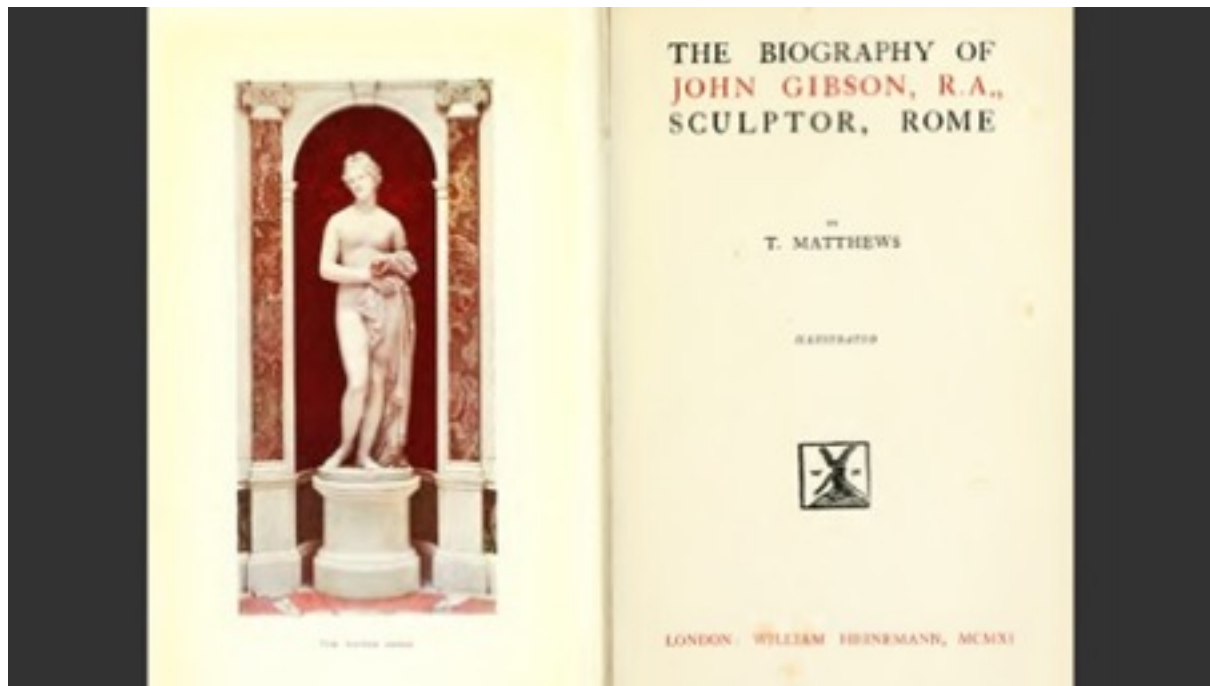


The biography of John Gibson: extract



The idea was caught from an incident in the street. I observed a big lad holding a dog by the collar at the moment of flying at some object, when he let him off. This caught my eye in a moment. I saw a composition which impressed me. I carried the whole of it in my memory and made a small model in clay. It was ordered by Mr. Sandbach in marble the size of life. This is a statue which I studied with great care and ambition to make it my best work.

now return to this important subject again. "It was as though through Polychromy the ancients gave expression to the brighter and more ethereal impulses of the mind. Polychromy was the link connecting the forms of matter with the airy fancies in which genius was rife."

When my Venus was finished, I then decorated her in a manner never seen before in these times. The flesh tinted like warm ivory (scarcely red), the eyes blue, the hair blonde, the net which contains the hair behind is of gold. "And her fair locks are woven up in gold" (Spenser). The blue fillets winding round the head are edged with gold, and she has earrings; her armlet is also gold, likewise the apple in her hand, which has a Greek inscription on it: "To the most beautiful." The drapery is left the white colour of the marble, the border ornament is in pink and blue. Upon the back of the tortoise at her feet is a Greek inscription: "Gibson made me at Rome."

When all my long labour was complete, I often sat down in quiet before my work, meditating upon it and consulting my own simple feelings. I endeavoured to keep myself free from self-delusion as to the effect of the colouring, which I put to the test of reason. I said to myself: "Here is a little nearer approach to the life, therefore more impressive—yes, yes, indeed she seems

an ethereal being with her blue eyes looking upon me." I forgot at moments that I was gazing at my own production. There sat I before her long and often. How can I ever part with her!

I am convinced that the Greek taste was right in colouring their sculpture—the warm glow is most agreeable to the feeling, and so is the variety obtained by it. The flesh is one tone, the hair another, the colouring of the eyes gives animation, and the drapery has its colour and all the ornaments are distinctly seen—all these are great advantages.

The moderns, being less refined than the Greeks in matters of art, are, from stupid custom, reconciled to the white statue. The flesh is white, the hair is white, the eyes are white, and the drapery white: this monotonous cold object of art is out of harmony with everything which surrounds it.

It is not necessary that I should give here quotations from the classic authors touching upon their Polychromatic practice; all these are published, as well as the fragments found with some traces of colour. Those who think that the Greeks did not colour sculpture in the high period of art are grossly mistaken. The Greek public were accustomed to see sculpture in gold and ivory, and the eyes in glass and precious stones—a cold white statue would therefore have appeared incomplete to those people. Leaving out Greek authorities, I can