

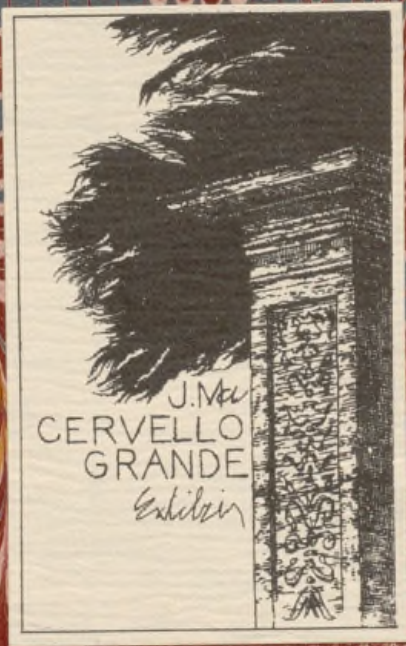


THE EARLY PORTUGUESE
SCHOOL OF PAINTING,
WITH NOTES ON THE PICTURES AT VISEU AND COIMBRA,
TRADITIONALLY ASCRIBED TO GRAN VASCO.



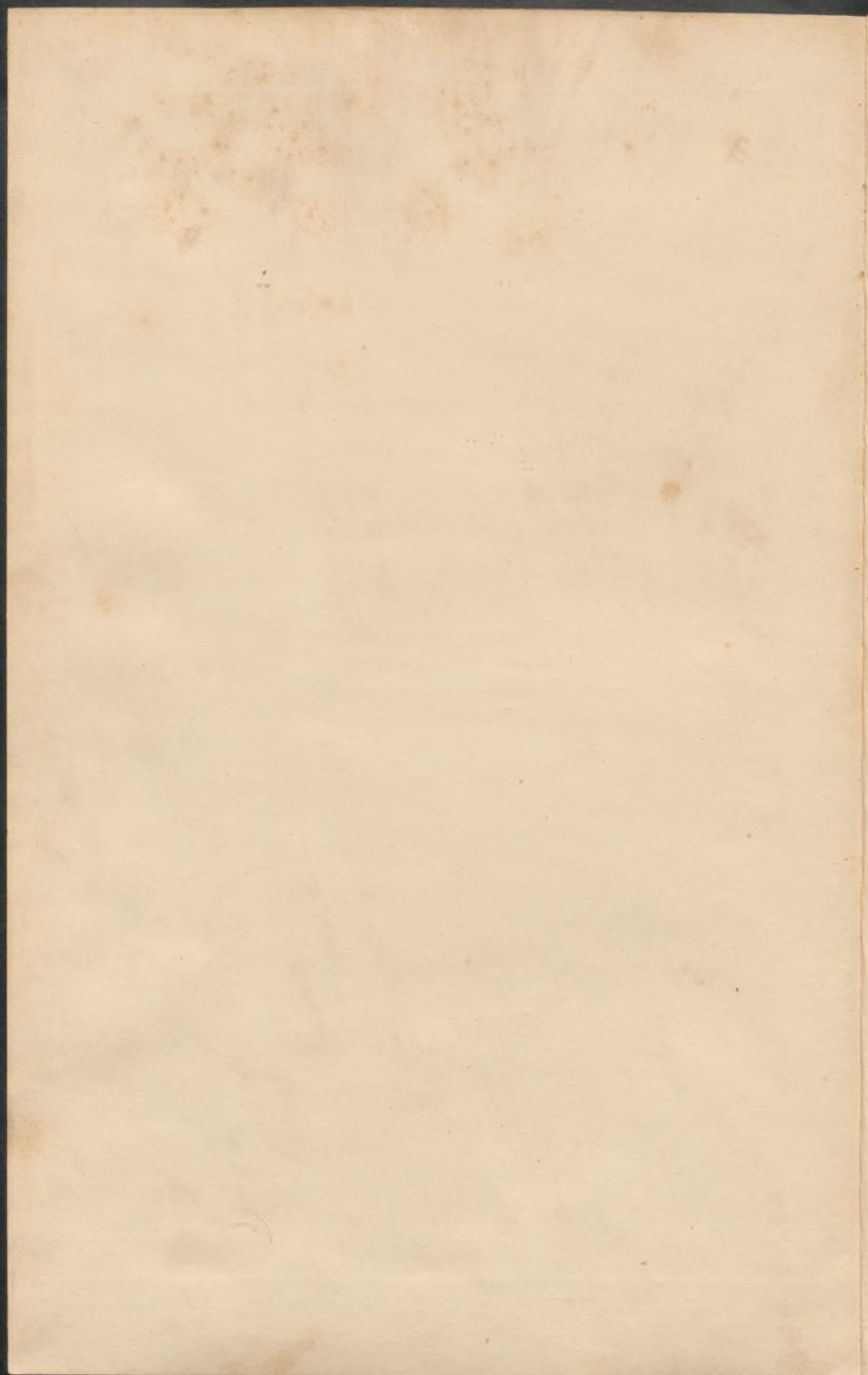
BY
J. C. ROBINSON.
1866.





J. Mc
CERVELLO
GRANDE
Exhibitor





Cerv. / 350

R 42034

THE EARLY PORTUGUESE
SCHOOL OF PAINTING.

2

30p. Signature slip

THE
EARLY PORTUGUESE
SCHOOL OF PAINTING,

WITH NOTES ON THE PICTURES AT VISEU AND COIMBRA,
TRADITIONALLY ASCRIBED TO GRAN VASCO.

BY

J. C. ROBINSON, F.S.A.,

MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS OF FLORENCE,
OF THE ACADEMY OF ST LUKE IN ROME, &c. &c. ;
ART REFEREE OF THE SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

(Extracted from the Fine Arts Quarterly Review.)



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
LIBRARY

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

THE
EARLY PORTUGUESE SCHOOL OF PAINTING ;
WITH NOTES ON THE PICTURES AT VISEU AND COIMBRA,
TRADITIONALLY ASCRIBED TO "GRAN VASCO."

INTRODUCTION.

It is perhaps a truism to say that the progress of the Fine Arts, in any particular country, is inseparably connected and interwoven with the general history of that country ; but at all events, this connexion is especially evident in the instance of Portugal. Portuguese history, however, is a neglected theme ; and art-literature there, with one solitary exception, in recent times, is almost a blank. Nevertheless, the general history of Portugal is a drama of most varied interest, the main events are striking, and successively present themselves in well-defined cycles ; and Portuguese art, though hitherto all but unknown to Europe at large, possesses an intrinsic importance, which, to say the least, gives it a claim to further elucidation.

Almost every country has had a golden age of art, usually coincident with the epoch of its greatest glory and material prosperity. Here, again, Portugal deserves attention, for its age of art occurred at a period especially notable in the history of the world at large, namely, at the close of the 15th and the early part of the 16th centuries. This period, throughout the entire Spanish Peninsula, witnessed a sudden uprising of art, unparalleled in the rest of Europe ; nor is this development, in respect to Portugal in particular, rendered less interesting from the remarkable fact of its rapid decline, shortly afterwards, in that country. Generally speaking, it is of little practical utility to trace back the progress of painting, as a speciality, in remote ages. Unfortunately the existence, if it may be so termed, of pictures is briefer than that of most other works of art, and for our present purpose it would be needless to resuscitate mere names, or to dwell to any

extent on the barren record of works no longer in evidence. Painting, sculpture, and architecture, in the earlier middle ages, were to all appearance handicrafts, much more equally developed in all European countries than is generally imagined; and it is probable that no single country of Europe could show any decided superiority over the others in respect of art. Italy was very wealthy and populous; it had a livelier tradition and better models of style in the relics of classical antiquity; but it may yet be doubted if, until the beginning of the 15th century, the painters, illuminators, architects, and sculptors of that classic land possessed any real preëminence over their brethren of England, France, Germany, or the Spanish Peninsula. A remarkable uniformity, or average standard of excellence, seems indeed to have been attained simultaneously in the various countries of Europe: nor was this confined to the master art—architecture, alone; the rapid diffusion of every new feature of which has been accounted for on many fanciful theories, of which an exaggerated estimate of the influence of freemasonry was, until recently, the most generally prevalent. The fact seems to be, that a much greater and more universal intercourse between the nations took place in mediæval periods than might have been supposed possible, considering the difficulties of communication which really existed. Skilled master workmen—artists, as they are now termed—were then, probably much more than at present, citizens of the world,—migratory and unsettled in their habits. This, indeed, should excite the less surprise, when it is considered that the universal patron was the Church, which had in every country the same prescriptive requirements, and which in innumerable monasteries and other religious establishments gladly gave shelter and support to strangers, whose talents enabled them to make an acceptable return. Thus Frenchmen and Flemings came to England, Italians and Germans went everywhere; and, what might well be doubted if there were not good record of the fact, English artists were no unfrequent wanderers in the Spanish Peninsula.

But admitting the fact of this general average diffusion of art, there were, at the same time, undoubtedly, countries or particular districts which from remote situation, poverty, or other causes, failed to keep up with the times; where old fashions and ruder developments lingered long after they were superseded in more favoured localities. The extreme west and the northern parts of Europe were the most backward in this respect. The obvious rule was, that as there was less material wealth and a sparser population in the outlying districts than in the more central and favoured countries; so there was less art manifested. Thus, in Great Britain, Cornwall, Wales, and Scotland

were manifestly behind the rest of the country; in France, Brittany was a primitive and benighted land. And lastly, Portugal, a country occupying much the same relative position towards Spain which Wales does to England, was, down to a certain period, less advanced in art and general civilization than the rest of the Peninsula.

This fact, notwithstanding the ultimate greatness and prosperity of the country, must still be kept in view, for the original lowliness and simplicity of Portuguese art underlies, and is still visible through, the brilliant strata of later ages.

But Portugal, although at the outskirts of Europe, was nearest to the Indies and the new world, the realms of boundless wealth and promise, and at an early period she began to assimilate and profit by the arts of the one and treasures of the other. The glorious reign of Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain was fully paralleled at the same epoch by that of Dom Emmanuel in Portugal. In both countries a wonderful uprising of art in every branch and speciality accompanied the general prosperity. The wealth of Mexico and Peru poured into Spain, was to a great extent expended on works of art; and in Portugal the riches of the Indies, flowing in an ever-increasing stream along the watery way traced out by the ships of Vasco de Gama, promoted all at once national developments of art in every plastic vehicle. To this day the glory of the Portuguese monarch is everywhere in evidence;—alike in architecture, sculpture, painting; the goldsmith's and jeweller's arts, the "Emmanuelite style," as it might well be termed, meets the eye on all hands; to say the least, it is obvious that the all-prevalent Renaissance, or revived classical style, received at this time in Portugal a local colour and distinctive national character of the most striking kind.

But it was not alone from the East, and in a merely decorative guise, that the light of art penetrated into Portugal; from a very early period the Peninsula seems to have been the principal foreign market for the innumerable pictures and other works of art of the early Flemish school. It is on record indeed that the great luminary of that school, John Van Eyck himself, early in the 15th century visited the Peninsula, in order to paint the portrait of a Portuguese princess, who was affianced to a duke of Burgundy.* The direct communication by sea, and the consequent active commercial intercourse of Portugal with the great Flemish commercial cities, were naturally the means of introducing numbers of Flemish pictures, illuminated books, and similar works of fine

* In 1428 John Van Eyck accompanied, for that purpose, the ambassador sent by Philippe-le-bon to demand the hand of doña Isabel, daughter of Juan I. of Portugal. Laborde, "Les Ducs de Bourgogne."

art. Artists themselves were not slow to follow where their works found a ready sale; and the artistic invasion of the Spanish Peninsula, which may be said to have taken place in the early years of the 16th century, was apparently effected quite as much from the side of Portugal, as through the influence of the new dynasty of Hispano-Flemish sovereigns of Spain, inaugurated by the marriage of the daughter and heiress of Ferdinand and Isabella with the last of the Burgundian Dukes.

At all events, except along the eastern or Mediterranean shores of Spain, in Catalonia and the kingdoms of Valencia and Murcia, where, through the obvious agency of locality and dynastic ties, Florentine, Genoese, and Neapolitan art obtained a considerable footing, Flemish art would appear to have predominated in the Peninsula. Flemish artists seem to have settled and become naturalized in all parts of the land, but especially in the centre of Spain, in the literally "Gothic" and truly Catholic countries of Old and New Castile, in the north-west provinces, and in Portugal. The "Juan Flamencos," "Juan de Borgoñas," "Francisco de Holandas," and numerous other españolized Flemings, whose names betray their native country, or that of their progenitors, are conspicuous in nearly every cathedral and conventual register of works. These men were the founders of schools of art, and the fosterers of successive generations of able native artists, who, engrafting national and local characteristics on the basis of the old Flemish art, produced, as may still be seen in the instances of Fernando Gallegos in Spain, and of Vasco Fernandez in Portugal, striking and characteristic works, scarcely inferior to those of their greatest contemporaries elsewhere.

The material prosperity of Portugal continued throughout the reign of John III. (1523—1557), and the character of that prince especially inclining him to uphold and exalt the Church, art, mainly of a devotional character, flourished in his time with undiminished lustre. During this period, however, the classical or pagan element, which had already long been paramount in Italy, penetrated into the Peninsula. The curious manuscript of Francisco de Holanda, written in Portugal during this reign,* indeed, is one of the most remarkable records we have of the entrancing manner in which the new art, identified in a certain sense with its great leader, Michael Angelo, at length seized on the minds of ultramontane painters and sculptors. Towards the

* Preserved in the library of the Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, and still inedited, with the exception of extracts given by Count Raczyński in "Les Arts en Portugal."

middle of the 16th century, a majority of the more gifted artists of the Peninsula had, in great measure, abandoned the old Gothic manner of their Flemish prototypes. Apparently this change of style was rapidly brought about, and in Spain its leading promoters are well known. Alonso Berruguete and Becerra, both pupils and assistants of Michael Angelo in Italy, and the sculptor Juan de Juni—all truly great artists, and the two former almost as universal in their talent as their immortal master himself—were the chief luminaries, and their innovations were soon reflected in every corner of the land.

But this revolution was not a universal one; the old school was by no means extinguished in the Peninsula, and there still continued to co-exist another race, namely, that of preëminently devotional painters, who adhered, as a matter of established, conventional routine, to the old mannerism. The ancient manner, in fact, still found numerous supporters both in the artists and patrons of art, and those characteristic qualities of the Peninsular races, immobility and unreasoning adherence to established forms, are strikingly manifested in the fact, that apparently down to the early part of the 17th century, pictures continued to be produced both in Spain and Portugal, which in all their main features of style and traditional type were essentially "Gothic,"—in which were imitated not only the technical qualities of the great artists of the age of Memling and Mabuse, but even to a certain extent the architecture, costumes, and ornamentation of past centuries. The new art was that of the Court and the great cities, and of learned connoisseurs, who then began to abound; but it is evident that side by side with it, the devotional feeling of the Peninsula at large caused the old models to be clung to with a prescriptive permanence not unlike that of the Byzantine Greek art of Mount Athos itself.*

Francisco de Holanda, writing in 1549, himself a friend and associate of Michael Angelo, composed his work on his return from Italy, whither he had been sent to pursue his studies in art at the expense of King John III. He omits no opportunity of ridiculing the prevalent "ancient" manner of his Portuguese contemporaries, but he leaves us, nevertheless, under the impression that the old fashion still retained possession of the field; and that it continued to do so in Portugal

* It should be observed, nevertheless, in respect to this remarkable class of pictures, that although to ordinary observers, or to such as are not acquainted with Peninsular art as it is seen in the country itself, these pseudo-antiques, when casually met with, appear somewhat inex-

plicable, there is little likelihood of the really accomplished art-critic mistaking them for genuine productions of the 15th or early 16th century; in other words, there are in all such works anachronisms of style or fact which infallibly reveal their real character.

more completely even than in Spain, is sufficiently proved by the evidence of art-monuments still extant in the country. The successor of John III., the unfortunate Dom Sebastian, maintained the high status of his country. The East still continued in all the minor arts to exercise a powerful influence; furniture, plate, embroidery, nay even the architecture of Portugal, continued to be strongly biassed by the Indian style and technical processes; rich curiosities and objects of ornamental art were imported in great profusion, whilst the precious woods of the East and of America also came into general use. It is not a little remarkable, indeed, to see in the Portuguese churches Gothic altar shrines and devotional pictures in juxtaposition with chasses and reliquaries of splendid Indian marqueterie and lac work; *parclozes* and altar-rails of mahogany and Brazilian wood; gold and silver everywhere,—the former metal, in the shape of rich gilding on elaborate semi-Indian wood carving, lining almost the entire interiors of numerous churches and ecclesiastical buildings. Probably one of the earliest pictorial evidences of the knowledge of the existence of the New World is to be seen in one of the ancient pictures of the Chapter House at Viseu, described in the following memoir, where one of the adoring Magi at the feet of the Saviour is portrayed in the costume of an American Cacique.

A disastrous eclipse was however at hand, and Portuguese art sank with the sudden loss of national liberty and life. The young king, Dom Sebastian, impelled by a spirit of romantic bravery, recklessly embarked on a wild enterprise for the conquest of Morocco. A great army, led by the flower of the Portuguese nobility, invaded Africa, but a single great battle overwhelmed this host, and the king himself perished in the fight. With this fatal battle of *Alcaçar-quibir* (A.D. 1578) came to an end the ancient greatness of Portugal. The crown reverted to an aged ecclesiastic, the Cardinal Henry, the only legitimate male survivor of the royal line. The whole of his short reign was a period of contention and cabal touching the nomination of his successor. He died seventeen months after his accession, A.D. 1580, and the tangled web of contention and intrigue was speedily cut by the sword of the most powerful aspirant to the vacant throne—Philip II. of Spain, who placing the famous Duke of Alva at the head of an invading force, in less than a year overran the entire country, and annexed it to Spain as a conquered province.

Portugal thenceforth remained for sixty years under the Spanish yoke, during which period the national life, though not extinct, lay dormant. Lisbon sank to the level of a distant provincial city. The history—if, indeed, during this period Portugal can be said to have had any

separate history—was a melancholy record of systematic oppression and degradation, whilst literature and the fine arts sank to the lowest ebb.

Portugal, however, had been too long a free and independent nation to admit of final amalgamation with the conquering race, and when the rapid and incomprehensible decline of the Spanish power took place under Philip IV., an overwhelming blow to the Spanish monarchy was dealt in turn by Portugal. In 1640 that country, by a successful revolution, suddenly and completely recovered its independence, and a descendant of its ancient kings mounted the throne; but the great age of art had then passed away. Material prosperity speedily revived; the Portuguese nation again attained to a respectable position in the European family, but its national art had entirely died out. Thenceforth there arose no native artist of any particular eminence, and the progress of art in Portugal thereafter would be a sterile and trivial theme. Although the wealth which flowed into the country in an increasing stream from its colonial possessions, was in the latter part of the 17th and during the 18th centuries freely lavished on great architectural undertakings and costly decoration, both civil and ecclesiastical, in which painting had a conspicuous part, neither in the works of native professors nor in those of the numerous foreigners who were attracted to the country, is there anything to chronicle but the fact of uniform mediocrity.

Fostered by an enlightened and accomplished prince, however, art has of late years taken root again in Portugal, and the newly awakened interest displayed in respect to the ancient art-monuments of the country, in great measure stimulated the writer to undertake the researches detailed in the following memoir.

NOTES ON THE PICTURES AT VISEU AND COIMBRA.*

THE pictures in the Cathedral at Viseu are noticed with considerable circumstantiality in the Comte de Raczynski's Book, "Les Arts en Portugal,"† and are there adduced as the most important and authentic works extant of *Gran Vasco*; they are as follow:—In the first place, fourteen pictures, hanging in the Chapter House, each about 3 feet 6 inches high by about 2 feet

* This memoir was written in Lisbon, in Nov., 1865, for the information of his Majesty the King Dom Fernando of Portugal.

† "Les arts en Portugal, lettres adressées

à la Société artistique et scientifique de Berlin, et accompagnées de documens, par Le Comte de Raczynski." Paris, Renouard, 1846, 8vo.

wide, painted in oil on thick panels, apparently of chestnut or walnut wood; they are in carved and gilded frames of the last century, and are placed high up on the walls, as decorative furniture. The room itself is very obscure, and the pictures being covered with surface dust and dirt, are very imperfectly seen,—they are indeed almost invisible from below. I have little doubt these fourteen panels were originally framed together as a “*retablo*” or large altar-piece. The subjects are various scenes from the life and passion of Our Saviour. (For a description of each composition, see Raczynski, p. 304.) From a careful consideration of the details of costume, ornamentation, and other indications, and from their general style, I think these pictures were painted about 1500—20, and are all by the same hand. My first impression was that they were the work of a Flemish master, but on further examination I came to the conclusion that in any case they were painted in the Peninsula, and that most likely they were the work of a Portuguese painter, thoroughly imbued with the style and technical peculiarities of Early Flemish art.

In the Sacristy are four large panel pictures, about 7 feet 8 inches square, and a series of eleven small panels, each about 2 feet 10 inches long, by about 1 foot 6 inches high. These pictures are all placed in ordinary carved frames of the last century.

At present they are symmetrically hung round the walls of the Sacristy, an early 17th century structure; but they have evidently been removed from some other position—very probably they were originally four separate altar-pieces of as many chapels in the Cathedral, and the eleven small panels, which represent half-length figures of saints, appear to have been their accompanying predella pictures.

The subjects of the larger pictures, named in the order of their probable date of execution, are,—

1. The Martyrdom of St Sebastian.
2. St Peter, clad in pontifical robes, and seated on a throne, apparently a typical representation or impersonation of the Catholic Church.

3. The Baptism of Our Saviour by St John.

4. The Pentecost.

These pictures and the eleven smaller ones exhibit a more advanced style than those of the Chapter House, and they are apparently by a different hand; their production would, I think, range from about 1520 to 1540.

Although in the four large pictures there are considerable variations in manner, and even in typical peculiarities, such as the physiognomic details of the figures, general style of drawing, disposition of draperies, &c., I am inclined to think with Raczynski, that they are all by the same artist, as are likewise the minor predella panels; I do not, however, consider this fact entirely without doubt. The Pentecost exhibits the greatest divergence of style, but I believe it to be the latest of the series in point of date; it is also the feeblest production of the four, but on the whole the differences of style are perhaps not greater than may be accounted for by the gradual mutations of manner of the artist, during the lapse of time betwixt the production of the several pictures.

At all events, two of the series, i. e. The Baptism and the St Peter, seemed to be certainly by the same hand. Immediately on seeing these pictures I was struck with their resemblance in style and general effect to a very celebrated work of art in Spain—the altar-piece, representing the descent from the cross, by Pedro Campana, in the Cathedral of Seville, and on further examination I could not avoid also perceiving a considerable analogy, especially in respect to colour, with certain works of Quentin Matsys; in fact these great square pictures immediately recalled to my mind the famous triptych by Matsys in the Museum at Antwerp. A further analogy with the earlier works of Bernard Van Orley of Brussels, seemed also to be perceptible; but their resemblance to the one great typical picture of Pedro Campana, a Brussels artist working in the Peninsula, at about the middle and probably during the earlier half of the century, seemed specific; the remarkably individualized features of the St Peter, and of the Christ in the Baptism, brought at once to my mind similar heads in the Seville picture.

There remains to be noticed only one other picture,—the altar-piece of the “Capella de Jesus,” a humid and apparently almost deserted chapel, detached from the main fabric of the Cathedral; and forming a sort of vestibule or gallery of communication from the exterior “enceinte” to the cloisters. This is a large arched panel, about eight feet high, with three small predella pictures beneath; the subject is the crucifixion, or “Calvary,”—a multifarious composition displaying the crucified Saviour, flanked by the two thieves, disciples with the fainting Virgin in the foreground, numerous Roman soldiers on foot and on horseback, and other accessory figures. The predella subjects are, Christ before Pilate, the descent from the cross, and Limbo, or the descent into Hades. Count Raczynski unhesitatingly assumed this work to be by the same hand as the four pictures in the Sacristy; it undoubtedly has great analogy with them, and I am inclined to adopt the same conclusion; I differ however from Count Raczynski in my estimate of its relative merit; it appears to me to be the weakest, rather than the most excellent, of the series.

In addition to these pictures at the Cathedral, there are several other early pictures of minor importance in the churches of Viseu and its neighbourhood; of these I saw two only deserving of especial notice; they are preserved in the Chapel of the Episcopal Palace at Fontello, situated about half a league from the city; one of them represents “Christ in the house of Martha,” a panel of about 7 feet 6 inches square, and another, a picture of somewhat smaller dimensions in three compartments, represents the Last Supper with episodes connected therewith. Of the last-named work I shall again speak; with respect to the former one, it has great analogy with the pictures of the Chapter House, especially with the Pentecost, but it is of inferior merit, and is, I apprehend, the work of a scholar or imitator.

Constant tradition in Viseu ascribes all the before-mentioned pictures to one celebrated artist, named “*Vasco Fernandez*,” or “*Gran Vasco*,” said to have been born in a village near the city, where a mill and the site of a cottage are still

pointed out as his birth-place. So great indeed, ultimately, became the fame of this artist, that at last, down even to the appearance of Count Raczynski's book, in 1846, nearly every ancient picture in Portugal was indiscriminately ascribed to him. It is no easy matter to wade through the voluminous and perplexing mass of memoranda relating to Gran Vasco and his reputed works, collected by Raczynski; his conclusions, however, may be summed up thus:—in the beginning of his researches the various notices he received seemed so hopelessly perplexed and contradictory, that he was inclined to disbelieve entirely in the existence of Gran Vasco, and to place him in the category of representative impersonations or myths. Count Raczynski soon perceived that the great mass of pictures ascribed to Gran Vasco were really the work of many different hands; denoting the existence, in the 16th century in Portugal, of a distinct National school of art. On further consideration, he perceived that a process had gone on similar to that by which, at no very distant period, nearly all early Italian pictures were indiscriminately ascribed to Pietro Perugino; all those of the early German School to Albert Dürer; and those of the Netherlands to Van Eyck, or Lucas Van Leyden. But here, again, parity of circumstance led to the conclusion, that an artist of surpassing merit, a real Gran Vasco, must have existed, although it seemed difficult to single out his actual works from the great mass of contemporaneous productions. Count Raczynski had advanced thus far, before he had himself seen the pictures in question; shortly before visiting Viseu, however, some interesting and apparently circumstantial evidence fell into his hands, the most important being an entry in the register of the Cathedral of Viseu, of the baptism of a certain "Vasco, son of Francisco Fernandez, painter, and of Maria Henriques, his wife, on the 18th of September, 1552." Thereupon, notwithstanding the fact which he had previously recognized, that the numerous pictures ascribed to Gran Vasco all obviously belonged to the *first* half of the 16th century,—whereas, supposing the matured labours of the newly discovered Gran Vasco to have been commenced at as early a time as

his twentieth year, namely, circa 1572, his artistic activity must have been mainly exerted towards the conclusion of the century,—Count Raczynski rather unaccountably seems to have rushed to the conclusion that this entry really recorded the birth of the great painter. At the same time the enthusiastic but not overstrained description of the Viseu pictures, sent to him by his correspondent the Viscomte de Jerumenha, prepared him to find an incontestably genuine series of the artist's works in his native town. Count Raczynski's visit to Viseu took place soon after this, and on his first view of the Calvary, and the four great pictures of the Chapter House, he gave utterance to an unfaltering and triumphant "Eureka!"—in his own words, "Fica revogada toda a legislaçao em contrario, c'est a dire que je revoque tout ce que j'ai cité ou rapporté sur Gran Vasco, &c., &c. Vasco Fernandez surnommé Gran Vasco, fils du peintre François Fernandez, naquit en Viseu à 1552." And further on, in respect to the picture of the crucifixion, "Ce tableau nous servira de point de comparaison pour tous les ouvrages du peintre qu'on peut raisonnablement attribuer à son auteur; voici d'abord ce que je pense de ce tableau, Il est d'un grand merite, quoique mal conservé; je l'aurais cru plus ancien que 1570, mais enfin les documents sont plus forte que toute que mes impressions, &c. Les tableaux de la sacristie sont evidemment l'œuvre du même maitre." M. Raczynski, however, rightly observed that the series of panels in the Chapter House were apparently by a different and earlier hand.

Now it was with an equally deep interest that I arrived at Viseu just twenty years after Raczynski, probably the only person tolerably master of the various points of the Gran Vasco controversy, who, during the interval, had taken the trouble to visit that remote mountain city with a similar intent. Count Raczynski's conclusion appeared to me so doubtful, that I was the more anxious to see and judge for myself, and I must say that the first glance convinced me that Count Raczynski had much better have confided in his own artistic perceptions, than in the mere unsupported authority of a parish register; and that

his infant Gran Vasco of 1552 could at best scarcely have emerged from boyhood, ere in the natural course of time the grave must have closed over the heads of the really great painters of Viseu. I say *painters*, for it is evident that the Cathedral pictures were the work of at least two different artists, one of whom seems to have flourished at a somewhat earlier period than the other. One of these artists then, as we have seen, was supposed by Count Raczynski to be the famous Gran Vasco; and popular estimation or tradition, the superior importance of the works themselves, and lastly the idea of the comparatively late period of Gran Vasco's artistic activity or existence, combined to point out the Sacristy pictures, rather than those of the Chapter House, as the real works of the master.

Whilst I was engaged in examining these pictures, however, it was my good fortune to make the acquaintance of Senhor Antonio José Periera, an artist of merit, native of and resident in Viseu. This gentleman, who had assisted Count Raczynski at the occasion of his visit, I soon perceived, took a deep interest in the question under consideration, and most obligingly volunteered to be my guide for the remainder of the day, in investigating the art antiquities of Viseu. To my great surprise, Senhor Periera soon informed me that he was the possessor of a signed picture of Gran Vasco. Considering that this was of all things the greatest possible desideratum; no such signed work, nor, indeed, any sufficiently well authenticated picture of Gran Vasco having been previously noted. And I must confess I was at first apprehensive there must be some mistake; but on visiting Senhor Periera's studio, a single glance at the picture in question convinced me of the truth of his assertion. Senhor Periera produced three separate panels, apparently the three divisions of a small altar-piece; the centre piece represented a *pietà* or descent from the cross, and the wings respectively St Francis in ecstasy, with a fine landscape background, and St Anthony of Lisbon on the sea-shore, preaching to the fishes. These pictures are about 4 feet 3 inches high, and the width of the three together about 6 feet 9 inches. In the lower portion

of the centre panel is the abbreviated signature of the painter, i. e., "Vasco Fernandez," most clearly and distinctly written, or painted in yellow, as if to imitate gold. See the accompanying fac-simile. Though the precaution was

VASCO
FR3

obviously superfluous, I examined it carefully with a magnifying glass, and the result was the perfect conviction that it was the genuine signature of the painter. I may further observe, that this signature is of rather prominent size, and is affixed on the panel, with a certain ostentation of conspicuousness,—peculiarities which observations elsewhere have shown me to be a national or characteristic habit of the Peninsular artists of the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries.*

Here then at last was to all appearance a genuine and unquestionable work of Gran Vasco. Unfortunately as pictures these panels are mere wrecks, for they have been remorselessly flayed and half rubbed out by some ignorant picture cleaner; enough, however, remains to give an adequate idea of their relative merit, and also of their leading characteristics of style and apparent date. I may in the first place state, that this picture *is*, or rather *was*, a fine work of art, equal at least in merit to any of the Cathedral pictures already described. My first object naturally was to satisfy myself whether or not these panels were by the same hand as either of the two series in the Cathedral. Senhor Periera had convinced himself that they were by the painter of the St Peter, the Calvary, and the other Sacristy pictures; it soon appeared to me, however, that this

* This habit of affixing a signature in some prominent part of the foreground of the picture, usually in bold upright church text characters, or in the kind of Italo-Gothic letter, seen in the present instance, seems to have been very frequent with the more eminent of the early Spanish and Portuguese painters; as other instances of early pictures so signed I may specify the superb but hitherto unnoticed altar-piece of Fernando Gallegos in the Cathedral of

Zamora, the altar-piece by the same great artist in the Cathedral at Salamanca, a beautiful early picture in the Cathedral of Cordova, signed "*Pedro de Cordova*," several panels in the churches of Seville, and the Triana suburb, by the excellent early painter *Alexio Fernandez*, and quite recently two very interesting early Spanish panels signed respectively "*Pedro del Gallo*" and "*Lo fils de mestre rodrigo*" have fallen under my notice.

conviction was rather the result of an *à priori* method of reasoning, natural, indeed almost inevitable, considering surrounding influences, than founded on an unbiassed comparison of the respective works; and after careful examination and consideration I was soon convinced that they were certainly *not* by the same hand as the Sacristy pictures. Nevertheless, in many peculiarities of design, colour, and general aspect, this signed work showed a kind of family resemblance to both series. I should here remark that the unquestionably earlier series of panels in the Chapter House, are not without certain features of resemblance with the later Sacristy pictures; in short, in all of them there seemed to be an obvious pervading local influence or style; and unless, indeed, imagination has misled me, there seemed to be such a general resemblance as to warrant me in assuming the existence of a succession of artists at Viseu, who had cognizance of each other's works; at all events I shall now venture to initiate the term "School of Viseu."

These panels, or, as I may more conveniently term it, this picture, of Vasco Fernandez, then, seemed to me to occupy a middle place in the school, i. e. betwixt the earlier pictures of the Chapter House and those of the Sacristy; and after careful consideration I estimate the date of its execution to be not later than about 1520. My impression now is (though unfortunately I could not re-examine the Chapter House series after the discovery of the picture in question), that it has, perhaps, more analogy with them than with the Sacristy series, but that it is *not* by the same painter. Could I have compared it with the Chapter House series in a good light, this point might probably have been set at rest; but this was impossible, from the fact that a violent tempest, with torrents of rain, which had set in on the morning of the day of my visit, towards the afternoon reduced the ordinary twilight of the Cathedral to almost total darkness, and at the same time converted the steep and narrow streets of Viseu into little better than mountain torrents, rendering locomotion all but impossible. My investigations, indeed, were made under circumstances of physical discomfort, which would have been intoler-

able but for the interesting nature of the research. My best thanks, however, are due to the dignitaries of the Cathedral, who, although my visit happened most inconveniently to fall on a Sunday, kindly afforded me every possible facility and personal assistance, even to the extent of allowing a ladder to be carried through the crowded Cathedral, and with considerable difficulty hoisted through the "Coro Alto" and the intricate corridors leading from thence to the Chapter House.

Quitting Viseu for a moment, I have now to state that I have had the further good fortune, as I believe, of discovering the real author of the Sacristy pictures, and of establishing beyond doubt the fact, that they are *not* the work of Vasco Fernandez. I must, however, premise, that I have almost a feeling of regret at having thus to put an end to the dearly cherished traditions of the place, to replace the old familiar local idol by a new and unknown deity. The artistic halo of Viseu will, however, I feel convinced, gleam still more brightly in the strong light of truth, for, in addition to one little more than mythic impersonation, I have now to add substantial individualities,—works and names.

My route from Viseu, crossing the ever-memorable ridge of Busaco, led me back again to Coimbra, and I lost no time, on arriving, in re-inspecting certain pictures in the ancient Church and Monastery of Santa Cruz; amongst them one large and important panel, hanging in the Sacristy, now appealed for closer attention. This picture, about 5 feet 3 inches wide by 5 feet high, retains in great part its original frame or architrave, forming an integral part of the picture; this is a simple but elegant architectural bordering, with two lateral pilasters carved with Renaissance arabesques in low relief; narrow frieze, cornice, &c. above, and regular base mouldings at the bottom; which details alone furnished an unmistakable clue to the date of the work, namely, circa 1530—40. The picture represents the Pentecost; unfortunately, though, on the whole, not perhaps in a hopelessly bad state of preservation, it has become extremely black, from the fact of its having, at some time or other, been thickly covered with a

bad oil varnish; and thus, in the scanty light of the Sacristy, it was at first sight all but invisible. Fortunately I was enabled by mounting on the wooden presses, which surrounded the room, to examine every part of its surface minutely. I had not been long so engaged, before it became evident to me, that this was another picture by the hand of the painter of the St Peter and the Baptism in the Sacristy at Viseu. The composition of this picture is entirely different from that of the Viseu Pentecost, and it is in every respect a finer one. But the exact resemblance in drawing, colour, details of costume, execution, and above all, in the peculiar and very marked physiognomic type of the principal figures, left no room for doubt; in fact the head of the St Peter at Viseu is here repeated in another St Peter, who forms one of the most prominent figures in the foreground of the picture, whilst the very similar ones of the St John and the Saviour in the Baptism have also their counterparts in other portions of the composition. I have, in short, the conviction, that this picture is the work of the traditional Gran Vasco of Viseu. But what was my satisfaction on inspecting the lower portion, to find a well-preserved and conspicuous signature of the artist! I append a fac-simile.



Here then we have, as I believe, revealed the real name of the painter of the St Peter and the Baptism at Viseu, and in all probability also of the St Sebastian, the Pentecost, the Calvary, and the small predella series; it is I think evident, that M. de Raczynski's Gran Vasco in reality was this same *Velasco*. There is something almost painful in this discovery, but, after all, this substitution of one name for another is of little real moment; the pictures remain in evidence, and they reflect equal credit on the country of their production, although no longer enshrouded in an atmosphere of mysterious tradition.

The facts now adduced afford, I apprehend, a new insight into the hitherto perplexed subject of Early Portuguese art, and

I may now state, as an earnest of the fertility of this yet almost virgin field of artistic exploration, that in another picture of the Santa Cruz Sacristy, representing Christ before Pilate, and which, though offering a certain general analogy with the Pentecost, was obviously by another and inferior hand, I noticed in conspicuous characters the signature here imitated.

OVIA

Although digressing for a moment from the proper order of my subject, I may here observe, that all these pictures are excellent works of art, not simply curious old paintings of merely archæological interest. They are of far greater artistic value than most of the pictures quoted in terms of eulogy by Count Raczynski, such as those of the Academy in Lisbon, the "San Bento," the "Abraham Prim," "Centurion," and other similar works. One only of these Lisbon pictures appears to me to have any analogy with the school of Viséu, viz. a little standing figure of St John (not the one indicated by Count Raczynski as the work of his painter of "Les belles Draperies"). This is an excellent little picture, conceived and executed very much in the style of the Viséu masters, but not, as I think, to be ascribed to any of the painters previously noted.

I have now for a moment to refer again to the pictures at the half-ruined palace of the bishop at Fontello, near Viséu. One of these, the Jesus in the house of Martha, I have already described; the other picture, consisting of three distinct panels, represents, as a continuous composition, the Last Supper, with episodes connected with it. This is altogether a more meritorious work than the other, and it has considerable analogy with Senhor Periera's picture of Vasco Fernandez; it is in fact the only one at Viséu to which it shows a distinct resemblance. This picture is, however, so much inferior to that signed Vasco, that I cannot but refer it, also, to a scholar or imitator. I shall not at present dwell any further on these pictures; they should, nevertheless, not be overlooked in any future work of investigation and comparison undertaken at Viséu.*

* A word in reference to the present | to rescue them from impending destruction.
state of these pictures may perhaps serve | My visit occurred in the midst of the

It is scarcely necessary to say that Count Raczynski's Vasco Fernandez, son of Francisco Fernandez, born in 1552, could not be the Vasco Fernandez of Senhor Periera's picture; this picture was unquestionably produced some thirty years at least before the birth of the former, and it is now, on the other hand, I apprehend, proved that the Vasco of 1552 was not the painter of the Sacristy pictures, as was, nevertheless, all along assumed by Count Raczynski. Nevertheless, a Vasco Fernandez was undoubtedly born at Viseu in 1552, and it is equally certain that his father, Francisco, was a painter, but at the same time there is no evidence whatever to show that the son followed the father's profession. Further researches will probably clear up these uncertainties; in the mean while, may not this Francisco Fernandez have been himself the son or some other relative of the Vasco Fernandez of our signed picture? This at least seems to be within the range of probability.

Gran Vasco, at all events, we may now safely assume, was not a mythic personage; the constant tradition of Viseu, and the immense superstructure of error and misconception concentered together throughout all Portugal, during two or three centuries, had at all events a nucleus of truth, but to what at the present moment is this evidence reduced? I am almost afraid to say,—I believe it to be brought down simply and solely to

first great downfall at the beginning of the rainy season. After a fatiguing descent of a mile and a half from the mountain summit on which the city is situated, literally wading in the bed of a rushing torrent, and leaping from rock to rock of the hollow ravine, which is the normal character of the so-called roads in the interior of Portugal, the old palace itself afforded but a sorry refuge. The curtailed revenues of the see of Viseu have for years past allowed of no expenditure for repairs on this ancient structure, and it is in consequence rapidly falling to ruin! Its vast saloons were everywhere converted into shower-baths by the rain, which poured in through its dilapidated roofs; massive leather-covered chairs of state and gilded

tables were all but swimming about; standing pools were forming in the hollow floors, whilst circling rills and trickling rivulets were falling down the staircases, and flowing out at every doorway. In one room an ancient library of many thousand volumes had been stacked up in a great heap in the middle, and hastily covered with some loose planks, which formed but a poor protection from the pattering downfall. The pictures in question were, however, not immediately in danger, though the blowing away of a few loose tiles, or the decay of the end of a rafter, above the spots where they are hung, might of course let in streaming sheets of water, which would inevitably ruin them forthwith.

Senhor Periera's ruined but authentic signed picture. It is sincerely to be hoped that other works by the same master hand will ultimately come to light, for I feel convinced they would further establish the existence of a preëminent artist, whose labours were mainly carried on during the first quarter of the 16th century. I cannot but believe, in short, that the painter of Senhor Periera's picture, Vasco Fernandez as he signs himself, was the person to whom, on account of his pre-eminence in art, the eulogistic epithet "Gran" or "Grande," was, either during his lifetime, or shortly after his death, bestowed. It now remains for his countrymen on the spot to carry on further researches, and to completely resuscitate this phœnix of the arts of Portugal.

Let us now see what is the present extent of our knowledge of the painters presumed to constitute the Viseu school:—the catalogue is as follows:—

1. The painter of the 14 pictures of Chapter House. *Circa* 1500—20.
2. Vasco Fernandez ("Gran Vasco?") Painter of Senhor Periera's signed picture. *Circa* 1520.
3. The painter of the Last Supper at Fontello, presumed to have been a scholar or imitator of Vasco Fernandez.
4. Velasco, the painter of the Viseu Sacristy pictures, the "Calvary," and of the Pentecost at Coimbra. *Circa* 1530—40.
5. Francisco Fernandez, painter, living in 1552 (see baptismal register of the Cathedral).
6. Vasco Fernandez, son of the preceding (see also Cathedral register), presumed, but without evidence, to have followed his father's profession, and erroneously supposed by Count Raczynski to have been the painter of the pictures actually by Velasco.
7. The painter of the "Jesus in the house of Martha" at Fontello, presumed to have been a follower of Velasco.

And to these may be added, as at all events displaying a certain general analogy with the Viseu painters,

8. "Ovia." The painter of the picture of Christ shown to the multitude, in Santa Cruz at Coimbra.

9. The painter of the St John in the Academy in Lisbon.

I have hitherto abstained from entering into any description of the "technical" and artistic characteristics of the Viseu pictures; unfortunately mere description can convey but faint and uncertain impressions. I shall, therefore, only dwell on peculiarities of a general nature. In the first place, then, as I have before stated, all the Viseu pictures exhibit, in an obvious manner, the all-pervading influence of Flemish art; but this influence, it is important to observe, is rather that of the earlier and greater masters, namely, of Van Eyck, Memling, and Quentin Matsys, than of the actually contemporary Flemish painters.

The Chapter House series might in fact, as far as technique is concerned, almost have proceeded from the pencil of Roger Van der Weyden or Hugo Van der Goes. They display the same jewel-like depth and brilliancy of transparent colour, spirited execution, and perfect understanding of texture; and what is still more remarkable, they are free from that offensive mannerism and "bravura" execution, which had almost entirely taken possession of contemporary art in Flanders. Nothing can be more beautiful than the colouring of these pictures: in this respect, they exhibit passages of the most piquant novelty. All the Viseu pictures, both of the Chapter House and the Sacristy, are distinguished by a remarkable gaiety and lightness of colour. Light rather than sombre backgrounds are the rule; it is, perhaps, mainly this pure and lightsome, yet at the same time powerful, colouring, which so strongly brought to my mind the pictures of Quentin Matsys and Pedro Campaña; but in this character alone do they resemble the former master, for the fantastic mannerism, vulgar grotesque types of humanity, and florid ideal ornamentation of the great painter of Antwerp, find no echo in the pictures at Viseu.

A love of truthfulness, and an endeavour to achieve the utmost possible perfection of imitation in details are everywhere perceptible; every piece of brocaded drapery, every strap, buckle, sword-belt, jewel, or piece of armour, would almost seem to have been conscientiously painted direct from the original

object. The gold brocade chasuble of the St Peter, for instance, with its fine embroidered orphreys, rich with saints and angels, elaborate canopies and foliage, must certainly have been painted from the actual vestment; and remarkably enough a superb chasuble of precisely the same apparent date and style, and differing but little from it in the actual details of the design, is still preserved in a press immediately beneath the picture.

I have before said, that passages of colour might be noted of singular harmony and originality of conception: a beautiful warm yellow, often in considerable mass, and frequently in contrast with varied tones of a fine purple brown or mulberry tint, is especially remarkable in the Chapter House pictures, whilst in those of the Sacristy crimson draperies of a peculiarly vivid, clear, lightsome ruby colour, apparently produced by glazing over an under-painting of black and white, will not fail to be observed. The latter pictures are on the whole more lightsome in effect than those of the earlier series, and although they are overlaid by the accumulated dirt of centuries, yet to the professional eye, accustomed to allow for such merely temporary obscuration, they still gleam forth like jewelled mosaics of rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, in a framework of silver.

The draperies, even in the earlier Chapter House pictures, are simple and natural; there is little or no appearance of the angular mannered folds so universal at the period; on the contrary, and especially in Senhor Periera's signed picture of Vasco Fernandez, and those of the Sacristy, the truth of drawing and amplitude of the draperies approximate even to Italian largeness of style. This characteristic of breadth is also displayed in the modulation of surfaces, especially in a peculiarly soft and tender fusion of light and shade, and local colour of almost Correggienesque beauty: but this breadth does not degenerate into vagueness, the boundary of every form and tint, on the contrary, being defined with almost photographic sharpness and precision.

A word more on the drawing and general conception of the figures, and these technical notes, so imperfect and yet

tedious, will be concluded. In the Chapter House series, the proportions of the figures are somewhat short, but they are of an elevated and serious type, having nothing whatever of Flemish vulgarity. In the Sacristy series the rendering of the human figure is often excellent, the hands and feet, as a rule, being drawn, frequently in difficult foreshortened attitudes, with great truth and mastery. But it is in the nude figure of the recumbent Christ, in the Vasco Fernandez picture, that the greatest excellence seemed to be attained; this figure is finely drawn and modelled in a simple dignified style, free alike from archaism or exaggeration. I was further especially struck by a group of small figures in the background of the St Sebastian picture, in the Sacristy, representing a knot of citizens at the gate of the town, discussing the events of the martyrdom in progress; the truth of action and expression of these figures appeared to me admirable; they are draped and composed, in general, with all the grandeur and amplitude of design of Andrea del Sarto, whose similar background figures they indeed strongly brought to my mind.

Finally, I cannot pass a higher eulogium on the Viseu pictures in general, than to say that they are replete with life and human expression, in every respect earnest works, remarkably free from the prevalent affectations of the epoch.

I now feel it incumbent on me to make some representation in regard to the present condition of these most interesting pictures; and I regret to say their state is that of complete neglect. They are in fact suffering rapid deterioration, and from causes which remedial measures of a simple and inexpensive nature would, for a time at least, to a considerable extent arrest. It is, I think, probable, that from the time these pictures were first painted and fixed in their places at Viseu, until a very recent period, they had remained literally untouched; as yet even, I believe, they have never been profaned by any repainting or so-called restoration, and they appear even never to have been re-varnished. On most of them the indurated crust of dirt, copiously sprinkled over with splashes of wax, from the tapers formerly burnt before them, the gradual deposit of

more than three centuries, still remains undisturbed. But two or three of the Sacristy pictures, on the contrary, were most unfortunately, some years ago, partially operated upon by an ignorant local picture cleaner, and with the worst possible result; happily, however, some of the more enlightened members of the chapter interfered, and put a stop to the man's operations, but not until many portions, especially of the Baptism picture, had been considerably injured by the abrasion or partial removal of superficial glazings and the more delicate surface-painting of details.

But although the hand of the spoiler has been arrested, scarcely less fatal influences are actively at work; apparently they have but escaped the Scylla of the picture cleaner to be engulfed in the Charybdis of neglect. Two evils, more or less naturally connected as cause and effect, are now actively at work—one, the gradual destruction of the panels by the ravages of insects, boring beetles and their larvæ; and the other, the blistering and ultimate scaling off of portions of the painted surface of the pictures.

The climate of Viseu seems to be a humid one, and the Cathedral and its appurtenant buildings, in particular, appeared to be particularly damp. Portions of several of the pictures, especially of the St Sebastian and the Calvary, have entirely perished, from the scaling off of patches of the surface, and doubtless the wet weather of the present winter will cause further loss of the same kind; the panels are honey-combed by insects; in some parts they are little better than a mass of dust, held together mainly by the "intonaco" or plaster ground, and the overlying painted surface. This transformation of the substance of the panels into a dry spongy mass, powerfully assists the disintegrating action of the atmosphere. From the different state in regard to the retention of moisture of the back and front, respectively, irregular expansion and contraction is induced, which is one of the principal causes of the blistering of the painted surface. This evil would, however, for a time at least, be counteracted by giving the pictures two or three coats of pure mastic varnish, whereby the dry and brittle crust of paint would

be strengthened, and rendered impervious to the moisture, which, in certain conditions of the atmosphere, is condensed upon it; but before varnishing any recent blisters should be carefully pressed down with a warm iron. These are the first and the most indispensable steps to be taken, and no time should be lost in doing so. In their present condition the pictures would absorb a considerable quantity of mastic, which, moreover, would be in other respects beneficial. So urgently is this remedy required that Mr W. H. Gregory, M.P., my friend and fellow-traveller to Viséu, with myself, would have been only too happy to have there and then defrayed the trifling expense of varnish, &c., which Senhor Periera, who was fully alive to the necessity of the case, would have carefully and conscientiously applied. The members of the Chapter were, moreover, made thoroughly aware of the desirability of the operation, and at the same time earnestly requested to restrict any remedial operations undertaken, to this safe and simple process. I am the more anxious to state this fact as it really occurred, inasmuch as immediately after our visit, an article appeared in the local newspaper, "*O Viriato*," in which our proposition was somewhat unfairly animadverted on, yet at the same time quoted as conveying a severe reproach to the authorities and inhabitants of Viséu. This article was reprinted with editorial comments in the Lisbon Journal, "*do Commercio*," of the 15th Oct., and it was followed on the 18th, in the same paper, by a letter from a correspondent, which again provoked a rather lengthy editorial article. The correspondent of the *Commercio*, however, whilst entirely endorsing and retailing, as if it were his own, every item of the advice furnished by myself to the authorities of Viséu, in a most ungrateful manner interlarded his letter with uncivil and irrelevant inuendos, thrown at the heads of the indiscreet strangers, who had dared to offer their advice and assistance; and the editor, although he did not abet the attack, did not deign to offer a word in defence.

It was not necessary to reply; my object had been fully gained in attracting attention to the state of the pictures at Viséu. I need scarcely say, however, that the fame of a great

artist is not a mere parochial matter, and surely it is no improper or ungraceful thing, even in a foreigner, to lend a helping hand in averting the destruction of unique and precious monuments of art, which, although they may be the actual property of a local corporation, in a higher and more rightful sense are truly the property of the world at large. But great as would be the sacrifice to the little world of Viseu, it is obvious that the only effectual means of giving these most important pictures a new lease of existence, would be their removal to a metropolitan gallery, where they would obtain the daily care and supervision absolutely essential to their safe keeping. If they remain in their present remote and unfit locality, their destruction will be a matter only of a comparatively brief space of time. Moreover, they are literally useless as they are at present; they have long since ceased to be objects of popular veneration or aids to devotion. With one exception (the Calvary), for a century or more, they have been virtually withdrawn from public inspection, and certainly not a single valid argument can be adduced in favour of their remaining buried in the Chapter House and Sacristy at Viseu. The plan now being adopted by the Italian government in similar cases, is, I cannot but think, the proper one; it is to remove all really valuable pictures from churches and convents to local or metropolitan galleries, and to replace them, when necessary, by modern copies. By this method, works of world-renowned importance are preserved for the admiration of after ages, whilst some encouragement is, at the same time, given to local artists, who are employed to make the necessary copies. That the Viseu pictures may speedily be translated to the place of honour in the public picture gallery at Lisbon is, at all events, the earnest wish of the writer.