

## RUBENS.

TAINÉ says, in his "Philosophy of Art in the Netherlands": "Rubens is to Titian what Titian was to Raphael, and Raphael was to Phidias. Never did artistic sympathy clasp nature in such an open and universal embrace. Ancient boundaries, already often extended, seem removed purposely to expose an infinite career. He shows no respect for historic proprieties: he groups together allegoric with real figures, and cardinals with a naked Mercury.

"There is no deference to the moral order; he fills the ideal heaven of mythology and of the Gospel with coarse or mischievous characters; a Magdalen resembling a nurse, and a Ceres whispering some pleasant gossip in her neighbor's ear. There is no dread of exciting physical sensibility; he pushes the horrible to extremes, . . . all the animal instincts of human nature appear; those which had been excluded as gross he reproduces as true, and in him, as in nature, they encounter the others. Nothing is wanting but the pure and the noble; the whole of human nature is in his grasp, save the loftiest heights. Hence it is that this

creativeness is the vastest we have seen, comprehending as it does all types, Italian cardinals, Roman emperors, contemporary citizens, peasants and cowherds, along with the innumerable diversities stamped on humanity by the play of natural forces, and which more than fifteen hundred pictures did not suffice to exhaust.

"For the same reason, in the representation of the body, he comprehended more profoundly than any one the essential characteristic of organic life; he surpasses in this the Venetians as they surpass the Florentines; he feels still better than they that flesh is a changeable substance in a constant state of renewal; and such, more than any other, is the Flemish body, lymphatic, sanguine, and voracious; more fluid, more rapidly tending to accretion and waste than those whose dry fibre and radical temperance preserve permanent tissues.

"Hence it is that nobody has depicted its contrasts in stronger relief, nor as visibly shown the decay and bloom of life; at one time the dull, flabby corpse, a genuine clinical mass, empty of blood and substance; livid, blue, and mottled through suffering, a clot of blood on the mouth, the eye glassy, and the feet and hands clayish, swollen, and deformed because death seized them first; at another, the freshness of living carnations, the handsome, blooming, and smiling athlete, the mellow suppleness of a yielding torso in the form of a well-fed youth, the soft rosy cheeks and placid candor of a girl whose blood was never



quicken'd or eyes bedimmed by thought, flocks of dimpled cherubs and merry cupids, the delicacy, the folds, the exquisite melting rosininess of infantile skin, seemingly the petal of a flower moistened with dew and impregnated with morning light.

"His personages speak; their repose itself is suspended on the verge of action; we feel what they have just accomplished, and what they are about to do. The present with them is impregnated with the past and big with the future; not only the whole face, but the entire attitude conspires to manifest the flowing stream of their thought, feeling, and complete being; we hear the inward utterance of their emotion; we might repeat the words to which they give expression. The most fleeting and most subtle shades of sentiment belong to Rubens; in this respect he is a treasure for novelist and psychologist; he took note of the passing refinements of moral expression as well as of the soft volume of sanguine flesh; no one has gone beyond him in knowledge of the living organism and of the animal man. . . .

"There is only one Rubens in Flanders, as there is only one Shakespeare in England. Great as the others are, they are deficient in some one element of his genius."

This great painter, Peter Paul Rubens, whom Sir Joshua Reynolds called "the best workman with his tools that ever managed a pencil," was born at Siegen, June 29, 1577, on the day commemorating the martyrdom of these saints at

Rome, hence the names given to the child. Antwerp and Cologne have claimed his birth, but subsequent historical investigation has shown Siegen as his birthplace. Jans Rubens, the father of Peter, was a distinguished councilman and alderman of Antwerp, having taken his degree of Doctor of Laws at Rome when he was thirty-one. When he was about that age he married Marie Pypelinx, a woman of good family, unusual force of character, and the idol of her son Peter as long as she lived.

Antwerp was now the scene of a desolating war. Charles V., Emperor of Germany and King of Spain, had abdicated, leaving the Netherlands to his son Philip II. Religious dissensions, the presence of Spanish soldiers, and other matters, led to revolts, which the Duke of Alva, with twenty thousand soldiers, was sent to suppress in 1576. Seven thousand of the people of Antwerp were slain, and five hundred houses burned.

Jans Rubens had been accused of Calvinistic tendencies, and thought it prudent to retire to Cologne before the arrival at Antwerp of the Roman Catholic Duke of Alva, placing himself on the side of Prince William of Orange, the Silent, who had married Annie of Saxony. She had quarrelled with her husband, had come to Cologne, and had employed Jans Rubens as one of her counsellors in obtaining her property, which Philip II. had confiscated. Forgetting his high position and his family, Jans Rubens sacrificed his good name and



character by his immorality, was arrested and thrown into prison by Count John of Nassau, the brother of Prince William, and Annie was divorced by her husband. By German law Rubens was under the penalty of death. He wrote to his wife, confessing his guilt and imploring her pardon. She determined at once to save his life, if possible. The noble-hearted woman wrote him tenderly — only great souls know how to forgive, —

“How could I push severity to the point of paining you when you are in such affliction that I would give my life to relieve you from it? Even had this misfortune not been preceded by a long affection, ought I to show so much hatred as not to be able to pardon a fault against me? . . . Be, then, assured that I have entirely forgiven you, and would to Heaven that your deliverance depended on this, for then we should soon be happy again.

“Alas! it is not what your letter announces that affects me. I could scarcely read it. I thought my heart would break. I am so distressed, I hardly know what I write. This sad news so overwhelms me it is with difficulty I can bear it. If there is no more pity in this world, to whom shall I apply? I will implore Heaven with tears and groans, and hope that God will grant my prayer by touching the hearts of these gentlemen, so that they may spare us, may have compassion on us; otherwise, they will kill me as well as you, my soul is so linked to yours that you cannot suffer a pain without my

suffering as much as you. I believe that if these good lords saw my tears they would have pity on me, even if they were of stone; and, when all other means fail, I will go to them, although you write me not to do so.”

Marie could not reach William the Silent, for he was away in the country, consolidating the Dutch Republic; but she visited in person his mother, and his brother, Count John. All her entreaties availed nothing. It was publicly stated that Jans Rubens had been imprisoned for political treason to Prince William, and must suffer death. Marie was forbidden access to any of William's family, and for two years was not allowed to enter the dungeon where her husband was confined.

At length she declared that the whole truth should be told, and Annie of Saxony be forever disgraced. This threat moved the proud Orange family, and procured the release of Jans Rubens, under bonds of six thousand thalers, that he would never go outside the little town of Siegen. Here he lived for some years, broken in health by his prison life, and under the strict surveillance of Count John. Finally, Marie obtained permission for them to reside in Cologne, where he died in 1587, when his boy Peter was ten years of age.

The next year Marie Rubens returned to their old home at Antwerp, and by her good sense and persistence recovered the estates of her husband, which had been confiscated during the wars, thus placing her family in very comfortable circum-



stances. Peter entered a Jesuits' college, where he showed great aptitude for languages. In childhood he had been taught Latin by his father, and French by a tutor. Later, he learned Italian, Spanish, German, and English, besides, of course, speaking his native Flemish. His mother had destined him for the law, but it was distasteful to him.

At the age of thirteen, as was often the custom, the frank and handsome boy was made a page in the household of his godmother, the Countess La-laing, but he took no pleasure in mere fashionable surroundings, and begged his mother that he might become an artist.

This choice did not attract the mother, whose ambitions and hopes centred largely in her enthusiastic Peter, but she had the wisdom to lead rather than to dictate. Parents who break the wills of their children usually have spoiled children as the result.

She placed her boy with Tobias Verhaeght, a landscape painter, from whom the lad learned that close study of nature which made him thereafter a reader of her secrets. Conrad Busken Huet says, in his "Land of Rubens": "Man and nature as the Creator made them were quite sufficient for Rubens's inspiration, no matter where he found them, far from home or close to it. What attracted him most in nature was the unchangeable, the imperishable, and the grand. He knew how to find these everywhere. Artists less gifted and

born by the seashore have before now felt the want of sniffing the mountain breeze. Did their cradle stand among the meadows, they longed for running streams and rivers. Rubens's pictures prove that such contrasts had no value for him.

"Within the narrow limits of his native soil, he found every condition necessary to the practice of his art. His imagination had no need of anything more stirring than that presented to him by the recollection of human vicissitudes amidst glebe and glade. The twinkling of the eye sufficed to transform them into battlefields in his productions. . . .

"When the sun shines, he shines everywhere. Such is Rubens's motto. He knows but one moon, but one starry vault, but one gloaming, but one morning dew. Every raindrop on which there falls a ray of light reminds him of a diamond. Each stubble-field whence uprises the lark supplies music to his ears. Each swan to which he flings bread-crumbs on his arrival at 'Steen' (his country home) teaches him to keep the most sublime song of his art for the end."

"It is curious to note that Rubens," says Charles W. Kett, in his "Life of Rubens," "who began with scenes of country life, returned in his last days to his first love, so that when he could no longer cover his huge canvases with heroic figures, he would retire to his chateau at Steen, and paint landscapes, even though the gout almost incapacitated him from holding his brushes."

After about ten years spent with Verhaeght,



young Rubens, thinking that he would devote himself to historical subjects, became a pupil of Adam van Noort, a teacher skilled in drawing, and in the use of brilliant color, with study of light and shade. He is said to have been intemperate and quick-tempered, but for four years Rubens found him a useful teacher.

"It is related," says George H. Calvert, "that one day, when the master was absent, the pupil took a fresh canvas to try what he could do by himself towards representing a weeping Madonna. He worked for hours, and so intently that he did not hear the returning footsteps of the master, who from behind gazed in admiration and wonder at his performance."

The young painter was restless, not an unnatural condition for an ardent, ambitious boy or girl. Such a life, fruitful for good or evil, must be filled with the best activities.

When Rubens was nineteen, he entered the studio of Otto Venius, a kind and learned man, of courtly manners, a free-master of the Guild of St. Luke, and court painter to Archduke Albert of Austria and the Infanta Isabella of Spain. She was the daughter of Philip II., to whom he had ceded the "Spanish Netherlands." They were distinguished patrons of art, and did everything to restore the war-worn country to peace and prosperity. Venius became deeply attached to his pupil, made him acquainted with the Regents Albert and Isabella, and inspired him to go to Italy to study



THE HOLY FAMILY.  
Rubens. Pitti Palace.



art, the country in which he had studied for seven years.

Rubens had already painted some admirable works: the "Adoration of the Three Kings," a "Holy Trinity," a "Dead Christ in the Arms of the Father," and a portrait of Marie Pypelincx, "the true-hearted wife," says Mr. Kett, "of the faithless Jans, the mother of the artist, the upholder of the family after the death of the father, the educator of his children, and the restorer of the fallen greatness of the name of Rubens. Calmly and beautifully does the pale face still look forth from the canvas as of old. She must have smiled with satisfaction on the rising fame of her youngest surviving son, now going forth into the world to have those talents acknowledged which her maternal heart was assured were in his keeping. Carefully attired, like a matron of good family, in velvet dress, mourning coif, and muslin cuffs, denoting her widowed state, she carries in her face the traits of a shrewd woman of the world, who has battled bravely with the times, and now sees victory crowning her endeavors.

"Her very chair, somewhat similar to the one still preserved in the Academy at Antwerp as the gift of her son, speaks of a home of comfort; her book, held in her still handsome hand, a forefinger marking the page she has not finished reading, tells of a certain amount of learned leisure; and her whole surroundings recall a home whence an artist, a man of culture, and a courteous gentleman might



derive those early impressions and first inspirations which would develop, when he came in contact with a larger world, into masterpieces of art."

On May 8, 1600, Rubens, at twenty-three years of age, having said good-by to his fond mother, started for Italy. His first visit was to Venice, where he studied the wonderful colorists, Titian, Paul Veronese, and Tintoretto. He is said to have copied twenty portraits by Titian, so earnest was he in obtaining the secret of these marvellous tints.

While here he became the friend of a Mantuan, an officer at the court of Vincenzo de Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua. This duke was thirty-seven years old, rich, handsome, somewhat of a poet, the patron of artists and authors, a brilliant and extravagant ruler. Through this friend, and also by letters of introduction from Archduke Albert, Rubens met Gonzaga, who was surprised at the learning of the attractive and distinguished-appearing young artist. Hearing him repeat a passage from Virgil, Gonzaga addressed him in Latin, and was answered in the same language, fluently and correctly. The duke had made a fine collection of paintings and antiques, and these Rubens was glad to study. A most fortunate thing resulted from this acquaintance; Rubens was appointed painter to the court and a member of the ducal household.

This was not the result merely of fortuitous circumstances. Rubens had been a student. He was called later by scholars, "the antiquary and Apelles

of our time." He was also a most industrious worker. Philip Rubens, his nephew, says in his life of his uncle, "He never gave himself the pastime of going to parties where there was drinking and card-playing, having always had a dislike for such." So fond was he of reading the best books, that in after years, when he painted, Seneca and Plutarch were often read to him. He had studied the technique of painting since he was thirteen years old. He was especially charming in manner, being free from harshness or censoriousness, and, withal, a person of much tact and consideration. He had prepared himself for a great work, and was ready to embrace his opportunity when it came.

Besides painting several originals for the Duke of Mantua, Rubens was sent to Rome to make copies of some of the masterpieces. He took letters of introduction to Cardinal Alessandro Montalto, the nephew of Sixtus V., very rich, and a great patron of art.

Besides this work for Gonzaga, Rubens painted for the chapel of St. Helena, in the Church of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, at Rome, at the request of Archduke Albert, formerly its cardinal, three pictures: "St. Helena embracing the Cross," "Christ crowned with Thorns," and a "Crucifixion."

On his return to Mantua, he copied the "Triumph of Julius Cæsar," by Andrea Mantegna; in one of the series, in place of a sheep walking by the side



of an elephant, he painted a lion. Dr. Waagen says in his "Life of Rubens": "His love of the fantastic and pompous led him to choose that with the elephant carrying the candelabra, but his ardent imagination, ever directed to the dramatic, could not be content with this; instead of a harmless sheep, which in Mantegna is walking by the side of the foremost elephant, Rubens has introduced a lion and lioness, which growl angrily at the elephant. The latter, on his part, is not idle, but, looking furiously round, is on the point of striking the lion a blow with his trunk. The severe pattern he had before him in Mantegna has moderated Rubens in his taste for very full forms, so that they are here more noble and slender than is usual with him. The coloring, as in his earliest pictures, is more subdued than in the later, and yet more powerful. Rubens himself seems to have set a high value upon this study, for it was among his effects at his death."

In 1603, Rubens was sent by the Duke of Mantua on a pleasant mission to Spain, with costly presents to Philip III., the indolent son of Philip II., and his powerful favorite, the Duke of Lerma. For the king there was a "gorgeous coach and seven beautiful horses, twelve arquebuses, six of whalebone and six variegated, and a vase of rock crystal filled with perfumes." For the Duke of Lerma, "a number of pictures, a silver vase of large dimensions inwrought with colors, and two vases of gold. For the Countess of Lerma, a cross

and two candelabra of rich crystal. For the secretary, Pedro Franqueza, two vases of rock crystal, and a complete set of damask hangings, the edges of gold tissue."

After a long journey, with continuous rain for twenty-five days, Rubens and his gifts reached Valladolid. When the paintings were unpacked, they were nearly ruined, from the colors having peeled off. At the request of Iberti, resident at the Court of Madrid from Mantua, Rubens undertook the work of restoration, and, better still, painted two originals for the Duke of Lerma, a "Democritus," and a "Heraclitus," both life-size, now in the gallery of Madrid. He also painted an equestrian likeness of the duke himself, several ladies of the court, for the gallery of beauties possessed by Gonzaga, and probably many other pictures on this first visit, as more than one hundred and twenty of Rubens's paintings are known to have existed in Spain. On his return to Italy he was loaded with gifts from the King of Spain and grandees, so much were his works esteemed and so greatly was the young Fleming admired. Once more in Italy, Rubens painted an altar-piece for the Church of the Holy Trinity at Mantua, in which the mother of the duke was buried; three pictures, the "Baptism of our Saviour," the "Mystery of the Transfiguration," and a central picture, the "Mystery of the Trinity," which latter contained portraits of Duke Vincenzo, his Duchess Leonora, his parents, and his children.