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THREE PICTURES

OF THE

“SPOSALIZIO”

(THE MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN)

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BERENSON, in his study and criticism of Italian Art (second series), gives his opinion that the “ Sposalizio ” of the Museum of Caën, which until now has been considered as an important work of Perugino, should only be attributed to one of his pupils, Lo Spagna.

Among those who accept the strong support which he gives to his hypothesis, there are, I believe, many who could not follow Mr. Berenson in his supposition that Lo Spagna painted this picture under the influence of the one of Raphael of the same subject, painted for Cita di Castello and now at the Brera in Milan. As the difference in composition and especially in all details of execution appears to be too great. Such would not be the case if Raphael's influence could be shown by an earlier picture of his, painted in 1502 as a Gradino under the Natività, by Pinturicchio, for the Convent of St. Francisco at Sienna (*see note 1 at end*).

This Gradino shows still distinctly the influence of Perugino

and of Pinturicchio, on whose demand it was painted. The "Sposalizio" of the Brera on the contrary, painted at the end of Raphael's first period (in 1504), is much freer from such influence. Comparing the picture of Caën with the Gradino, we find Berenson's hypothesis infinitely more probable, the grouping and the type of most of the models are the same but the defects which Berenson points out in the Caën picture, and attributes to the inferiority of Lo Spagna, are not to be seen in the Gradino, whose author shows his superior talent at the early age of nineteen.

Two years later, this is with remarkable greater freedom mani-

festated in the picture of the same subject painted for Citta di Castello, now in the Brera at Milan. There all differences between the Caën and the Sienna picture are more marked and developed. At the first glance one sees in the Caën picture the square figure of the priest in an ungraceful posture, the Virgin showing more than desirable her condition, through a



Cliché Giraudon.

PÉRUGIN. — LE MARIAGE DE LA VIERGE
(Musée de Caen)

very formless drapery. The index finger of her right hand unnaturally contracted. Joseph keeping the flourishing branch so that it seems to grow out of his head. His right leg badly placed. Moreover in the whole picture the drapery is weak and heavy. None of these defects pointed out by Berenson are to be seen in the Gradino of Sienna, and this difference is still more marked in the “Sposalizio” of the Brera, painted from other models and superior in composition to the Gradino, as much as the Raphael of 21 is to the Raphael of 19. However comparing the two pictures of Raphael as to their actual condition and state of preservation, we find the most delicate miniature-like execution of the Gradino, by its absolute preservation, giving to this earlier composition a charm, which restoration and retouches have diminished in the one of the Brera.



Gliché Brogi (Milan). RAPHAEL SANZIO. — LE MARIAGE DE LA VIERGE
Pinacothèque Royale, Milan (Palais Brera)

The Gradino supports no doubt much more the theory of Berenson about the origin of the Caën picture than the Brera Sposalizio. Nevertheless I venture to bring forward another hypothesis which seems to me simpler and having more practical probability. It is supported by the numerous sketches and drawings now in different Museums and Collections quoted by Berenson. From these I conclude that Perugino, before he painted an altar-piece for the Church of St. Lorenzo, placed in his studio his well known models, indicating their posture, forming the groups he imagined. All his pupils profited by this opportunity, making sketches of the whole or of single groups, or studies of some of the figures. This would explain two so differently gifted pupils as Raphael and Lo Spagna drawing the same composition afterwards used for painting, showing such differences as the Caën picture and the Sienna Gradino. This also would explain Pinturicchio there the female figure drawing now in Florence attributed to him by Berenson, the model being used at the same time by all others working at Perugino's studio. This explains too that Pinturicchio knowing Raphael's sketch of the Sposalizio engaged him to come to Sienna in order to paint the Gradino under the large picture Nativity of the Virgin (*see note 1*) which he painted for the Convent of San Francisco in Sienna on command of Signor Sergardi.

The great delicacy of the gradino has been specially mentioned in all descriptions of the whole picture that appeared before the year 1655.

In that year happened the conflagration (*see note 2*) of the convent destroying together with several other famous pictures that of Pinturicchio, of which the lowest part only the gradino was saved and sent to Rome for Pope Alexander VII. who before he was elected Pope (Fabio Chigi) described the picture in his guida di



RAPHAEL SANZIO. — THE MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN
GRADINO OF THE NATIVITA OF THE VIRGIN, BY PINTURICCHIO

Sienna (*see note 3*). The manuscript of which is still in the Bibliothèque of Sienna.

The gradino remained in Rome until left to a nephew of the Pope in whose family it has been remaining until the actual proprietor bought it and brought it to Paris. Therefore it has been described only by authors living before 1655. The later ones for instance ~~Walden~~ did not know it, as it was then already private property.

NOTE 1. — Una di esse fu certamente la bella tavola con la Natività della Vergine per quella chiesa di S. Francesco, dall'Orsini intieramente ignorata, e da altri suoi biografi. Nell'archivio di quel convento rimaneva la seguente memoria, a noi comunicata dal ch. P. Pungileoni.

« Pietro Perugino famosissimo pittore fece una tavola grande, che fu tenuta bellissima, all'altare di Giovanni... e alla cappella di Giovanni Piccolomini Cardinale di S. Eustachio, con rara eccellenza dipinse la Natività di nostro Signore, ma è cosa mirabile. Bernardino Pinturicchio, anch'esso celeberrimo pittore Perugino all'altare di Filippo Sergardi ministro nella Apostolica Camera effigiò in una tavola di buonissima maniera la Natività della gloriosa Vergine, et il famoso Raffaello da Urbino vi dipinse nel gradino della tavola con piccola maniera altre sacre storie. »

NOTE 2. — « Nell'incendio della chiesa accaduto nel 14 agosto 1655 per la bella tavola del Razzi, che rappresentava la invenzione, della Croce, una di Pietro Perugino, in cui era mirabilmente espressa la Natività di nostro Signore con una del Pinturicchio, alla qual tavola Raffaele di Urbino dipinse il gradino con grandissimo amore, come si ha dalla ricevuta di mano stessa del Pittore che l'autore di un « manoscritto dell'Archivio di questo convento, attesta averla veduta appresso i Signori Sergardi Nobili Senesi. »

NOTE 3. — Si parla poi di questo quadro del Pinturicchio anche in una vecchia Guida di Siena del 1625, scritta da Fabio Chigi, che fu poi Alessandro VII ed anche ivi si dice, che avea la predella dipinta da Raffaello.