

A SKETCH OF ART IN GLASGOW. 1600-1922.

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A CELEBRATED living poet, after a recent inspection of the Art Galleries at Kelvingrove, expressed to me his amazement in what he termed "discovering" such a treasure-house of Art. In answer to the obvious query, was this his first visit to Glasgow, he said, "No," and added, "I have passed several times through the city travelling north, but I never imagined that this somewhat grey town (it was a "rainy" day when blankness, uniformity, and drabness exasperate the nerves) was so rich in the æsthetic elements of life." Exactly. Our poetical traveller is typical of many travellers on the great north road. Yet, to the pilgrim who cares to halt for a space, there will be revealed, perchance, a vision of things other than those associated with the day-long grinding of the mills and workshops. It may be that in the distant future there will arise an artist to whom the suggestiveness and humanity of the feverish life of the streets and the factories and the yards will mean a discovered treasure. Out of these grim and grimy notes of the modern city and cities there may blossom forth a new æstheticism—if the

painter be great enough to handle greatly the passing pageant of the business age; but the task is titanic when we think, as think we must, upon the fresh beauty of the green meadows and the bluebells and daisies which gem the banks of the wimpling burns. Certainly it is curious to note how most of the great triumphs of art have been won in cities, and in cities where life was oftentimes busy and complex. So it was in the marts of the Middle Ages, Bruges, Amsterdam, and Venice; and so it is in the great modern mart, Glasgow of to-day, vibrant if inexplicable to those who gaze upon the gulf that separates seemingly the lives of the massed citizens from poetry and the vision splendid.

Art is an elastic word. If we regard it in its wider and, I think, more clarifying sense, not confining it to the putting of paint on canvas, then the history of art in Glasgow carries us far back upon the pathway of time. In one of the city kirkyards there is preserved a rich collection of sculptured stones, probably the finest collection in Britain, with the exception of those at Iona. These stones embrace recumbent cross-slabs, erect cross-slabs, cross-shafts, a finely sculptured sarcophagus, and four hog-backed stones, the latter, strange relics, puzzling to the archæologist and the antiquary in their suggestion of a vanished life and civilisation and art. The stones, of which there are about forty, show a beautiful variety of decorative design, including interlaced work, key patterns, zoomorphs, and figure subjects. They date approximately from the sixth to the tenth century, and their presence postulates the existence on the banks



Virgin and Child—*Botticelli*



Head of a Boy—*Frans Hals*

of the river Clyde during the early Christian age of a community tolerably advanced in those arts which lend a gracious sweetness to communal life. Casts of the sarcophagus and the hog-backed monuments and one of the fine standing crosses are to be seen at Kelvingrove.

A whole wilderness of barren centuries separates the sculptors of these stones from the years when we discover what may be described legitimately as the first reference to "painting" of which there is any record in our city. In the burgh records of Glasgow of 1574, in connection with an action raised by one "Maister Robert Herbertson" to recover certain portions of his mother's property, mention is made of "ane brod paynted upon ye samyn ye Image of our Lady." The "brod" (board) is the earliest "painting" associated with the city; the next reference is equally modest. It is also from the burgh records, where, under date 12th June, 1641, we read, "On the said day ordains the threasaurer to have ane warrand to pay to James Colquhoun fyve dollouris (dollars) for drawing of the portrait of the town to be sent to Holland." I suspect that the "portrait" means really a map of the town, and that it was intended possibly for Blaeu's Atlas, published later on at Amsterdam.

After the storms of the Reformation had blown over, the Town Council made its bow as a patron of Art. In the year 1627 a new Tolbooth or Town's House was completed—the tall, square-crowned tower at the Cross belonged to this Tolbooth—and for the decoration of the Council Chamber therein royal portraits, which still form part of the Cor-

poration collection of pictures, were from time to time obtained. In the year 1670 the Town Council resolved to purchase from London portraits of Charles I. and Charles II. "for the town's use." The portrait of the reigning monarch—from the brush of Lely—was promptly procured; that of his father was not received till 1677, when it was hung in the "Councill hous with the rest now thair." We do not know exactly what "the rest" included, but as one of the series extant of royal effigies which adorned the walls of the Councill Hous is a portrait of James VI. and I., inscribed and dated 1618, we may conclude that it formed one of "the rest." Although the magistrates of Glasgow were stern Covenanters and Presbyterians, they seem to have manifested in their eagerness to obtain royal portraits a facile loyalty worthy of the "Vicar of Bray."

In addition to the royal canvases, Allan Ramsay, son of the author of "The Gentle Shepherd," was commissioned to paint for the town the portrait of Archibald, third Duke of Argyll, one of the Commissioners of the Treaty of Union. These portraits now adorn the corridors of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery.

The earliest "portrait" we possess of the city appears in Slezer's "Theatrum Scotiæ," published in 1693. Slezer was a native of Holland. He came to Scotland in 1669, and had an appointment in the Army. While in Scotland he did many sketches, "prospects of the royal castles and palaces, cities, burrows, universities, towns, and hospitals." These were engraved by Robert White, of London, and



The Foulis Academy, Glasgow, 1753
(One of the earliest Art Schools in Britain)

issued in book form, with letterpress in Latin—no scholar would have deigned to look at the book had the descriptions been in honest English—by Sir Robert Sibbald. So pleased were the members of Parliament with the publication that an Act was passed to defray its expenses; and promises of patronage were given freely by the King, his son the Duke of York, and many eminent noblemen. Alas for the promises of Princes and Parliaments. Poor Slezer's book would not sell; the money voted by Parliament did not reach him; his pay as Captain of Artillery was "cut" by one-third, and at last he was forced to flee from his creditors to the Sanctuary at Holyrood House, Edinburgh, where he remained in seclusion and poverty until his death in 1717. Such was the fate of the artist to whose skill we owe the earliest drawings of Glasgow. These drawings are of great interest, one of them showing the old Glasgow College, which was founded in 1450, and stood in the High Street of Glasgow until 1870, when the handsome pile on Gilmorehill, overlooking the Kelvin, was thrown open to students.

The first real attempt to foster art in Glasgow was the establishment, in 1753, of the Glasgow Academy of the Fine Arts by the brothers Robert and Andrew Foulis, the celebrated printers. This school of art was opened in a room granted by the University fifteen years before the founding of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and it was really the first effective art school in Scotland. Although disastrous to its promoters and patrons, it exercised a distinct influence on the progress of art culture in

Scotland. The brothers Foulis brought to their school teachers from abroad, and collected, at great expense, pictures, casts, and engravings for their students to copy. After a struggle of twenty-two years, and despite the countenance of the University and the substantial support of some Glasgow merchants, the scheme ended in failure. Andrew died in 1775, and in the following year Robert, while on his way home after the disappointing result of the sale of his art collection in London, died broken-hearted in Edinburgh. Two Academy pupils, David Allan and James Tassie, attained distinction. David Allan, who was called the Scottish Hogarth, from his skill in the delineation of the manners and customs of the Scottish peasantry, is now best remembered for his illustrations for Ramsay's "Gentle Shepherd." Three examples of his work are in the Kelvingrove water-colour collection. Modelling was a feature of the course in the Foulis Academy, and there James Tassie found his particular bent. It is interesting to note that subsequently he became assistant to Dr. Quin, Professor of Physics in Dublin, and together they invented the glass paste which Tassie used for those famous medallions in which he preserved the features of so many eminent men of his age. Tassie was the first to take a plaster cast of the celebrated Portland Vase. In Kelvingrove Gallery are to be seen numerous examples of his medallion portraits, and one of his reproductions of the Portland Vase.

After the failure of the Foulis venture, there was no attempt made for some time to cultivate art in the city. A medical man may be said to have given



Adoration of The Magi—*Antonello da Messina*, 1460



Danae or The Tower of Brass—*Sir E. Burne-Jones*

a fresh impetus to the latent æsthetic sense when, in 1807, the celebrated Dr. William Hunter bequeathed to the University of Glasgow the collections, literary and artistic, formed by him. The collection embraced, in addition to Natural History, a valuable library of early printed books and MSS., a remarkable series of coins and medals, portfolios of engravings, and a small cabinet of pictures. An appropriate building was erected for the conservation and display of the Hunter relics, and thus, at an early period in the nineteenth century, a small but carefully selected collection of pictures was made available for the public of Glasgow. The efforts of the Foulis brothers were premature. They were put forth just as the city was "birsin yont" upon its great industrial and commercial career. But now wealth was abundant, and with it came that cultured leisure which fosters art. In 1821 an influential body of merchant princes formed an "Institution for the Promoting and Encouraging of the Fine Arts in the West of Scotland." The functions of this institution were limited to holding exhibitions in two successive years, 1821-1822. Three years subsequently the Glasgow Dilettante Society was formed (1825), and in 1828 held its first West of Scotland Exhibition of the works of living artists. The exhibitions of this society continued in regular succession until 1838, in which year it ceased to struggle for an unresponsive public. Again, in 1840, a body was formed, under the name of the West of Scotland Academy. It was composed of artists and laymen, and held its first exhibition in 1841, and its thirteenth—and last—in

1853. A little later a new association was formed, whose primary aim was to provide a building in which art exhibitions could be carried on. Two exhibitions were held in 1853-1854 and 1854-1855, but the Crimean War was on, and art, as usual, had to take a back seat when "holy and righteous" militarism ruled the roost.

In 1861 was held the first annual show of the Institute of the Fine Arts. The object of this association was, and is, to diffuse among all classes a taste for art generally, but especially for contemporary art, and this purpose the Institute fulfils by means of annual exhibitions. In the year 1879 the Institute was incorporated under the Companies Act, and in 1896 Queen Victoria, in recognition of the services rendered to art during its thirty-six years' existence, graciously empowered it to use the title "Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts," by which it is now known. Around the exhibitions of the Institute a native race of artists rallied, and to them artists from afar were attracted, and so have these exhibitions come to be recognised and profoundly respected by art-lovers as the exhibitions of "The Glasgow School."

In connection with the early history of the Corporation Art Collection three names stand out conspicuously—Archibald M'Lellan, William Ewing, and John Graham-Gilbert. The permanent art gallery of Glasgow became a realisation when, on the 15th May, 1856, the Town Council resolved to acquire by purchase a block of buildings in Sauchiehall Street, with the collection of sculpture and pictures at that time known as the M'Lellan Gal-

leries. Archibald M'Lellan was a coachbuilder. He was more; he was an æsthetic soul, a lover of art, and a keen and discriminating judge of pictures. The great work of his life was not coach-building for "the great"; it was the foundation of what is now known as the M'Lellan collection of pictures: he devoted a large slice of his life to the accumulation of this remarkable collection.

The M'Lellan collection was formed during the second quarter of the past century, and at a period when the value and permanent importance of the great masters were recognised by few, and when it was not the fashion to patronise Rembrandt, Rubens, and Raphael, and when it was quite unnecessary for the recognition of culture to talk glibly of Botticelli and the Bellini. It is to the everlasting credit of M'Lellan that he recognised the true artistic value of works of art when they were neglected by the so-called "cultured" wiseacres and leaders of taste! It was the ambition of M'Lellan to establish in Glasgow a gallery of art for the benefit of his fellow-citizens, and to bequeath it for public use at the time of his death.

On his decease, the Town Council, amid a storm of opposition, agreed to purchase the buildings erected by M'Lellan for £29,500, and the pictures therein for £15,000. Thus what were the M'Lellan Galleries became the Corporation Art Galleries. Within a month of the purchase Mr. William Ewing, in redemption of a pledge he had given conditional on the completion of the acquisition, presented thirty works; and in 1874 the remainder of his valuable collection passed to the Corporation,

and now forms a notable feature of the city's art collection. The Ewing bequest was followed in 1877 by that of the widow of John Graham-Gilbert, R.S.A., a collection of pictures of tremendous value.

Some little time after these acquisitions, the Town Council thought it desirable to obtain expert opinion upon their value, and Sir Charles Robinson, Her Majesty's Surveyor of Pictures, was asked to examine and report on the condition and value of the works. I quote his concluding sentences:—"I apprehend that the aggregate in Glasgow constitutes the most interesting and valuable provincial public collection in the kingdom; nor do I think I am exaggerating when I say that I think that the Corporation Gallery, when better known, will take rank as a collection of European importance." Since that report was made many patriotic citizens have added to the value of the collection. The family of James Reid, of Hyde Park Locomotive Works, "in affectionate and grateful remembrance of their father," gifted a collection of pictures which had been acquired by the father at a cost of £22,723. In this gift are included Corot's masterpiece, "Pastorale, Souvenir d'Italie," Turner's "Modern Italy," and Israel's "Frugal Meal."

To the art wealth of Glasgow, following upon the Reid gift, there have to be added numerous and important gifts and bequests, which have added to the comprehensiveness and importance of the Corporation Art Galleries. Among these gifts are the Donald Collection, valued at about £40,000, comprising pictures by Millet, Corot, Turner, Orchardson, Troyon, and Dupre; the



Going to Work—*Jean Francois Millet*



The Forerunner—*Sir John Millais, P.R.A.*



The Frugal Meal—*Josef Israels*



A Highland Funeral—*Sir James Guthrie, R.S.A.*

Smellie Collection of fifty-three pictures, embracing examples of water-colours of Turner, David Cox, George Barrett, Cattermole, Peter de Wint, Blommers, Maris, Israels, and Neuhuys; the Teacher bequest, comprising 117 pictures of the modern British and Continental schools; twenty-three pictures given under the deed of assignation by Bailie A. G. Macdonald, and of high importance as examples of the most eminent of our local artists; and other important bequests and gifts, such as the Graham Young, Mrs. Janet Rodger, the Misses Anderson, the Alexander Hill, Sir Charles Tennant, William Connal, James Orrock, Miss Urquhart, Mrs. Walker, Mrs. John Elder, Mrs. J. C. Arnot, and Mr. W. A. Sandby, who gifted five fine water-colours by Paul Sandby, the father of British water-colour painting.

The crowning achievement of Glasgow was the erection in Kelvingrove Park of the Art Galleries and Museum, which was inaugurated as the central Art Gallery of the city of Glasgow on the 25th October, 1902. In connection with and under the administration of Kelvingrove, there are four district museums—Camphill, People's Palace, Tollcross, and Mosesfield. How these institutions are appreciated by the citizens is demonstrated by the number of visitors. In 1921 the visitors to Kelvingrove numbered 2,114,000, and the total for the three institutions was close upon three millions.

While the art wealth of Glasgow has been growing steadily through gifts and benefactions, direct purchases by the Corporation continue to add significant and important features. Among the more

outstanding purchases of recent years made by the Art Galleries Committee of the Corporation have been Whistler's "Carlyle," Ruben's "Boar Hunt," Walter Crane's "Briar Rose," Strang's "Nymph and Shepherd," and Nicholson's "Carolina." Last year a Print Department was added to the Kelvingrove Galleries. Many valuable gifts of etchings and drawings have been forthcoming, and among the more prominent were over three hundred prints of Durer, Rembrandt, Ostade, Meryon, Cameron, Bone, and so on, from John Innes; large and important collections from John Currie, Miss Walton, Richard Edmiston, W. A. Walcot; and fifty fine and rare prints from the late William Strang.

In a word, the Glasgow Gallery is one of which the citizens have just reason to be proud. It must be taken into account in reckoning the art wealth of the race; and it affords valuable material for tracing the history of the leading schools of European art from the sixteenth century to the present day.