended body.

This church of SS. Jervase and Protasius, which imitated, like most churches of the early Christian period, the form of a basilica or court of law, was constructed out of fragments of

Pagan edifices, and occupied the site of a Pagan edifice, whose columns had been employed to carry the roof of the church, or, when of porphyry or serpentine, had been sawed into discs for the pavement. On the slant of the hill, supporting the apse, encircled by pillarets, is a round mass of masonry, overgrown with ivy and ilex scrub, the remains of some antique bath or grotto; and under the battlemented walls, the cloistered courts of the convent, there stretches, it is said, a network of subterranean passages running down to the Tiber. Four hundred years ago they were not to be discovered if looked for, being completely hidden by the fallen masonry and the cypress roots and growths of poisonous plants—nightshade, and hemlock, and green-flowered hellebore; but wicked monks had sometimes been sucked into them while digging the ground, or decoyed into their labyrinths by devils. Was it possible that there had lingered on through the ages a vague and horrified remembrance of those rites, the discovery of whose mysterious and widespread abominations had frozen Rome with horror in her most high and palmy days; and was there a connection between those neophytes, wandering with blood-stained limbs and disheveled locks among the groves of the Aventine, then rushing to quench their burning torches in the Tiber, two centuries before Christ, and the devils who troubled the Benedictines of SS. Jervase and Protasius? These evil spirits would appear, it had been said, in the cloisters of the convent, processions carrying lights and garlands; and on certain nights, when the monks were in prayer in their cells, strange sounds would issue from the church itself, of flutes and timbrels, and demon laughter, and demon voices chanting some unknown litany, and clearly aping the mass; and Cardinal Capranica was blamed by many pious persons for his rash intention of filling once more the deserted convent, and exposing holy men to the wrath of such very pertinacious devils. Meanwhile mass upon mass was said to clear the place of this demoniac infection. In was in this church that the sacrilege of Domenico and Filarete rose to its highest, and that an event took place which the men of the fifteenth century could scarce find words to designate.

Domenico had grown tired of his friend's archaeological impieties. It gave him no satisfaction to pour out wine, burn incense, arrange garlands, and even cut the throats of animals according to a correct Pagan ritual. It was nothing to him that Horace and Ovid and Tibullus should have done alike. He was a good Christian, never doubting for a moment the power of the Blessed Virgin, the saints, and even the smallest and meanest priest, nor the heat of hell-fire. But he wanted to have the secret of antique proportions, and he was convinced that this secret could be communicated only by a Pagan divinity, just as certain theological mysteries, such as the use of the rosary, had been revealed to the saints by Christ or the Virgin. The Pagan gods were devils, and to hold communication with devils was mortal sin and sure damnation. But lots of people communicated with devils for much more paltry motives, for greed of gold or love of woman, and were yet saved by the intercession of some heavenly patron, or found it worth while not to be saved at all. Domenico, like them, put the question of salvation behind him. He might think of that afterwards, when he had possessed himself of the proportion of the ancients. At all events, at present he was willing to risk everything in order to attain that. He was determined to see that god of the heathens, not as he had seen him once in the house of Messer Neri Altoviti, cut out of marble, but alive, moving, speaking; for *that* was the god.

The god was a devil. Now it is well known that there is a way of compelling every devil to show himself, providing you use sufficiently strong spells. They had sacrificed goats and lambs enough, and had burned perfumes, and spilled wine sufficient for tine of Cardinal Riario's suppers. It was evidently not that sort of sacrifice which would rejoice the god or compel him to show himself. For weeks and weeks Domenico ruminated over the subject. And little by little

time logical, inevitable answer dawned upon his horrified but determined mind. For what was the sacrifice which witches and warlocks notoriously offered their Master?

The place could not be better chosen. This church was full, every one knew, of demons, who were certainly none other than the gods of the heathen, as Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and all those other holy doctors had written. It was deserted, its keys in the hands of Cardinal Capranica's confidential architect and decorator; and there were masses being said every holiday to scare the evil spirits. The sacrament was frequently left on the altar.

All this Domenico expounded frequently to Filarete. But Filarete's classic taste did not approve of Domenico's methods, which savored of vulgar witchcraft; perhaps also the learned man, who did not want the secret of antique proportion, recoiled from a degree of profanity and of danger, which his companion willingly incurred in such a quest as his. So Filarete demurred for a time, until at length his feebler nature took fire at Domenico's determination, and the guilty pair fixed upon the clay and place for this unspeakable sacrilege.

The Church of SS. Jervase and Protasius has undergone no change since the feast of Corpus Christi of the year 1488. The damp that lies in the atrium outside, making the grass and poppies sprout round the Byzantine pillar which carries a cross over a pine-cone, has invaded the flat-roofed nave and the wide aisles, separated from it by a single colonnade. A greenish mildew marks the fissures in the walls, rent here and there by landslips and earthquakes. The cipolline columns carrying the round arches on their square capitals are lusterless, and their green-veined marble looks like long-buried wood. The mosaic pavement stretches its discs and volutes of porphyry or yellowed Parian marble, a tarnished and uneven carpet, to the greenish-white marble steps of the chancel. The mosaics have long fallen out of the circle of the apse; and the frescos, painted by some obscure follower of Giotto, have left only a green vague stain over the arches of the aisle. Pictures of statues there are none, and no conspicuous sepulcher. Only, over the how entrance, a colossal wooden crucifix of the thirteenth century hangs at an angle from the wall, a painted Christ, stretching his writhing livid limbs in agony opposite the high altar. It was in this stately and desolate church, under the misty light that pours in through the wide windows of gray coarse glass, and on the marble altar facing that effigy of the dying Savior, that, in derision as it were of the miracle which the church commemorates on that feast-day, Domenico and Filarete were about to offer up to the demons Apollo, Bacchus, and Jove the freshly consecrated wafer, the very body and blood of Christ.

But an accomplice of theirs, a certain monk well-versed in magic, whom they employed in sundry details of devil-raising, on the score that they were seeking treasure hidden in the church, had suddenly been seized with qualms of conscience. Instead of appearing at the appointed time alone, and bearing certain necessaries of his art, he kept them waiting a full hour, until they began their proceedings without his assistance. And even as Domenico was reaching his companion the ostensorium, which had remained on the altar after the morning's mass, the church was surrounded by the officers of the Podestà on horseback, and by a crowd of monks and priests, and rabble who had followed them. Of these persons, not a few affirmed in after years, that, as they arrived at the church door, they had heard sounds of flutes and timbrels, and mocking songs filling the place; and that the devil, dressed in skins and garlands like a wild man of the woods, had cleft the roof with his head, and disappeared with many blasphemous yells as they entered.

VII

In those last years of the fifteenth century, Rome was a city of the Middle Ages. The cupola of the Pantheon, the circular hulk of the Colosseum, and the twin columns of Trajan and Antoninus projected, like the fantastic antiquities of some fresco of Benozzo Gozzoli, above domeless church roofs, battlemented palace walls, and innumerable Gothic belfries and feudal towers. In the theater of Marcellus rose the fortress of the Orsinis; against the tower whence Nero, as the legend ran, had watched the city burning, were clustered the fortifications of the Colonnas; and in every quarter the stern palaces of their respective partisans frowned with their rough-hewn fronts, their holes for barricade beams, and hooks for chains. The bridge of St. Angelo was covered with the shops of armorers, as the old bridge of more peaceful Florence with those of silversmiths. Walls and towers encircled the Leonine City where the Pope sat unquietly in the big battlemented donjon by the Sistine Chapel; and in its midst was still old St. Peter's, half Lombard, half Byzantine. In Rome there was no industry, no order, no safety. Through its gates rushed raids of Colonnas and Orsinis, sold to or betrayed by the Popes, from their castles of Umbria or the Campagna to their castles in town; and their feuds meant battles also between the citizens who obeyed or thwarted them. Houses were sacked and burned, and occasionally razed to the ground, for the plowshare and the salt-sower to go over their site. A few years later, when Pope Borgia dredged the Tiber for the body of his son, the boatmen of Ripetta reported that so many bodies were thrown over every night that they no longer heeded such occurrences. And when, two centuries later, the Corsinis dug the foundations of their house on the Longara, there were discovered quantities of human bones in what had been the palace of Pope della Rovere's nephew. Meanwhile Ghirlandaio and Perugino were painting the walls of the Sistine; Pinturicchio was designing the blue and gold allegorical ceilings of the library; Bramante building the Chancellor's palace, and the Pollaiolas and Mino da Fiesole carving the tombs in St. Peter's, while learned men translated Plato and imitated Horace.

Of this Rome there remains nowadays nothing, or next to nothing. Sometimes, indeed, looking up the green lichened sides of some medieval tower, with its hooks for chains, and its holes for beams, a vague vision thereof rises in our mind. And in time presence of certain groups by Signorelli, representing murderous scuffles or supernatural destruction, we feel as if we had come in contact with the other reality of those times, the thing which serene art and literature and the love of antiquity had driven into the background. But the complete vision of the time and place, the certain knowledge of that Rome of Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII, we can now no longer grasp, a dreadful phantom passing too rapidly across the centuries.

It is with this feeling of impotence in my attempt to follow the thoughts of an illiterate artist of the Renaissance, that I prefer to conclude this strange story of the quest after antique beauty and antique gods by quoting a page from one of the barbarous chroniclers of medieval Rome. The entry in the continuation of Infessura's diary is headed "Pictor Sacrilegus"

"On the 20th July of the year of salvation fourteen hundred and eighty-eight, there were placed for three days in a cage on high in the Campo dei Fiori, Messer Niccolò Filarete, Canon of Sancto Joanne; also Domenico, the Volterrano, painter and architect to the magnificent Cardinal Ascanio, and Frate Garofalo of Valmontone, they having been discovered in the act of desecrating the Church of SS. Jervase and Protasius, and stealing for magic purposes the ostensorium and many gold chalices and reliquaries with precious stones; and it was Frate Garofalo who, being versed in witchcraft and treasure finding, was the accomplice of the above, and denounced them on the feast of Corpus Domini. And the twenty-third of the said month of July they were justiced, and

in this manner. *Videlicet*, Filarete and Domenico, having been removed from the cage, were dragged on hurdles as far as the square of San Joanni, and Frate Garofalo went on an ass, all of them crowned with paper miters. Frate Garofalo was hanged to the elm-tree of the square. Of Filarete and Domenico, the right hand was chopped off, after which they were burned in the said square. And their chopped off right hands were taken to the Capitol and nailed up above the gate, alongside of the She-wolf of metal Laus Deo.”