

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

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TICINESE ARCHITECTS AND SCULPTORS IN PAST CENTURIES

By Dr. A. Tanner, translated from "Deine Heimat" by one of our readers.

(Continuation from issue May 11th 1962.)

While the Solari were bringing to Venice the finest flower of the Renaissance, the Rodari, from Maroggia, were building the cathedral of Como according to the new conception of art. The Rodari are three brothers: Tomaso, the chief, and his two younger brothers Giacomo and Bernardino. We have in them a good example of the way of associating of the artist families of those times. Among the three, four or five members of one family you would always find one whose genius would excel that of the others, and then the brothers or the other relatives would submit to him as a matter of course, as to an acknowledged chief. He planned and held the main direction of the work, the others carried it out. At that time no one gave himself airs of a great artist before having given proof of his worth. To begin with he was satisfied to place himself under a good leader, and to follow the tradition. It is in this way that in the case of many ancient monuments the name of the author has been lost, but the original expression of beauty has been preserved.

In Como, under the direction of Tomaso Rodari, architect and sculptor of exquisite genius, his two brothers, also, created beautiful work. If, however, in order to seek after a supposed originality, they should have desired to go their own way today they would perhaps be forgotten. By Tomaso Rodari are also built the two finest churches in the Ticino, viz., the Collegiata of Bellinzona and that of Lugano. The latter has in the facings of its portals perhaps the finest sculptured marble of the sixteenth century. About the cathedral of Como the great art historian, Burckhardt, says: "The choirs and the transverse wings are one of the finest creations of the Italian Renaissance." A contemporary of the Rodari is Cristoforo Solari, a sculptor of great capacity, to whom we owe, among others, the very beautiful sepulchral monument of "Lodovico il Moro" and of his wife "Beatrice d'Este" now in the Certosa of Pavia.

And while the Solari were working in Venice and the Rodari in Como the Gaggini from Bissone were creating most beautiful work in Genoa, which is still greatly admired today. The Gaggini is a family of artists which, single-handed, could demonstrate how, under certain conditions, genius is an hereditary quality. For nearly 200 years the Gaggini opened *ateliers* of sculpture in all parts of Italy. From Genoa, where the head of the family had established himself, his sons and nephews very soon radiate over the whole Peninsula and create everywhere new and fruitful centres of art, principally in Naples and Sicily. Among these artists of the family Gaggini many enjoy great fame in the history of art, like Giovanni, Pace, Elia, Domenico and Antonello. Giovanni Gaggini sculptured portals for Genoese palaces and decorated churches and chapels. Pace Gaggini, also a sculptor, worked for the Certosa of Pavia and at Genoa and his fame stretched to Spain, where in Seville he carried out the monument to Caterina da Rivera. Domenico Gaggini, the most famous of the family, leaves immortal works in Genoa, Naples, Palermo and elsewhere. His son, Anonella Gaggini splendidly carried on the tradition with grace and strength and enriched with marvellous statues all the great palaces of Sicily.

In Florence there were no Ticinese artists. Florence was itself a hot-bed of artists and did, therefore, not need the influx of strangers. It had been the cradle of the art — it is there that had taken shape that marvellous spring-tide of art which became the Renaissance, and on the work of Brunelleschi and of Donatello have learned also the great artists of the Ticino. But within a short space of time the Ticinesi had become competitors and in fact when, in the sixteenth century, Rome, the eternal city, had at last gathered within its walls the flower of Italian artists, we find the masters from the villages of the Lugano countryside competing, and with success, against the masters of Florence. The height of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Baroque period are completely dominated by our artists. To Bramante from Umbria followed the Tuscans San Gallo and Michelangelo and to them succeeded our own Ticinesi: Fontana, Maderno and Borromini, as the undisputed leaders of the new artistic movement. The cathedral of St. Peter in Rome, symbol of all that period, though started by the Tuscans, is completed by our own men. The history of Italian architecture from 1550 to 1650 bears only names of Ticinesi as leaders of the various phases. We begin with an exquisite sculptor: Andrea da Breno, who sculptured in Rome marvellous sepulchral monuments in which there is still today all the freshness, measure and admirable sobriety of line of the first Renaissance. We come then to speak of the family of the Fontana from Melide and of the Maderno from Capolago who, at their time, for their intelligence, ability and artistic genius were among the best honoured and most popular men of Italy. The Fontana were two brothers: Giovanni and Domenico. They lived during the second half of the sixteenth century and both left Melide when still quite young in order to go to Rome where, in the buildings which the Popes were having erected, they felt sure of finding work and of having an opportunity of fulfilling their dreams of art, glory and wealth. Giovanni, the elder, built various palaces, among which we could mention the Giustiniani and the de Gori palaces and the church of San Martino, at Siena. But he has been principally what today would be called an engineer, an incomparably fine technical mind, builder of roads and aqueducts.

His younger brother, Domenico, proved an even finer genius and to the technical ability of his elder brother he added a greater and more delicate artistic sense. Assisted by Cardinal Montalto, who had allotted him various work to carry out when the cardinal became Pope, Domenico was at once chosen as chief architect for the building of the cathedral of St. Peter, which was far from nearing completion. By varying somewhat the original design by Michelangelo Domenico erected the majestic dome of the cathedral in only twenty-two months, although his adversaries had declared that it was impossible to carry out such a piece of work in less than ten years. As the cathedral of St. Peter was the pride of every citizen of Rome one can quite imagine the popularity of the daring and unerring Ticinese. He was created by the Pope a Knight of the Order of Christ and was the first man to bear the title of Knight-Architect, a special distinction granted by the Pope only to their very finest architects.

(To be continued.)