

Catholic Encyclopedia (1913) — Giorgio Vasari

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Painter, architect, and writer, b. at Arezzo, 1511; d. at Florence, 1574. Although an artist of considerable repute, Vasari depends for immortality on his remarkable work, "Vite de' più eccell. pittori, scultori et archit," on the lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors, and architects, a work of stupendous industry and the most important record of the greatest epoch of the world's art. Inaccurate in places, owing to the writer's prejudice against certain painters, it is on the whole a marvel of good writing and accuracy, and, with all its defects, is the great treasure-house to which all writers have gone and must go for information respecting the early artists of Italy. Its first edition appeared in 1550 at Florence. It was succeeded by editions in 1567, 1568, 1760, 1811, etc. In 1864 Milanesi published his alphabetical list of the lives, and followed it in 1868 by his important annotated edition, adding considerable information to Vasari's original work. The book was translated into English by Mrs. Foster, and published in Bohn's Library in 1846, 1850, and 1852. In 1884 the sixth volume of the commentary by Richter was issued, and sections of the original work, comprising selected lives, were issued by Ellis in 1895, but notably by Blashfield and Hopkins in 1897, with very important notes and appendixes. A new and sumptuous edition of Vasari's work was projected in 1896, to be edited and annotated by Venturi, but only one volume, dealing with Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello, was issued.

A still more important edition, to be known as the Quattrocentenary edition in ten volumes, with a translation by Gaston de Vere, is (1912) being prepared. Vasari's lesser writings, his letters and "Ragionamenti", published in 1588 after his death, and the account of the decorations he prepared for the wedding of Francesco de' Medici, are contained in the Milanese edition. During the last two years a large number of letters and documents by and relating to Vasari have been discovered; a summary of these private archives at Florence, belonging to Count Luciano Rasponi-Spinelli, was published in April, 1910. In 1912 Mr. Sidney J. A. Churchill, of Naples, has issued, for private circulation, his "Bibliografia Vasariana", the first serious attempt to make an accurate bibliography of the works of Vasari, and chronicling 197 separate editions, as well as references to his drawings, engravings, and manuscripts.

We now come to Vasari's paintings. Vasari was a kinsman of Luca Signorelli, and Luca's words, "Study well, little kinsman", were remembered by him all his life, although spoken when he was only a child, and when his father submitted to the old painter some drawings by the little boy. He was trained at Arezzo; he was an infant prodigy, exhibiting some of his drawings to Cardinal Passerini when only twelve years old, and reciting a great part of Virgil's *Æneid*. At Florence, young Vasari was placed under Michelangelo, and later became a great friend of Baccio Bandinelli. Afterwards he went to Rome with Cardinal de' Medici, worked there for some time, and then returned to

Arezzo in poor health; eventually he went back to Florence in 1541. He met Cardinal Farnese at Rome, and he it was who urged the painter to write his famous book, which was dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici, the Duke of Florence, whose service Vasari entered in 1553, and whom he served faithfully to the end of his life. He was responsible for the greater part of the historical decoration of the Sala Regia at Rome, and commenced frescoes for the cupola of the cathedral at Florence, which he never completed. Several buildings at Pistoia were built after his designs, and his architectural work was intimately associated with the Church of Santa Maria Novella at Florence, with the Palace of the Uffizi and the celebrated corridor connecting it with the Pitti which he built across the Arno, and with some rather unsatisfactory work in the Church of Santa Croce. His pictures can best be studied at Florence, but there are fine examples also at Bologna, Lucca, Madrid, Rome, Vienna, Paris, and Dresden.

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