

AN ARTISTIC DISCOVERY

NEW ATTRIBUTION OF CAMBRIDGE PICTURES.

An artistic discovery of considerable interest and importance has been made in connexion with two pictures given to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, by the family of the late Professor Frederick Fuller, of Peterhouse, in fulfilment of his wishes.

With several other pictures of the Italian schools they appear to have been brought to England about 1815, and they were accompanied by the description:—

"2 Quadri piccoli in tavola di Domenico Ghirlandajo, che uno rappresenta il miracolo di S. Zanobi e l'altro l'Annunziazione. Erano nella chiesa di S. Lucia di Firenze." Shortly after their arrival at the Fitzwilliam Museum, on October 30, 1923, Professor Yashiro, of Tokyo, who has made a careful study of the Florentine school, visited Cambridge, and saw the pictures before they were exhibited. He at once recognized that the "Annunciation" was by Domenico Veneziano, and afterwards wrote that it was part of the predella of the well-known picture by that painter of "The Virgin and Child Enthroned, with Four Attendant Saints," in the Uffizi Gallery, formerly over the high altar of the Church of Santa Lucia de' Bardi, in Florence, from whence, according to the original description, the two pictures were derived.

A few weeks later, photographs of the two pictures were sent to Mr. Berenson. Professor Yashiro's discovery with reference to the "Annunciation" was not mentioned, but Mr. Berenson came independently to the same conclusion and pointed out that the name on the frames was not without interest. Evidently there was a tradition that the pictures were by a "Domenico," and Domenico Veneziano being little known at the beginning of the last century, it was assumed that the painter was Domenico Ghirlandajo. There can be no question that the "Annunciation" is by Domenico Veneziano, and since the "Miracle of St. Zenobius" is on a precisely similar panel of approximately the same depth, with a general similarity in technique and colouring, and taking into account the note of origin, it is practically certain that the two panels formed parts of the same predella; and the bishop in the Uffizi picture, hitherto called St. Nicholas, though without his attributes, is now shown to be St. Zenobius, Bishop of Florence in the fifth century, and one of the patron saints of that city.

But the interest of the discovery made independently by Professor Yashiro and Mr. Berenson does not end with the identification of the painter of the "Annunciation" and the correction of the saint's name in the Uffizi picture. In his "Storia dell'arte Italiana," Signor A. Venturi, the eminent Italian critic, reproduces the Uffizi picture, and also a fragment of its predella, representing the "Martyrdom of St. Lucy," now in the Friedrich Museum at Berlin. Thus, with the two Fitzwilliam Museum examples, we have three panels from the predella accounted for. From the number of figures in the Uffizi picture there should be two more panels, and they might be expected to represent the Baptist and St. Francis, who stand on the Virgin's left. Mr. Berenson is able to tell us about these. "I am happy to announce," he writes, "that all the five panels of the predella still exist. Besides the three mentioned above, one representing the youthful Baptist wandering off into the wilderness is now in the possession of Carl W. Hamilton, of New York, and the fifth, representing the 'Stigmatization of St. Francis,' was recently in the hands of Mr. Julius Böhler, of Munich." Mr. Berenson adds that he looks forward to publishing all five "as a contribution towards our further understanding of Domenico Veneziano, and of his rôle in Florentine art."

The subjects of the five panels enable us to reconstruct their positions in the predella in relation to the figures in the Uffizi picture: the "Annunciation" in the centre, with the "Miracle of St. Zenobius" and the "Martyrdom of St. Lucy" on the right, and the "Baptist" and "St. Francis" on the left.

Very little is known about Domenico Veneziano. He is first heard of in a letter to Pietro de' Medici, dated April 1, 1438, and from 1439 to 1461, when he died on May 15, he was working in Florence in association with Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico, and Piero della Francesca, who was his pupil. The story that he was murdered by Andrea del Castagno, who wished to monopolize the secret of oil-painting, which Domenico Veneziano is said to have received from Antonello da Messina, is now completely disproved, since Castagno is known to have died four years earlier than his alleged victim. Domenico Veneziano is represented in the National Gallery by three pictures: two heads of saints, and a large "Madonna and Child Enthroned," which, like the Uffizi picture, bears his signature.

[Photographs of the pictures will be found on the picture page.]

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The Times (London, England), Monday, Feb 23, 1925; pg. 15; Issue 43893. (826 words)

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Gale Document Number:CS253433943