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E. H. BLASHFIELD'S MURAL DECORATIONS FOR HUDSON COUNTY AND YOUNGSTOWN COURT HOUSES BY WILLIAM WALTON

IN HIS eight great pendentives recently placed under the central domes of two new and imposing court house buildings, Mr. Blashfield seems to have especially justified his choice of that field of mural painting in which he has excelled, and which, very possibly, was selected for him by temperament, training and those various other circumstances and qualities which distinguish one painter from another. Whatever, architecturally considered, may justify in certain conditions other styles of mural painting, the gravely historic, the wildly decorative and allegoric, the merely illustrative, that which prides itself on being of the present day, literal, so-called realistic, ignorantly scorning the imaginative and the ideal—whatever may permit in certain architectural situations the introduction of some one of these methods, it would seem that in the pendentives or spandrels, under a great open dome, only one style of mural figure decoration in color was called for. In these narrow triangular spaces, between the arches which carry the soaring dome, is need only of something which completes the sense of impersonal elevation and lightness and aspiration and joy to the eye which the architect with his semi-classic or near-Renaissance inspiration is trying to express. In these narrow and most vital spaces anything which interfered with this serene and triumphal whole, which imparted information concerning the iron workers and the masons, or the life in the streets outside, or even some details of the local history—in hunting shirts or in frock coats—would be most incongruous. Here, if anywhere, must the mural painter most strictly consider his architecture, and, if he be really qualified, it may be given him to complete finally the architect's triumph as no architect since Bramante could have done.

At least, something like this will be suggested to the intelligent visitor who sees for the first time Mr. Blashfield's four pendentives of the trumpeter *Fames* under the central dome of the big new Hudson County Court House on the heights of Jersey City, N. J. To begin with, his paintings present an admirable triumph of whites—that color which is so difficult; in the midst of the colder and bluer and grayer whites of the marbles around and below them and under the purple and dull gold of the dome above, these warmer, yellowish and greenish whites, with the brown of the wings and the still warmer tints of the flesh and the hair, give a curiously beautiful color effect to the whole interior of the upper part of the great open hall. The figures seem luminous, even in the presence of the numerous electric globes which burn on the brightest days, and their stature and grace and wide wings complete the impression of something monumental, fine and imperishable, like the architecture. The displayed wings are very important in this case—which fact alone justifies the choice of this ideal and imaginative art. In the second floor of this central hall, below them, is a great circular opening surrounded by a balustrade, so that the paintings can be seen from the ground floor through this opening, but much better from the second floor. A mezzanine balcony with a light iron railing is carried around the four sides between the second and third floors, and the walls, at this writing, show flat tints of pale reds and oranges, but no other paintings. The interior of the dome is decorated with narrow, vertical, converging panels, with a background of dark-purple similar to that which the painter has put in behind his figures; on this background is a delicate Renaissance pattern in dull yellow or dull gold, and the necessary accent of red is furnished by little oblong and circular medallions running around near the center of the dome and bearing the signs of the zodiac in white relief. The daylight falls through a great circular skylight in the top, and is supplemented by the numerous electric globes around the sides.

Pendentive Decorations by E. H. Blashfield

These figures are about thirteen feet in height, but when seen from the second story seem but little larger than life—as is fit for genii. Three have set their long, slender trumpets mouth down on the floor, while they support on slender pedestals ornamental shields, or *écussons*, bearing each the portrait in relief of some distinguished citizen of the State—Alexander Hamilton, Richard Varick and Abraham O. Zabriskie. She who has charge of John Stevens's immortality lifts her trumpet and her veil, with one hand, to show a somewhat disturbed and beautiful countenance. In fact, in three of these heads the painter has apparently thought it worth while to depart from the serene and classic type which he usually gives his stately and presiding womanly figures. In the great displayed wings in each case the upper wing coverts, on each side of the head, are brown, not too warm, the feathers below pale yellow and the long lower feathers white. The shadows of the white draperies are yellowish gray or greenish gray, the shields and pedestals very light yellowish in color, the narrow border which runs all round the triangle (not shown in our photographs) a clear, positive gray. These human figures are supported, as it were, and led up to by carved female heads crowned with rays, in white marble, in the keystone of each of the four great arches. The architect of this large and imposing building is Hugh Roberts, of Jersey City, and, in addition to the large historical paintings by Howard Pyle in the Freeholders' Room downstairs, it is proposed to place other decorative panels on some of the walls.

A greater profusion of detail, ornament and color is furnished in the four pendentives of the dome of the new Court House of Youngstown, Ohio, Owsley, Boucherle & Owsley, architects, as called for by the somewhat greater richness of the architectural setting, the paintings furnishing the final touch of enrichment. The interior of the dome, which also rises over a central open hall, is blue and gold, with some subdued reds in small places, and the walls are of cream white marbles and creamish-colored stones, in the painter's opinion, "very handsome and distinguished." The backgrounds of the pendentives are of ultramarine; the great architectural wreaths which traverse the upper portions of each, yellow, bound with blue ribbons; the thrones of white marble, each carrying an ornamental band of light mosaic; the dresses of varying whites and the mantles of different colors. The four great epochs of the law are presented in these throned figures, about nine feet in height as they sit, with their attributes; something of the majesty and power of the

law in the heads, not without a suggestion of its dread. In the first, *Law in Remote Antiquity*, the painter wished to symbolize the older and the newer dispensation, the older patriarchal and the later dispensation of gentleness indicated by the lamb which the child holds in her arms, the whole as law based on tradition. The reddish brown mantle over the figure's head and the shepherd's crook which she carries suggest the pastoral life of the Orient; the warm grays of the sheep and the yellows and russets of the child complete the color scheme.

In the second of the series, *Law in Classical Antiquity*, especially of Rome, based on organized force, on power, the codex held aloft and the fasces on which she rests her hand are founded on the sword and helmet and cuirass, and the cornu, or Roman trumpet, held by the boy with the wolfskin over his head. Here the mantle which falls over the white robe is yellowish gray, the armor of brass and steel, and the child's legs are in dark blue. For the *Medieval Law*, the artist conceives it as founded on faith, inculcated by the Church, and he shows us an abbess with a crozier and the upraised right hand of blessing; the gentle acolyte before her lifts a bishop's mitre over a great cathedral candlestick. The richly embroidered mantle of the abbess is bluish green and beneath her white robe she wears a yellow undergown, showing at the neck and the lower sleeves. And finally, in *Law in Modern Times*, founded on equality before the law (so we fondly deem), the right arm rests on the ballot box, the right hand grasps a copy of *Les Droits de l'Homme*, and the left upholds one of the Declaration of Independence. The power of modern science is indicated by the instruments, the wheel, the telephone, the wireless telegraph. And, for this triumphant climax, the robes are in scarlets and crimsons and the child in dark pink. It will be seen that something considerably more extensive than mere knowledge of technique of painting in oil is required for such mural paintings as these. At the recent annual exhibition of the New York Architectural League the League's medal of honor for painting was awarded to Mr. Blashfield for these Youngstown decorations.

THE fifteenth annual exhibition of the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, opens April 27th, closing June 30th.

THE American Art Annual, Volume VIII, 1910-1911, Florence N. Levy, editor, has just appeared, with special articles and invaluable material.



**"LAW IN REMOTE ANTIQUITY," PENDENTIVE DECORATION
BY E. H. BLASHFIELD
COURT HOUSE, YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO**



**"LAW IN MODERN TIMES," PENDENTIVE DECORATION
BY E. H. BLASHFIELD
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**"LAW IN THE MIDDLE AGES," PENDENTIVE DECORATION
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