

HISTORY
OF
THE LIFE AND WORKS
OF
RAFFAELLO.

BY
QUATREMERE DE QUINCY,
OF THE INSTITUT ROYAL DE FRANCE
ACADEMIE DES INSCRIPTIONS ET BELLES LETTRES,) AND SECRETARY TO
THE ACADEMIE DES BEAUX ARTS.

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BY
WILLIAM HAZLITT, ESQ.

HISTORY

OF THE

LIFE AND WORKS OF RAFFAELLO.

It was the small town of Urbino, in the Papal States, which, on the 28th March, 1483, gave birth to Raffaello Sanzio.¹ The patronymic was originally De' Santi, or Sancti, but custom had italianized it into Sanzio.

The family was of ancient date at Urbino, where it had maintained itself with honour in a moderate condition of fortune. It had a genealogy set forth in Latin on a scroll of paper, that Antonio de' Santi, son of Giulio, the head of the family, held in his hand, in a portrait of him formerly in the possession of cardinal Giovanni Francesco Albani, who became pope under the name of Clement XI.

This genealogy, for a copy of which we are indebted to Bellori, contains the names of a succession of Urbinese citizens, well known in their native town, where they had exercised various professions, and had served the state in various employments.² Among them we remark several

¹ Upon the house where he was born there is an inscription, to mark with honourable distinction the place of his birth; it terminates with these lines:—

“Ludit in humanis divina sapientia rebus
Et sæpe in parvis claudere magna solet.”

² The genealogy runs thus:—“Giulio de' Sancti, cousin to Tiberio Bacco, a Roman citizen of great eloquence, was the first of the family De' Sancti, still honourably known at Urbino, who assumed this cognomen. From him descended Antonio de' Sancti, who is painted here. He gave birth to Giovanni Giacompo, a learned canon; to Giovan-Bat-

painters, Raffaello being the fifth of the family who practised the art. The profession, however, was all he inherited from them; for none had his genius or his reputation.

Not that Giovanni Sanzio, his father, was destitute of ability. More than one production of his pencil demands from the impartial critic the acknowledgment that, notwithstanding a feebleness of colouring, and a timidity of style inseparable from that early stage of the revival of art, they manifest unequivocal indications of a progress full of promise for the future. The researches which have been made in Italy for worthy productions of art, anterior to Raffaello, have placed several works by his father in an honourable position on the interesting list.¹ One rare merit he possessed—that of not imagining himself greater than he really was, and of comprehending that his own talent would be wholly surpassed by his son's. It is to this noble modesty, perhaps, that we, in a great measure, owe Raffaello.

While yet an infant, Giovanni Sanzio bestowed upon him all the earnest attention which an only and long-desired son can receive from a tender father. He knew that if the habits of men take their origin from the earliest moments of their existence, the education which is to guide them should also commence with their infancy; that it is in infancy they should hear from their mother those first lessons which derive their virtue from the domestic affec-

tista, a brave officer of infantry; to Galeazzo, a noted painter; to Sebastian, and to a daughter. Galeazzo begot Giulio, a celebrated painter, and compiler of this genealogy; Antonio and Vincenzo, both painters, and other sons and daughters. Of Sebastian were born Girolamo and Giovan-Battista. Of Giulio, Galeazzo, Curzio, Annibale, and other sons and daughters. Of Antonio, Claudio, and several daughters. Of Giovan-Battista, son of Sebastian, Giovanni, father of Raffaello." Bel-
lori adds:—"Antonio is painted in a half-length, wearing a dark habit of antique fashion, lined with fur, and with a cap on his head. On the table near him is a book, inscribed *Appiano Alessandrino*, indicating his profession of historian and man of letters."

¹ Among them we have noticed a St. Elizabeth with the Virgin on a throne; a Visitation of St. Elizabeth, in the church of the Minori Osservanti; the Virgin on a throne, with Infant Jesus and Infant St. John, at Berlin, &c. Baldinucci names five historical works of Giovanni Sanzio as still remaining in Urbino.

tions. With the maternal milk Raffaello seems to have imbibed the taste for painting. His first playthings were the implements of his father's art; and the latter delighted on all occasions to encourage tendencies which seemed the presage of an extraordinary vocation to the noble art he himself so loved.

Ere many years had elapsed, he saw that the child, whom, from the time it could walk, he had made the companion and assistant of his labours, was already too far advanced to remain his pupil, and his paternal love at once resolved to act upon the discovery. Desirous that his son should have for a master the most renowned painter of the day, Pietro Vanucci, called *Il Perugino*, he made a journey for this purpose to Perugia, where he acquired the friendship of this celebrated man, and, as a marked proof of this friendship, his promise to receive Raffaello into the number of his pupils, of whom posterity has preserved the names of more than one still renowned artist, and among them that of Bernardino Pinturichio.

If, in the outset, Perugino, astonished at the precocious talent manifested by Raffaello in drawing, charmed with the amiable temper, the deportment, and the grace of his pupil, prognosticated that he would soon become his master, the young man, on his part, imitated Perugino as assiduously as though he were never to be other than his disciple. The copies of the one are not distinguishable from the originals of the other; when the pupil worked on the same canvas with the master, the result seems the product of one hand.¹

An elaborate investigation into this subject, which can only be made in Italy by an immediate comparison of the original productions of this period, while modifying this statement of Vasari's,² renders still more clear the wonderful precocity of Raffaello. It might easily be shown indeed, from such an examination, that the genius of Raffaello from the first had a great influence over the

¹ Among the works assigned to the childhood of Raffaello is a Madonna, painted in fresco on the court-yard wall of his father's house.

² Vasari, *Vite de' Pittori*, iii. 161.

talent of Perugino, not so much as to execution as to refinement and grace of expression. It would thus seem that the pupil gave his master lessons of the highest importance, a circumstance reflecting equal honour upon both.

In considering the state of painting in the schools of this period, even in that of Perugino, we must admit that the art was as yet little advanced; but then its progress was in the right direction, the unsophisticated imitation of pure nature. Great poverty of invention, timidity in manual execution, a dryness, but at the same time a clearness of stroke; no great depth of tints, and imperfect management of colouring, but purity and freshness of tone; a gentle simplicity in the composition, little expression or decision of movement indeed, but a freedom and truthfulness of attitude; such were the characteristics of the contemporary schools of the Bellini at Venice, of Francia at Bologna, of Ghirlandaïo at Florence, and of Pietro Vanucci at Perugia; characteristics which we find also, somewhat modified, in the productions of Raffaello, while under the eye of his master.

It is impossible to say what might have become of the arts of design among the moderns, destitute as they are of the habitual sight of the nude human form, the study of which was, to so great an extent, presented to her artists by the public institutions of Greece, had not the models of antiquity suddenly reappearing in Italy, fecundated, as with a vivifying ray, the germs of the new schools, and expedited their advancement.

It was towards the close of the fifteenth century that the Medici, and more especially Lorenzo the Magnificent, threw open in their palace, filled with remains of ancient art, a sort of academy for students, and the arts of design at once passed from infancy to maturity. Masaccio had already appeared, as the prelude to the revolution about to take place. Soon after him, Lionardo da Vinci and Michel Angelo having broken through the trammels of a timid routine, gave an enormous impulse, though by different paths, to the science of design; and next, the chance which occasioned him to leave the school of Perugino,