ON COLOURING STATUES.

A PAPER READ AT CAMBRIDGE, AT THE MEETING OF THE ARCHÆOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND IN 1854.

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I do not propose to occupy the attention of the section with a history of art, nor with a description of any of the processes of sculpture; but simply to discuss what may, in some respects, be termed a question of *taste*, (though other considerations of much importance are involved in the inquiry,) and upon which all who feel an interest in art, and in seeing sculpture practised upon some established principle, may be expected to have an opinion. The subject seems especially to call for careful consideration at this time, and I am glad of the opportunity afforded by a meeting like the present, where so many scholars, antiquaries, and artists are collected together for the express purpose of entertaining such questions, to bring forward a subject which I venture to believe will be thought well deserving their attention.

Owing to some experiments that have recently been made, it has been much canvassed whether or not statues should be coloured.

That the judgment we may arrive at will settle definitively the practice can scarcely be expected. There always will be persons who will exercise their indisputable right to please themselves, both in the mode of producing and in estimating works in those imitative arts whose first appeal is to be made through the eye. But it is important in its relation to the public education in art that the opinions of those who have studied its history and theory should, if possible, be ascertained respecting any remarkable innovation, or inroad upon long established practice. It is, in fact, the duty of those who profess art to watch over its character and interests; and if they have reason to believe that true principles are likely to be lost sight of, or tampered with,

unhesitatingly to enter their protest, in order that the non-professional, and especially art promoters and supporters, may not be left without information and authority to direct them.

The study of the finest productions in the highest walks of the arts of design has led to the establishment of certain fixed principles, or *canons*, upon which the judgment of ages has determined that each art can alone be safely practised. These are not accidental and arbitrary regulations; they have been fairly deduced from the most perfect known works; whose excellence may likewise be proved to result from the presence of these elementary conditions. In the imitative arts of painting and sculpture especially, the proper limits of each have been well and carefully defined. Sufficient room has been left for the exercise of individual taste and fancy; but any great or striking deviation from these conditions becomes an infringement of the conventional and necessary rules by which it has been determined that each art is, or ought to be, bound.

The desire for change is so strongly implanted in the human mind, that it is not easy to define its boundaries, or to say where it should cease to claim indulgence and exercise its influence. But it cannot be doubted that its gratification must be subject to some limitation, and that there must be some laws of propriety and good sense beyond which it should not be attempted to pander to it. Irregular attempts to astonish may obtain for a time the admiration, the eye-wonder of the multitude, and especially of the uneducated and unrefined, always too ready to receive with delight what is calculated to cause excitement to sensibilities that are not easily stimulated by ordinary means; as in the lower class of drama, the utmost exaggeration of language and action are sure to have an immediate and unfailing effect on the spectators or audience, when the quiet though truthful representation of the self-same subject would in all probability appear dull and commonplace. On the same principle, in the present day, the painting and daubing of the clown's face till, literally, it loses all human character, constitutes one great source of admiration and enjoyment of that personage's *rôle;* seems to pass for wit, and, indeed, goes far to make up the facetious character.

The expression of an individual opinion, whether of

approval or dissent in the matter before us, will very inadequately meet a question which should be argued much more broadly, and should include the consideration of whether it is right or wrong in art to paint statues. As a matter of taste, or rather fancy, it must be left to the artist and the purchaser; but the inquiry should be made on higher principles than if it were only to test the value of a caprice. The proposition to be discussed is, "Whether the practise is conformable with the principles upon which pure sculpture should be exercised?"

The grounds upon which its advocates appear to found their recommendation of this practice shall, as far as I am competent to do it, be set forth fully and fairly. So far from desiring to press my own opinions presumptuously, my object is rather to elicit argument and information; and it will be my endeavour to conduct the inquiry proposed in a liberal spirit, and with every possible feeling of respect for, and even deference to, those who now stand forward in support of what others, equally conscientiously, are disposed to consider a dangerous novelty.[1] A difference of opinion upon particular details of practice is quite compatible with the most sincere acknowledgment of the ability and talent of those from whom we may dissent upon a few insulated points. The object is to establish a truth, not to achieve a victory. But if it shall be shown that the proposed practice is not in accordance with true principles of art, it becomes the more necessary to declare it against the opinions of those whose undoubted ability may be powerful to influence the public taste. And if, after all, an objectionable practice should obtain, for a season, after a protest against it has been recorded by those who have endeavoured fairly to weigh the arguments on both sides, it will be seen that it has not been effected without a warning voice having been raised against it.

It is fair to assume that the artists who propose to introduce the novelty of painting or colouring statues, &c., conceive that such additions will *improve* sculpture. It

[1] I am happy in this place to acknowledge the value of Mr. Owen Jones's little essay upon this subject. Although I do not agree with many of that gentleman's conclusions, and must confess myself opposed to the practice he would be glad to see established in general polychromic sculpture, his "Apology" is written in a fair spirit.

would be absurd and unjust to accuse them of recommending it on any other ground; with the intention, that is, of injuring or deteriorating their art. When, therefore, they profess and show they are not satisfied to see sculpture practised in its simple specialty—as an art dealing with *form* only—a sufficient difficulty—it may fairly be taken for granted that they think it is deficient in some quality wanting to its perfection, and that they can supply this want by the aid of another art. It is to be lamented that if this is their feeling the proposition is not thus candidly stated, and that the Polychromists do not explain more fully and clearly than they have yet done the object they have in view, and the advantages they think will accrue to their art from it; because then the question might at once be argued on its merits. But the advocates for the practice of colouring sculpture appear to be either unwilling or unable to enter upon any art-reasons for its adoption. Generally, they are satisfied with saying it was done by the ancient sculptors, and desire to found the modern practice upon *precedent*. It scarcely is possible to conceive that this comprehends all in the way of reason that artists of ability can give for desiring such an innovation on long accustomed practice. To advocate colouring sculpture upon no other ground than because ancient sculptors are said to have done it, seems to be simply a narrow prejudice; and before the general body of, perhaps less well informed, sculptors, and the public, who cannot carry their respect for mere antiquity quite so far, can be expected to conform to the recommendation, surely the art-reasons for such innovation, and the principles upon which they found their new theory, should be freely explained. That sculpture among the ancients, Greek as well others, was sometimes painted or coloured, and that it had other ornamental accessories, cannot be disputed; the fact is asserted by ancient writers, and what is still more important, monuments have been found so decorated, which place the matter beyond question and contradiction. This, then, is admitted: but this authority, taking it fully for what it is worth—and some remarks will be offered further on upon some of the most generally received quotations from ancient authors, on this subject—no more proves the propriety or the desirableness of the continuance, or rather the renewal of the practice in the present day, and in the actual

condition of sculpture, than the equally well authenticated fact of the early personages and characters of the Greek drama having smeared their faces with wine-lees, or concealed them under hideous masks, proves the propriety of suggesting to our actors and actresses to do likewise.

Again, admitting the fact, and even the value of the authority of antiquity for Polychromy, it still may be questioned, first, whether painting or colouring statues was originated by any of the great masters of sculpture; secondly, whether the practice was general in the best time of sculpture; and thirdly, whether it was employed by the best artists in their ordinary works—works, that is, not executed for a particular purpose and under special conditions—a consideration, it will be presently seen, of the highest importance in this inquiry. There is not a shadow of doubt that all these three questions, bearing on the ancient authority, may be answered in the negative.

It may be permitted here briefly to state an art-principle which will not be disputed: it may help to clear the ground for some subsequent remarks.

The legitimate province of sculpture is to represent by *form;* what is not represented by form does not come under the definition of sculpture.

If sculpture be painted it is a mixture of *two* arts: as, if a picture be relieved or raised in any part, it is also a mixture of two arts.

Let us imagine that in order to increase the effect of some well-known picture, say the Transfiguration, portions of it were raised and sculptured, so as to produce, in fact, the relief or projection of the various figures and groups. Would it not be denounced first as a most inefficient device; and, next, as an inexcusable departure from an established law of art? It is much to be lamented that while no painter of reputation, ancient or modern, has attempted so to contravene an admitted principle in his own art, professors of the sister art of sculpture, many of them artists of unquestionable talent, such as Bernini, Roubiliac, and others, have not always confined their practice within such wholesome and necessary restraint; though, with all their indulgence in the fantastic and picturesque, the sculptors alluded to are not known to have had recourse to the painter's art.

Having admitted, generally, the fact that there is the

authority of the ancients for colouring sculpture, it is now proposed to consider more at large the question, whether it is desirable to return to this practice. The legitimacy of mixing together two arts, which the principles essential to each require should be kept distinct, has already been disputed. The next inquiry will be, what are the objects to be obtained by painting or colouring sculpture ?

1. Is it to render the imitation more close to nature ?
2. Is it to attract attention ?
3. Is it to gratify the sense by adventitious decoration ?
4. Is it to give distinctness to the parts of a work when viewed from a distance.

First, with respect to close imitation.

It scarcely can be necessary to state in such a meeting as this, that it is a radical error to suppose that the province of the sculptor is to effect an exact imitation ; that is, such imitation as should produce illusion. We all know that, in many respects, this is impossible in sculpture. In others, where it is possible, the *fac-simile* representation of inferior objects, such as veils, napkins, the stuffs and materials of drapery is, as all practical sculptors know, simply the work of (a superior, it may be, but) a careful carver.

As I am addressing a general and unprofessional audience, it may not be out of place to state the principle by which the sculptor is governed in this respect. It is stated that there are certain objects in nature which do not admit of being exactly imitated in sculpture. But even if it were possible to carry the imitation of that which is the highest object of the artist's study—namely, the human figure—to such perfection as to induce the belief that it was real : that to any one entering a sculpture gallery the figures should so closely resemble nature that, at first sight, they should appear to be living men and women standing on pedestals, would not the achievement cause a very disagreeable impression ? Undoubtedly it would. At present the lover and admirer of art is gratified by the contemplation of a fine and successful work of art, *as* a work of art. His imagination supplies all that is wanting ; and he does not ask nor expect that his senses shall be deceived. Nay, the moment he could bring himself to look at it as a positive and exact imitation of a human figure : the hair, the eyes, the lips, the nails—every part coloured and tinted, like life, but without life, he would

be more disposed to shrink from than admire it. Let us for a moment imagine some well-known work,—the Apollo, the Laocoön and his Sons, the Farnese Hercules, so treated, and judge for yourselves what would be your feelings. Even such a near approximation to reality as is afforded by wax-work exhibitions,[2] is anything but pleasing to the generality of people, and especially persons of taste in art, though they may be amused by the talent and ingenuity shown in thus producing resemblances. The dissatisfaction felt is to be accounted for on a perfectly intelligible principle. The reason for it is to be found in the fact that wax-work approaches too near to nature to be agreeable as *art*, and yet is not near enough, or true enough to nature—nor can it ever be so—to make us forget it is art. Certainly there is no reason to believe that ancient Greek sculpture ever fell so low in taste as to have a school of close imitators of the kind alluded to ; or that the introduction of colour had any such object.[3]

As it is always desirable if possible to refer to existing examples, I will remind you of many sculptured works to be found in this country, from which you may form a judgment of the effect of colour in increasing the truth of imitation. I have already touched on wax-work. I now allude to the painted monumental figures still found in many of our churches. They are chiefly of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though the practice prevailed in the earliest period of such monuments ; for the further we go back to *barbarism* in art, or to the infancy of art, the more surely do we meet with coloured sculpture. Now these are, undeniably, legitimate examples of polychromic sculpture ; and, of their kind, good examples : and what is more to the purpose, they are infinitely superior in this respect to any ancient works of the kind that have been discovered. Probably, as they are of modern date, no value whatever will be allowed them ; but had any figures or fragments resembling them been dug up in Greece or Asia Minor, there can be little doubt, judging from the examples that have been quoted, they would have been hailed by the

[2] I have no intention to insult legitimate sculpture by a comparison with bad common-place wax-work figures ; but, in all fairness, would take the best that could be produced. Even if they could be the productions of first-rate artists the argument would equally apply.

[3] The advocates for colour say it is not their object to imitate nature !

Polychromists as invaluable specimens of the practice, and triumphantly adduced as authority for its reintroduction. And how do these affect us, considered as works of art, independently of course of any interest that belongs to them on other grounds? Are not the best of them more suggestive of the toy-shop than the sculptor's *studio?* By far the most successful works of the kind, (and the effect they produce at first sight is described, by those who have seen them, as perfectly startling,) are to be met with in Spain where statues, as large as life, and represented in action, are to be seen painted with the utmost care and finish. It is known that while this taste prevailed, the sculptors laboured to acquire the skill of the best painters, that they might themselves insure all the pictorial effect possible to their statues; and as the artists of the time, the sixteenth century, were amongst the most able that Spain has produced,—as Cano, Montanes, Hernandez—these performances far surpass anything of the kind found in other countries. But, while giving them all due credit for the peculiar excellence they exhibit, several accomplished writers on Spanish art [4] have not hesitated to record their unqualified condemnation of the practice as opposed to all true principles of sculpture. But, to show the extent to which enthusiasm, and the determination to support any favourite theory may be carried, the ingenious author of a well-known treatise on Polychromy says, "*Si une figure coloriée avec art et avec goût ne fait pas bien, c'est la sculpture qui est en defaut et non pas la polychromie.*" This is certainly taking a somewhat unusual view of the position that sculpture might be supposed to hold in the question.

In the examples referred to the gradations are studiously marked in the colours applied; complexion, half-tints, veins, the eyes—all are carefully expressed. In the very few instances in which colour has been found on ancient sculpture, —and I believe there are none of the best period of Greek art—there is no attempt at gradation. The pigment is of one *uniform* tint, and appears to be laid on, or over, a thin coating of *stucco*, which covers, and must, more or less, clog and thicken the surface of the material of which the statue is formed. The flesh is usually expressed by a dark red, but

[4] See Ford, "Handbook of Spain;" Sir Edward Head; Stirling, "Spanish Painters."

sometimes, judging from remains of colour on Terra Cottas, it was white. In figures on vases this frequently occurs. The eyes were of various substances, sometimes of glass or paste, sometimes metal, sometimes even of precious stones; and there are instances of inlaying metal of a lighter colour, as silver, on bronze lips.

It has thus been briefly shown that colouring sculpture is not desirable on the ground of exact imitation; and that the Greek sculptors of the best period of the art, who are quoted as authorities for the practice, never could have had that object in view.

The next inquiry is with respect to attracting attention. They who consider that the whole and sole object of art is to please the eye, may very consistently contend that all means that can be devised as conducing to that end are legitimate. They would, therefore, add extraneous decoration or ornament to sculpture in order to attract purchasers, by exhibiting to them either what is merely pretty or showy, or something that is calculated to excite or gratify certain feelings of mere sense. There have been, and it is to be regretted, there are artists who are open to the reproach of doing this for very unworthy purposes; but it will be admitted, to their honour, that English sculptors are not liable to the reflection of making their art a means of corruption, by the studied display of qualities and modes of expression that can only be intended to minister to the grosser senses. But, where no such purpose is contemplated, a sculptor, jealous of his fame and of the honour of his calling, should be careful not to subject himself even to the suspicion of practising what might be termed trick or claptrap, as a means of inviting attention to his merits. It is, in fact, the mere chapman's excuse; and, though there may be nothing absolutely wrong in it, in morals, it surely places him who adopts it in a somewhat different position from the class of artists to whom we should look for the maintenance of a high character for their profession.

The next subject of inquiry, namely, whether the object of colouring sculpture was to give distinctness to the several parts of a composition, will require a more extended consideration than has been given to the previous questions. In studying the practice of sculpture among the Greeks,—those great masters of the art whom all the modern schools

have agreed to take as their exemplars,—it must be borne in mind that, without necessarily deriving their art from any other nation or people, the *mode* of presenting it would most probably be much influenced by older and foreign usage, as the practice of other and, compared with themselves, more advanced nations became known to them. Thus, though sculpture was first known and practised in Greece later than in Egypt or Assyria (as it was also totally distinct in its types), still, though original there, the report and example of what was done in other countries would doubtless be the cause of the introduction and adoption among the Greeks of similar practices. As the custom of painting their sculpture prevailed among the older nations, it is reasonable to believe that the reports of travellers might have occasioned the introduction of a similar practice among the more recent settlers in Greece ; and thus it may be considered rather as a foreign graft upon their own rude and primitive attempts at art.[5] This supposition places the practice upon an entirely different footing to that which it would have had had it been a peculiar feature in Greek design, and originated by the great Greek masters ; when of course their taste would have been made responsible for its invention. Once introduced, usage gave it a hold upon the prejudices of the people who, as sculpture at that early period of their history was only, or for the most part, used for sacred purposes or illustration, no doubt soon closely associated all these modes and particulars of representation with the popular religious feelings ; and thus, probably, in the more barbarous ages of Greek art the painting of the statues of the gods became a prescribed practice. The intuitive genius of this remarkable people soon, however, improved upon the rude means which at first seemed only to be employed to produce a pretty and attractive effect in decoration. In

[5] It may be observed here that there can be no doubt that painting with these nations was in a great measure hieratic and symbolical. In figures of mythological personages, in kings and heroes, each colour so applied, (and all are painted from head to foot,) conveyed a distinct meaning, probably recognised by the multitude, but certainly understood by the priests, as having a peculiar application. We do not sufficiently reflect in considering monuments of this kind, that sculpture had a much more profound meaning, and was fulfilling a much more important mission in past ages than it has or perhaps ever can have with modern nations. We must always bear in mind, that it was not always produced merely to gratify a taste for art, or to furnish galleries with pleasing objects of exhibition and display.

their Polychromic architecture they appear fully to have equalled their earlier exemplars in the richness of emblazonment, while they surpassed them in the delicacy of the forms of their ornament, in the appropriateness of application, the balance of quantities, and the judgment displayed in the several combinations and juxtaposition of colours : and thus, by their refined taste, they raised to the dignity of fine art that which among a less-delicately organised people would be, and doubtless was, mere gorgeous and, comparatively, barbarous enrichment. It was the same in Polychromic sculpture ; and in studying its existence among the Greeks at the time of their best sculptors, it will be necessary, in order to judge fairly, to inquire how much of it was prescriptive, and of necessity, and how far the great masters of the art can be considered responsible as original or independent authority for statue-painting.

The period when it is agreed, by all historians of art, that sculpture attained its highest perfection, ranges between 480 B.C., and about 200 B.C. From the time, that is, when Myron and Phidias lived, and when the latter superintended the more important public works undertaken by order of Pericles, till the extinction of the immediate scholars of Lysippus, fifty or sixty years after the death of Alexander the Great.

Although an approach to a fine style of art is traceable in the schools immediately preceding the age of Phidias, yet there can be no doubt that, previous to the time of that great master, sculpture was still of a hard and exaggerated character. The sculptures from the temple of the Panhellenian Jupiter at Egina, among other valuable examples, indicate both these facts. Phidias, and those under him, effected an important revolution in art. He had the genius, and his favour with Pericles gave him the power, to break through much that was prescriptive and traditional in sculpture ; and, freeing it from these trammels, he produced what far surpassed all that had gone before it—as indeed it never has been equalled since—in the statues and rilievi which decorated the Parthenon at Athens. Still, the reformation was partial. Imitation was indeed now founded on the close study of selected forms in nature, expressed in what is known as the grand style in art ; but there is no doubt the improvement or the change did not

extend to some important details of execution. Those liberties and innovations which Phidias suggested and effected in the general treatment of historical and poetical subjects, would not be permitted in the same degree in the representation of sacred personages. He would here find himself restricted by usage, from which it was neither safe nor lawful to depart; and it is recorded that the mere introduction of two portraits, said to be of Pericles and of himself, in the accessorial rilievi that decorated the statue of Minerva, subjected the sculptor to an accusation of sacrilege. In statues of the gods, then, we must not always expect to find the free, untrammelled production of the artist; but even where great improvements may be traced in some important points, be prepared to see some characteristics preserved of the original types. Nor was the artist bound by custom alone. The priesthood, always alarmed at any change indicative of the exercise of individual and independent thought, required a strict adherence to established forms. Any very sweeping innovation in the mode of representing the gods might have shaken the faith of the common people in the religion itself, and then, of course, as a necessary consequence, in its teachers and ministers. In this respect, then, there was policy in insisting upon his adhering to certain received dogmas in art. In obedience therefore to the universal feeling, Phidias made the statues of Jupiter at Elis, and of Minerva at Athens, of various materials. These works, we must bear in mind, were the offerings of a grateful people for most important victories achieved over a powerful enemy who had threatened their very existence as a nation. They were to be made out of the spoil taken from the vanquished foe. The Minerva especially was voted to crown the triumph over the Persian hosts, after the failure of the expedition into Greece under Xerxes. The old and accustomed means, namely, the employment of rich and varied materials, were, of course, adopted equally on this occasion. Ivory and gold, painting and inlaying, and every conceivable enrichment, were lavishly bestowed in order to make these votive statues the most costly of dedicated gifts. But *chryselephantine* and *polychrome* sculpture were not first known or invented at this time, nor was Phidias the first sculptor, by many, who

practised it. Fortunately for art the greatest sculptor who ever lived illustrated Greece at this period ; and thus it was that the richest works in sculpture, in material, were also, by a happy accident, the most perfect productions of art ; but surely no one would attempt to argue that they were the most perfect works of sculpture *because* they were composed of gold, ivory, or any other particular material, or because they were painted and enriched.

It is not necessary to describe these works in detail, but it is difficult for the imagination to conceive anything more splendid and gorgeous than the effect of their varied enrichments, viewed in combination with fine architecture, the details of which were also richly coloured, and glistening under the bright sun and cloudless sky of Greece. The most poetical fancy would probably fail in attempting to picture to itself the real brilliancy of the scene, taken as a whole. But, as critics, let us not lose sight of the important fact that we are judging the works alluded to only in a large combination—as objects of *spectacle* and display. Does it follow that, considered individually, as works of sculpture, the variety of materials and the flutter of colour would not be injurious to them, as these attracted admiration, instead of its being drawn to those finer and simpler qualities which should specifically claim attention in this art. The fact is, the sculpture so applied lost its distinctive or special character. It was a portion of an architectural effect. Colouring, we know, was extensively employed in architectural decoration, and when the sculptor was called upon to act in combination with the architect, his work, no doubt, was subject to the same laws of treatment as other parts of the composition. He placed his groups in the pediment with its enriched coloured mouldings, against a background, sometimes painted blue—perhaps to imitate the sky, but quite as likely merely to give increased distinctness and relief to his figures. He further increased their effect, as portions of a general design, with gilding and other accessories, and no doubt, also, sometimes with colour. But in all this, his object was to make his sculpture subserve to the whole effect. In short, it became necessary to adapt the sculptures, in colour and in finery, so to speak, to the objects around them ; so that in fact, as we are now considering it, instead of a principal it became a subordinate and only ministerial accessory.

The necessity for giving this distinctness to the several parts of a work which was to be viewed from a distance, would perhaps be considered a justifiable ground for colouring sculpture. Many objects would probably be so placed that, in their unassisted simplicity of uniform colour, they could not be judged of in themselves, nor would they under some possible conditions, be sufficiently separated or detached from the architecture to be seen at all. The treatment of the frieze of the Parthenon, one of the finest examples of the class of art existing, illustrates this speculation; while the peculiar technical treatment of these bassi-rilievi shows how deeply the ancient artists studied the various requirements arising out of such circumstances in the preparation of their works. I need not now speak of the peculiar flat execution of the sculpture, but will observe that the darker and decided colour of the background—for it appears on examination that even now there are remains of blue colour discernible—may be accounted for, independently of its architectonic condition, as a means of giving distinctness and relief to the horsemen and other figures in the procession. The reason for such adventitious aid to their effect will be found in the position this frieze occupied in the decoration of the temple, and in consequence, the peculiar quality and limited quantity of light it could receive.[6]

Now, so far as we have proceeded, the only two intelligible grounds for the introduction of colour in sculpture among the Greeks seem to be, first, to assist in giving completeness to architectural effect, and secondly, to insure distinctness to the parts of the sculpture itself. No one will argue that

[6] Among our obligations to the committee of artists who have so carefully arranged the various courts at the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, must be noted, especially, the opportunity they have afforded the public of judging of the effect of the employment of colour in sculpture and architecture respectively. Upon its applicability to the latter art it is not necessary here to offer any remark. Polychromy in architecture has received full attention, and has been most ably discussed by many eminent writers. Where painting has been applied to insulated sculpture (for the frieze of the Parthenon must be so considered as it is here presented to us), it surely is not asserting too much to say the bad effect it produces is quite enough to insure its unqualified condemnation. The experiment here made of the light blue background only, with the *rilievi* left white upon them, is sufficiently unsatisfactory; but the grey, white, black and brown horses, and their flesh-coloured riders, with their gilded heads of hair, all so admirable and so perfect in their simple art, are here degraded into tawdry toys. It is remarkable, also, that the figures appear now to have lost their symmetry, and the composition its unity, while all the finer qualities of detail in which they in fact abound, are entirely suppressed, or lost sight of.

in either case the object of the artist was to give to sculpture something it required, or was in want of, for its perfection.

It remains now to make a few remarks on the ancient authorities for colouring (Greek) sculpture. In the first place, the presumption is very strong that the assumed fact that the finest Greek sculpture was ever systematically coloured, rests on very questionable foundation. It is rather taken for granted from certain vague expressions of comparatively late writers, than proved from contemporary authority, or from any experience we have of the fact as a matter of universal custom. Pliny and Pausanias, and a few other writers, living long after the date of the sculptors whose works they refer to, mention works so treated; and modern critics, few, or none of them practical artists, have founded various speculations upon these imperfect data. It certainly is remarkable, if the practice ever prevailed to the extent that is pretended, that among the very large number of marble statues of a fine period of art that remain to us to attest the indisputable superiority of the ancients in sculpture (proper), there is not a single example of the practice alluded to. It will not do to say this is owing to the great age of the works, and the accidents to which they have been exposed, for many of them have been found under circumstances that have insured their integrity a sufficient time to show the original surface. Besides, there was a period when the works of the ancients were studied and imitated in Rome with the most scrupulous exactness. The chambers of the Baths of Titus, and of the Villa of Hadrian, have given their long-concealed and well-preserved treasures of art to the light, after preservation from injury for centuries; and while the colours of paintings on walls have been found as bright and fresh as when they were executed, none of these even comparatively late works in sculpture have been found painted, or showing any indication of colour, in the way the admirers of *polychromy* have pretended. There is no intention here to deny the mere fact that colour was sometimes employed, but only to dispute the universality of the practice, and its being usual in the best period of sculpture.

The poetical and fanciful imaginings of certain writers have no doubt been accepted by some modern commentators on art as the statement of facts, and this has probably led to

considerable misapprehension ; and as artists have not always the time or opportunity to inquire or examine for themselves into the value or correctness of the statements made to them, they are often unfairly influenced to adopt, as usages of the ancients, practices which, if they ever obtained at all, were partial and exceptional. A few examples of accounts of statues, improved or embellished by the authors who describe them, will illustrate the character of some of these so-called authorities, and a very little reflection will show how little such descriptions can be relied on.

A sculptor named Aristonidas is recorded as the author of a bronze statue which represented Athamas sitting, overcome with remorse, after the murder of his son. In order to express with greater truth the effect of confusion and shame, the artist mixed iron with the bronze ; and this, "by its redness shining through the brightness of the bronze," caused an appearance on the surface like a *blush*.[7] Now iron is not red, to begin with ; and then the redness is described as shining through the "*nitorem*" of the bronze, as though bronze were a transparent material.

Again, another ancient authority is quoted as recording that Silanio (an artist who lived about 320 B.C.) made a statue representing Jocasta dying, and that by a peculiar mixture of the metals used in the composition of this work, a cast of *paleness* was given to the countenance.[8]

It is scarcely necessary to say that these accounts are utterly undeserving of credit—so far as they assert that those expressive tints were produced by any possible mixture of metals ; for the term used is "*miscuit*," "mixed together." Any one who has the slightest acquaintance with metallurgy must know that the effects thus described are incompatible with the *fusion* of the different metals used for bronze statues : and even supposing, for the sake of argument, the possibility of keeping the metals distinct in a common melting, how then would it be possible to insure the blush or the pallor coming in the right place ? It would not be easy to determine the precise colour that such materials should assume when they are intended to represent such refinements

[7] "Aristonidas artifex cum exprimere vellet Athamantis furorem Learcho filio residentem pœnitentia, *æs, ferrumque miscuit*, ut rubigine ejus per nitorem æris relucente exprimeretur verecundiæ rubor."—PLIN. N. H. xxxiv.

[8] Εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον ἀργύρου τι συμμίξαι τὸν τεχνίτην, ὅπως ἐκλιπόντος ἀνθρώπου καὶ μαραινομένου λάβῃ περιφάνειαν ὁ χαλκός.—PLUT., Symp. v.

as the *complexion* of persons under the influence of strong emotions, but we have yet to learn that the addition of *red* cheeks or a *pallid* countenance would be an improvement to a *bronze* statue. It is probable that such works, as they are here described, never had any existence but in the imagination of the writer. The fact of one of these authors mentioning the peculiarity of the work alluded to as an "*on dit*," rather strengthens this opinion; for Plutarch does not, as is generally assumed, describe a work he had seen, or that even existed in his time. As its reported author lived between three and four hundred years before the birth of Christ, and Plutarch not till nearly one hundred and fifty after that event, thus comprising an interval of between five and six centuries, considerable allowance must be made for those who presume to entertain doubts. "They say," or "it is said," cannot, in a practical matter like this, where there is no adequate contemporary testimony, nor any remaining monuments, be received as sufficient evidence or authority. In the other instance alluded to, of the statue of Athamas, Pliny says "*hoc signum extat Thebis hodierno die*," but he does not say he had seen it.

Callistratus describes, among several similar examples, a Cupid, the work of the celebrated Praxiteles. In enlarging on its claims to admiration, he says there was on his cheeks a vivid blush.

In marble statues the colour might be put on; but this must have been very coarsely, and almost in patches. Pausanias mentions various works of the kind painted with vermilion. Among others he speaks of a statue of Bacchus that was made of gypsum, and painted—another of gold, or gilt, with the face painted red.[9] Some fragments of statues were exhumed at Athens in the year 1835-6, on which colour was found, laid on in thick coats. Among them was a female figure, of which the face, the eyes, and the eyebrows were painted.

I will venture to add one more illustration from M. Quatremère de Quincy's celebrated work, in proof of the inadequacy of ancient authority, or that which is quoted as such, to establish any fixed doctrine upon this contested subject. There was a statue of a Bacchante, attributed to Scopas, who held,

[9] I have not thought it necessary to multiply my references to works of the kind. Those who would examine further may consult the well-known essay of M. Quatremère de Quincy, "*Sur le Jupiter Olympien*," who has collected all, or nearly all, the notices to be found in ancient writers upon this curious subject.

instead of a thyrsus, an animal (a kid) with its entrails exposed; the marble represented the livid flesh, and one sole material offered the imitation of life and death, &c.: "*Erat autem illud capellæ simulacrum lividi coloris. Etenim saxum cadaveris quoque induerat speciem, namque et eamdem materiam in mortis et vitæ imitationem diviserat.*"[1] The *commentator* on this passage supposes here, says M. Quatremère de Quincy, that Scopas had availed himself of a vein of marble which he found resembled the colour of the dead animal: "*Nempe in marmor incidisse artificem aliquâ parte lividum, quam partem ille cautè in effingendum capellæ mortuæ imaginem verteret.*" M. Quatremère de Quincy at once protests again this far-fetched explanation. He perceived in a moment its absurdity, or, at least, improbability, and enters into particulars to show that such an account of the wonders displayed in this work was quite inadmissible. He truly says, "*Cette hypothèse pourrait bien n'etre qu'une méprise*"—and then goes on to say, "*Il est plus simple d'imaginer*"—something else—and gives his own quite as fanciful speculation as to how the performance was accomplished.

Now the above are some of the leading authorities upon which stress has been laid for the fact of the ancients having habitually coloured their sculpture. Can it be seriously proposed to establish a general practice upon such doubtful expressions and insulated examples as these, and then to call it the authority of the ancients? As reasonable would it be to take the authority of antiquity literally, and to affirm that living busts could be produced out of blocks of stone, or that bronze may be made to breathe, because we find in ancient writers such expressions as "*vivos—è marmore vultus*," or "*spirantia—æra*," or believe that pictures and statues lived, because it is said—

> "Et cum Parrhasii tabulis, signisque Myronis,
> Pheidiacum vivebat ebur—"

with endless other instances of the kind.[2]

But admitting, for the sake of discussion, the argument of authority. If the great sculptors of antiquity bowed, on

[1] Το δὲ ἦν χιμαίρας τι πλάσμα πελιδνὸν την χρόαν, καὶ γαρ τὸ τεθνηκος ὁ λίθος ὑπεσύετο, καὶ μιαν οὐσαν τὴν ὕλην εἰς θανάτου καὶ ζωῆς διηρει την μίμησιν.—CALLISTR. *in Bacch. Stat.*

[2] The descriptions of statues by Callistratus are certainly very curious and interesting. But where, in addition to the practical difficulty referred to, there is no concurrent testimony of the time, and not a single ancient fragment of a statue, such as he describes, to support his marvellous accounts of blushing *bronze* cheeks and glowing countenances,

occasion, to public opinion in colouring and otherwise ornamenting statues of divinities, and others that were so far of a prescriptive character, or contributed with their art to the enrichment of architectural effects, there is still reason to believe that in their ordinary works they did not habitually use such extraneous accessories. The very manner of alluding to such works suggests that they were exceptional; and there is even authority, quite as respectable as that for colouring, for the admiration felt by the ancients for statues in pure white marble.[3]

It has been attempted to be proved that the "*circumlitio*," referred to by Pliny,[4] has reference to this practice of colouring statues. It cannot, however, by any ingenuity be made to mean such painting or tinting with *different* colours as painter-sculptors are advocating. The great probability is that it refers to a most careful perfection of surface; both by giving a certain degree of finish or even polish to the marble, and probably by rubbing in a preparation—a varnish—capable of imparting a rich roundness or appearance of fatness, so to call it, (the "*morbidezza*" of the Italians) to the execution; and enveloping the whole with a warm yellowish tone of colour, anticipating by these artificial means, the mellowing effect of age. But such a general tone cannot be considered in the category of colour, as it is now proposed to use it. It has been imagined by some writers that the varnish described by Vitruvius was intended to be applied over paintings and other works in order to preserve them.[5]

To recapitulate in a few words. So far from denying that the ancient statues were sometimes coloured or painted, the authorities for the practice have been fairly produced and considered in this discussion. The mode of effecting the colouring has been shown, also on ancient authority. With respect to its application to productions in bronze, the marvellous effects of which have been as eloquently described, it

indulgence must be granted for the incredulity of those who cannot give entire faith to his statements. There is no intention to deny that the *statues* were produced by the artists to whom they are attributed. It is only suggested that the extraordinary accompaniments of *fused* colours, and the almost imperceptible gradations of delicate tints, must have been supplied by the elegant and poetical fancy of the writer.

[3] Plin. N. H. lib. xxxvi. c. 5, and Lucian. Dial. Amores.

[4] "Dicebat Praxiteles, interrogatus quæ maxima opera sua probaret in marmoribus, quibus Nicias manum admovisset; tantum *circumlitioni* ejus tribuebat."—Plin. xxxv. ii.

[5] This was an opinion of M. Latronne. See Hittorf, "Sur la Polychromie" &c., p. 110.

has been shown that the authority for it is of very questionable value, and that the statements, if there be any truth at all in them, must be exaggerations. In colouring other works we now know how it was done. The description of ancient writers has been confirmed by modern discoveries, especially by the fragments that were found, as has been stated, a few years ago at Athens, painted thus coarsely, without variety or gradation of tint. Doubtless, when colour was employed, this was the ancient practice.

Since this paper was read, it has been objected in reply to the arguments adduced, that the advocates for painting sculpture do not intend to adopt or imitate this wholesale and crude colouring, nor do they intend to imitate nature. It is said it is not proposed, now, to cover statues thus coarsely and entirely, but only to introduce, here and there, delicate tints, mere indications of colour in some parts ; as the cheeks, the hair, the eyes (the colour of the eyes being different from the colour of the cheeks—and yet the imitation of nature not intended!). But surely this is proposing to do under the professed protection of the authority of the ancients, what the ancients did not do. I think the advocates for colouring sculpture will in candour agree with me, that, whatever opinions may be entertained as to the desirableness of the practice, there is not the most remote hint in any reliable written authority, nor in any recovered fragment or work of art, to indicate that this delicate and partial tinting was the ancient practice, or was ever resorted to, even exceptionally, by any of the great masters of the art—as Myron, Phidias, Praxiteles, Alcamenes, Lysippus.

And had it been employed, what would have become of all this tinting after the lapse of ages? Yet do we feel or fancy that the existing works of the best Greek schools, however we may deplore the mutilations consequent upon age and accident, seem to require such accessories? Do we feel that the Theseus and Ilyssus, the Venus of Melos, the Apollo of the Belvedere, and others, show a deficiency that colour could supply? Or in modern works, do we feel any regret that the Moses of Michel-Angelo, the bronze Mercury of Giovanni di Bologna, the Christ of Thorwaldsen, the Hercules and Lycas, or the fine statues of the Popes, by Canova, or the Michael and Satan of our own Flaxman, are without this embellishment; or believe they would be

improved by receiving it?[6] The modern sculpture-Polychromists would then introduce an entirely novel practice—Be it so. They may take their stand as inventors if they will; and upon this ground may endeavour to gain converts to a new system; but it is scarcely fair to profess they are, in this, following in the steps of the masters of Greek sculpture.

I have been obliged by the character of the arguments put forward by the advocates for painting statues, namely, the value of ancient authority, to make that, and I fear it has been done with much repetition, the chief object of my attention. I have presumed to question its force and its universal application to sculpture (proper), though fully admitting the fact of polychromic *ornamentation.* But if its supporters should think their favourite ancient authority more distinct and decided than has been here allowed, and that the practice of colouring statues was universal and habitual among the Greeks twenty centuries ago,—for remember the period of the greatest Greek sculptors was between five and three hundred years before Christ,—is it, after all, a sufficient reason for *our* doing it—as mere copyists? If imitations of ancient statues and ancient ideas, so far as they can be conceived independently of all ancient association or sympathies, are required, then, where it is desired, let all these presumed *appliances* be added; but surely it would be mere pedantry to insist upon them in the application of sculpture to the requirements of a people, of whatever civilised nation, who differ altogether in their religion, poetry (that is, in its machinery), feelings, and habits from the ancient Greeks; and this only because the ancient Greeks are believed to have employed them. What hope can there be of ever succeeding in making art the expression of real sentiment and living thought, if we are systematically to ignore our own age and its wants, and only to put it forward mechanically—in short as the academic expression of factitious Greek sentiment—in such classic guise as museums and galleries of ancient sculpture suggest?

[6] It may be observed, incidentally, that the delicate tinting of marble statues would act as a prohibition to the multiplication of fine favourite works. No sculptor who had devoted time and study to the delicate painting or colouring of his sculpture could contemplate with any degree of complacency the soaping and oiling it must undergo in order to its being moulded. Thus private collectors, galleries of art, schools of design, would all be deprived of the advantage and pleasure of possessing fac-similes of possibly very fine productions in sculpture.

The argument that this new process might be found pleasing has not been openly put forth : the professed ground of its proposed introduction being always *ancient authority ;* and we are, therefore, scarcely called upon to discuss that secondary question. But it may be as well to be prepared for that plea. The first enquiry in that case should be, who is to be pleased ? Pleasing a particular age or party is no proof of the taste being correct. The history of art affords, or should afford, sufficient warning that fanciful innovations and caprices of practice not founded on principle, although, at first, they may have had admirers and patrons, have always failed to secure a permanent footing ; and this even when, as has often been the case, their promoters have been artists of high reputation. What, for example, could be more pleasing, in the popular acceptation, than the productions and style of Giovanni di Bologna, of Bernini, and of Roubiliac ? These were all men of unquestionable genius, and great power in art, who, in their own time, were loaded with honours, and reaped the substantial reward of universal popularity, and left crowds of imitators behind them. It is not overrating them to assert that the best productions of these sculptors will bear comparison in invention, originality, knowledge of form, and execution, with anything the more modern schools have to show. And now, with all their indisputable merit, for no one can deny them this character, how are their works looked upon, and in what manner are they referred to ? As warnings to students not to indulge in fancies that are opposed to the principles of pure art. We have not now to learn that contemporary favour or popularity is no security for future fame ; and it is remarkable how surely, sooner or later, false taste meets its fate.[7]

I hope I may be pardoned for offering, in conclusion, some few observations upon a collateral subject, which has forced itself on my attention during the inquiry into the mere art-question it has been my object to illustrate. I believe it to be far from unimportant ; and I do not doubt that if my apprehensions are well founded, the higher class of Polychromist sculptors, and its advocates among amateurs, will agree

[7] A strange reason is reported to have been given by some advocates for Polychromy for the objections that have been felt here against the proposed introduction of painted or tinted sculpture : namely, that we are not accustomed to it in England. In what country, it may be asked, are they accustomed to it?

with me in deprecating the evils which seem to threaten art by the introduction of what is at present an almost untried experiment.

There is no surer indication of the decadence of good taste in art, and therefore of art itself, than when, after a considerable degree of excellence has been attained, a passion arises for elaborate execution and ornament. What in one age is only the effect of ignorance, in another indicates corruption. The history of art, ancient and modern—for its rapid decline, even in Greece, is very remarkable—supplies us with ample evidence of this, and it is unnecessary to enlarge upon it, or to detain you while proofs are advanced in support of an indisputable fact. Barbarous and uncultivated nations in their earlier attempts at art adopt all the means that occur to coarse sensibilities to give effect to works of imitation. The employment of colours in sculpture is amongst them. In the same way, in a more advanced condition of society, when in any exercise of ingenuity or art (and it applies also to poetry and literature) a high degree of excellence has been attained, a desire of change arises; some fresh interest is anxiously looked for, and the fancy requires gratification in novel excitement. Nor is it, in art, confined to those meretricious *accessories* which have been chiefly considered in the foregoing remarks: meretricious *subjects* may also be looked for as the natural consequence or development of a taste for luxurious decoration. It should be remembered, that in the period of what has been termed the sublime style of sculpture—that of Phidias, who was distinguished as the sculptor of the Gods, and the beauty of whose works was said to have added something even to the dignity of religion,—

. . . Adeo majestas operis Deum æquavit,

it is believed the female form was never represented without appropriate drapery. It seems to be established that it was after his era that this fresh stimulus of the senses was introduced; and the undraped female figure has been exhibited from that time amongst the commonest subjects of imitation. We should not read the lessons of history in vain. Sculptors should strive not to allow their art to degenerate into a possible means of corruption. They must know how very few who contemplate undraped statues, can have the

necessary knowledge to form anything like an accurate judgment upon their merit, their truth, and the higher technical qualities of the art, and consequently, that such works can usually only address the sense, and not the understanding. They, as guardians of, and caterers to, the public taste, should avoid and protest against any innovations which, by possibility, may have a tendency to deprave that taste, or to lower the high standard of art. The class of subjects likely to be preferred for the more favourable exercise of this character of embellishment, will soon show the direction from which danger may be apprehended. The attention of sculptors will not be given to heroic representation, or to subjects that are calculated to suggest ennobling thoughts, but rather to those of an opposite tendency, the sensual class. Assuming that the ancient classical mythology will, as usual, be the field of illustration, sculptors will scarcely choose the manly and developed forms of a Hercules, a Theseus, or an Achilles, for his delicate tinting or colouring, but will naturally prefer the soft and voluptuous female form, as Venus, Nymphs, Bacchantes, Dancing-girls; or the famous courtesans of antiquity, the Glyceras, the Phrynes, and Laises of the olden time, with no stinted exhibition of their imagined charms: or if male subjects, those of the class of Cupids, or young Bacchuses. Such as these lend themselves especially to the attractive accompaniments proposed to be introduced —the delicate tinting of flesh— but which would appear out of place, nay, probably, even very offensive in representations of more virile character. It is surely not too much to say that a male statue, such for instance as the Farnese Hercules, the Barberini Faun, or even the Belvedere Apollo, if presented to public exhibition in flesh tints, with the hair painted, and the eyes coloured, however delicately and carefully this might be done, would not for a moment be tolerated. Would any father of a family willingly take his wife and daughters into a gallery so peopled? The feeling of prejudice which some persons entertain with respect to all exhibitions of classical sculpture, and which it is impossible to blame where nude displays are made apparently only for the sake of exhibiting the naked human figure, would have ten-fold force under such circumstances. This really comprehends the whole question, and it is difficult to conceive how the modern Polychromist can escape from the dilemma.

Far be it from me to suppose for a moment that artists of merit and acknowledged reputation have had the most remote idea of exercising their art to an immoral purpose, or of exciting an interest in sculpture, by merely appealing to the lower senses. But though such a notion may never have crossed their own minds while engaged in the fascinating production of beautiful works, it may be permitted to point out how others, not so circumstanced, may possibly be affected; especially too, when, obviously, the subjects are not chosen for any instructive purpose or elevating object. It may be true that while fancy-sculpture—in distinction to portrait-sculpture—is so often exercised with no higher aim and purpose than to please the eye, or obtain patronage, the study and exposition of the merely beautiful in form, may possibly appear an all-sufficient aim and object to the artist; and then, of course, it would matter very little to him where he sought for his subjects, and what names he gave his statues. I cannot but think that art has a higher mission than this—merely multiplying forms of beauty—and even admitting, in sculpture especially, that beautiful form should be its exponent or language, and, as we must do, that we can nowhere find more admirable examples of the true principles of art, or of models of form, than are left us in the works of the Greeks, still, the illustration over and over again of obsolete fables and their actors, however well done, however successfully imitated from the antique, is calculated rather to retard the useful progress of the art, than to lead to the true development of sculpture in its highest and most worthy purpose; such a purpose, in fact, as we know it was the intention of the great sculptors of antiquity to attain, by the application of their art to the noblest subjects of their religion and their heroic national history.

P.S.—I regret extremely that I am unable to append to this paper the remarks it gave rise to on various kindred points of art, from some of the eminent persons who were present at the reading. But my acknowledgments are especially due to the Dean of St. Paul's (Dr. Milman), to Mr. Hawkins of the British Museum, to Mr. O. Morgan, M.P., and to Mr. G. Scharf, for their highly interesting observations on ancient sculpture, and for the additional light they threw on the particular subject discussed in the paper; and I take this opportunity to beg these gentlemen to accept my sincere and grateful thanks for their valuable assistance.

R. W., Jr.