

Ticinese architects and sculptors in past centuries [to be continued]

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TICINESE ARCHITECTS AND SCULPTORS IN PAST CENTURIES

(The Editor, on a visit to Italy some months ago, came across, especially in Rome and Venice, some of the magnificent works of our Italian-speaking compatriots. The "Swiss Observer", a few years ago, published an article by Dr. A. Janner, which was translated by one of our readers, and which we re-publish below. It is a splendid testimony to our friends of the Ticino, and will act as a kind of art guide to would-be visitors.)

How numerous are the Swiss, and even the Ticinesi, who do not know of the great and glorious contribution given by the Ticino to the field of arts! How many who, when fulfilling a long cherished dream, go to Italy and are dumb with admiration at the magnificence of so many majestic churches and so many superb palaces, and do not know — which would make their admiration greater still — that many of those monuments are the work of their compatriots.

And yet it is so. It was the Ticinesi who built in Venice many of the finest monumental structures of the Renaissance and of the Baroque period. It was the Ticinesi who followed Bramante and Michelangelo as architects-in-chief for the building of the Cathedral of St. Peter in Rome and were, therefore, officially acknowledged as the foremost architects in Italy. Ticinesi worked for the Duomo of Milan, the Certosa of Pavia and the Cathedral of Como. It was they who brought to Genoa the first tidings of the Renaissance. In Naples they conceived some of the finest monuments, and in Sicily they left a number of the most beautiful statues.

If we look at these artists as a whole we find in them certain characteristics, common to them all, which distinguish them completely from the artists from Tuscany. They are, first of all, less individualistic than the Tuscans — the Ticinesi nearly always come on the scene as whole families, to work in the same town, at the same building. Then the Ticinesi are modest men, who do not pose, who do not seek after easy fame with strange and new attitudes, which, however, was often done by the Tuscans. They are, further, men of rural upbringing, who work more for the sake of the beautiful and difficult task to be overcome than for personal prestige or vainglory. History has very little to say about them and it is necessary to search the most minute chronicles of the time in order to find their names, which are usually come across only due to some task they had been allotted, or some work which they had done. It is perhaps that the Ticinesi always felt rather mountaineers in the midst of the other, more vivacious, populations of Italy and therefore they shunned the noisy society and the futile exhibitions. They preferred to live in the midst of their own small families, educating their children to their own calling, initiating them when still quite young to the use of the chisel, of the compass and of the square.

The Ticinesi were incomparably good technical men — in designing a palace they saw at a glance all the technical difficulties to overcome, they knew how each stone would have to be set, they knew what mechanical means were necessary. There is no difficulty connected with their calling which frightens them — they know not only art but also the manual work of the builder — before being architects they have themselves been only stone-masons. Even the most humble but so essential of work is not despised by them, on the contrary they value it as much

as their own. If need be they could themselves take up again the hammer and the trowel and perhaps even make up the mortar, to make sure that it will set well. For them art is merely the natural development of a certain manual ability, because even the ordinary work they carry out with the conception of art.

They emigrate at twelve to fifteen years of age and go with their father to work at some building, then their inborn artistic taste and their technical genius make architects-in-chief and sculptors of them. It is in this way that we find already in the thirteenth century masters from the Lugano countryside as chief architects for the finest buildings of that time. Adamo, from Arogno, reconstructs the cathedral of Trent and creates the very beautiful apsis; Bono from Bissone, sculptured the portal of the cathedral of Parma, and we find the masters from the Lugano neighbourhood as architects and contractors for the two greatest buildings of Lombardy, viz., the Duomo of Milan and the Certosa of Pavia. If the records of the building of the Duomo are consulted one finds only names of Ticinesi, and we know them to be our compatriots because the village of origin is always added, like Martino from Arogno, Giorgio from Maroggia, Giovannino from Bissone, and innumerable others. The Certosa of Pavia, also, has been conceived by a Ticinese and Ticinesi, among others Marco from Carona, followed one another in the leadership of the work. At the same time they were working in Siena, Genoa, Venice, Milan, etc.

But let us come to the most marvellous period of the Italian Renaissance and let us see what share the Ticinesi have had. The Solari family, from Carona, goes and establishes itself in Venice towards 1450 and, due to their origin, they are there called the "Lombardi". The older members are ordinary stone-masons and stone-cutters, but the sons, who have treasured the teachings of their fathers, and in whom the genius of their stock has, so to speak, come to life, become great artists, the foremost architects of Venice. In this way Pietro Lombardo creates the finest churches and the finest palaces of the Renaissance. He erected, among other buildings, the school of St. Mark, the palace Vedramin-Calergi, the palace Gussoni, the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, the church of San Giobbe. And among his monuments we will mention that to Jacobo Suriano and that of Dante at Ravenna. "It seems", says Corrado Ricci, an Italian Historian of art, "that his artistic genius is fluttering over every square rod of Venice."

The new style of architecture was called "Lombard" style just to indicate who has been the real originator of it. Peter Lombardo was followed by his two sons, Antonio and Tullio, for the completion of the building already begun, and they carried on the work with no less genius than their father. By Tullio is the very beautiful dead warrior, "Guiderello", which is in the museum of Ravenna. They were extraordinary artists, these Lombardi; architects and sculptors at one and the same time, they themselves sculptured the statues and the monuments required to decorate the churches they were building. They could handle the chisel with the same ability with which they were handling the compass — they were self-sufficient in all that was necessary to their calling. And in this sober art are to be found certain somewhat austere characteristics which seem to demonstrate the mountain origin of the family. *(To be continued.)*