

## REMBRANDT.

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EDMONDO DE AMICIS, that wonderful word-painter, says in his "Holland and its People:" "However one may be profane in art, and have made a vow never more to offend in too much enthusiasm, when one is in the presence of Rembrandt van Rhijn, one can but raise a little, as the Spaniards say, the key of one's style. Rembrandt exercised a particular prestige. Fra Angelico is a saint, Michael Angelo a giant, Raphael an angel, Titian a prince; Rembrandt is a supernatural being. How otherwise shall we name that son of a miller? Born in a windmill, rising unheralded, without master, without examples, without any derivation from schools, he became a universal painter, embraced all the aspects of life, painted figures, landscapes, marine views, animals, saints in paradise, patriarchs, heroes, monks, wealth and misery, deformity and decrepitude, the ghetto, the tavern, the hospital, death; made, in short, a review of heaven and earth, and rendered all things visible by a light from the arcana of his own imagination.

"It was said that the contrast of light and shadow corresponded in him to diverse movements

of thought. Schiller, before beginning a work, heard within himself a harmony of indistinct sounds, which were like a prelude to inspiration; in like manner, Rembrandt, when in the act of conceiving a picture, had a vision of rays and shadows, which spoke to his soul before he animated them with his personages. There is in his pictures a life, and what may almost be called a dramatic action, quite apart from the human figures. Vivid rays of light break into the darkness like cries of joy; the darkness flies in terror, leaving here and there fragments of shadow full of melancholy, tremulous reflections that seem like lamentations; profound obscurity full of dim threatenings; spurts of light, sparkles, ambiguous shadows, doubtful transparencies, questionings, sighs, words of a supernatural language, heard like music, and not understood, and remaining in the memory like the vague relics of a dream.

"And in this atmosphere he plants his figures, of which some are clothed in the dazzling light of a theatrical apotheosis, others veiled like phantoms, others revealed by one stroke of light upon the face; dressed in habits of luxury or misery, but all with something strange and fantastic; without distinctness of outline, but loaded with powerful colors, sculptural reliefs, and bold touches of the brush; and everywhere a warmth of expression, a fury of violent inspiration, the superb, capricious, and profound imprint of a free and fearless genius."

This strange, great painter, Rembrandt, was born, not in a windmill, as Amicis says, but in Leyden, Holland, July 15, 1607. His father, Gerrit Harmen van Rhijn, a miller, was then forty years old, in easy circumstances, married to the daughter of the baker Willems van Snydtbrouck, then thirty-five, a vigorous, strong-charactered woman, whom the boy, in after years, loved to paint, over and over again.

Of their six children, Adriaen, who became a miller, Gerrit, Machteld, Cornelis, Willem, who became a baker, and Rembrandt, the latter was destined for the law. He was early taught Latin, as a preparation for the Leyden Academy, but before he was twelve he showed such decided taste for painting and designing that his parents removed the lad from school, and placed him with a relative, who was an artist, Jacob van Swanenburg. He had returned from study in Italy in 1617, and Rembrandt entered his studio, probably in 1620, the year in which our forefathers left Holland.

For three years the boy bent himself closely to the work he loved. He made such remarkable progress that, at the end of this time, he was sent to the well-known painter, Pieter Lastman of Amsterdam. He remained there but six months, and then returned to his home in Leyden.

From the age of seventeen to twenty, while in his Leyden home, we know little of the youth, save that he studied nature with loving fidelity, wandered over the low, picturesque country with



REMBRANDT AND HIS WIFE SASKIA.

In the Royal Picture Gallery, Dresden. Painted by himself.

its canal and windmills, and observed people and skies and landscapes.

The first work attributed to Rembrandt was painted in 1627, when he was twenty years old, "St. Paul in Prison," showing care in detail and richness in color. During the next two years, he made etchings of himself and of his mother, who appears to have been his ideal.

His first oil paintings were done in 1630; one, now lost, showing a philosopher in a grotto; and the "Bust of an Old Man," which, says Prof. John W. Mollett of France, in his *Life of Rembrandt*, "is the most interesting of all the Rembrandts in the Cassel Gallery, from the fact that it first displayed his knowledge of the great secret, which he subsequently so wonderfully developed, of concentrating light upon the heads of his portraits. He painted other old men's heads at the same date, and all are remarkable for indefatigable elaboration and care. In this same year, Rembrandt produced more than thirty etchings."

After several years passed at Leyden, Rembrandt removed his studio to Amsterdam, a rich and flourishing city of one hundred thousand people at that time, whither his fame had preceded him. He hired apartments over a shop on the Bloemgracht, a quay in the western part of the city, where numerous pupils soon came to him, and commissions from the wealthy. One of his first principal works was "The Presentation in the Temple," now in the museum at the Hague.

"The picture," says Mr. Sweetser, "presents a great temple interior, with groups of citizens and prelates, and, in the centre, massed under a bright light, the Holy Family, with the richly robed Simeon adoring the child Jesus. It is full of the strong shades and contrasting brightness of the new school of art, replete with poetic power and fresh personality, warm in golden lights, and in certain parts showing a rare minuteness of finish in detail. This subject was always a favorite with Rembrandt, and several other paintings thereof are preserved, together with numerous sketches and engravings, showing the venerable Simeon in the Temple at Jerusalem.

"The 'Susannah' was executed during the same year, and is now at the Hague. The shrinking, naked figure of the fair bather, though lacking in statuesque beauty and symmetry, is thoroughly natural and tender, palpitating with life, and lighted with a warm and harmonious glow. This, also, was a favorite theme with Rembrandt, and conveniently replaced the Diana and Actæon of the classical painters with a subject not less alluring, and perhaps more permissible."

Rembrandt also painted "St. Jerome," now at Aix-la-Chapelle, the lost pictures of "Lot and his Daughters," and the "Baptism of the Eunuch;" "The Young Man," now at Windsor; the "Prophetess Anna," in the Oldenbourg Gallery; the "Portrait of a Man," in the Brunswick Museum; and about forty etchings, among them two por-



THE LESSON IN ANATOMY.  
Painting from the year 1632, Royal Gallery of The Hague, by Rembrandt van Ryn.

traits of his mother, several of himself; the "Bath of Diana," and the Meeting of "Danaë and Jupiter."

In 1632, Rembrandt painted his famous "School of Anatomy," now at the Hague, for which the Dutch government, two centuries later, gave thirty-two thousand florins.

"This picture represents the celebrated anatomist, Nicolaus Tulp, a friend and patron of Rembrandt, in a vaulted saloon, engaged in explaining the anatomy of the arm of a corpse. He wears a black cloak with a lace collar, and a broad-brimmed soft hat. With his half-raised left hand, he makes a gesture of explanation, while with his right he is dissecting a sinew of the arm of his subject. The corpse lies on a table before him. To the right of Tulp is a group of five figures; and two other men are sitting at the table in front. These listeners are not students, but members of the guild of surgeons of Amsterdam, as shown by a paper held by one of them. They are attending to the lecture with very various expressions.

"They are all bare-headed, dressed in black, and with turned-over collars except one, who still wears the old-fashioned upright ruff. There are, perhaps, other persons present in the hall, as Tulp appears to be looking beyond the picture, as if about to address an audience not visible to the spectator; and it is here worthy of remark that Rembrandt's compositions are never imprisoned in their frames, but convey an idea of a wide space

beyond them. It is somewhat singular that the spectator seems hardly to notice the corpse lying before him at full length, the feet of which he can almost touch, although it is strongly lighted in contrast to the surrounding black garments, and most faithfully presents the peculiar hue of a dead body, leaving no doubt that it was painted from nature, as well as the living heads. The admirable art of the composition consists in its power of riveting the attention to the living in the presence of death."

Amicis says: "It is difficult to express the effect produced by this picture. The first feeling is that of horror and repulsion from the corpse. The forehead is in shadow, the eyes open with the pupils turned upwards, the mouth half open as if in astonishment, the chest sunken, the legs and feet stiff, the flesh livid, and looking as if, should you touch it with your hand, it would feel cold. With this rigid body a powerful contrast is produced by the vivacious attitudes, the youthful faces, the bright, attentive eyes, full of thought, of the disciples, revealing in different degrees the avidity for knowledge, the joy of learning, curiosity, wonder, the strength of intelligence, the suspense of the mind. The master has the tranquil face, the serene eye, and the almost smiling lip of one who feels the complacency of knowledge. There is in the complexion of the group an air of mystery, gravity, and scientific solemnity, which inspires reverence and silence.

"The contrast between the light and shadow is as marvellous as that between life and death. It is all done with extraordinary finish; one can count the folds of the ruffs, the lines of the face, the hairs of the beards. It is said that the foreshortening of the corpse is wrong, and that in some points the finish runs into dryness, but universal judgment places the 'Lesson in Anatomy' among the greatest triumphs of human genius.

"Rembrandt was only twenty-six years old when he painted this picture, which, therefore, belongs to his first manner, in which there are not yet apparent that fire and audacity, that sovereign security in his own genius, which shine in the works of his maturer years: but there is already that luminous potency, that marvellous *chiaroscuro*, that magic of contrasts, which form the most original trait of his genius."

I remember, in standing before this picture, to have had the same "repulsion" of which Amicis speaks. How differently one feels before that other marvel of the Hague, Paul Potter's "Bull," so at one with nature, so tender, so restful! What wonder that it once hung in the Louvre, beside the "Transfiguration" of Raphael, the "St. Peter Martyr," of Titian, and the "Communion of St. Jerome" by Domenichino?

During this year, 1632, Rembrandt executed several portraits of men; the "Rape of Proserpine," in the Berlin Gallery; "Moses saved from the Nile;" "Christ and Nicodemus;" the "Oriental

Standing," in the gallery of the King of Holland; the "Betrothed Jewess;" the "Rape of Europa;" and portraits of six women. His etchings this year were, "A Man on Horseback," "Cottage with White Palings" his first landscape, "Seller of Rat's Poison," "Jesus being carried to the Tomb," and the "Resurrection of Lazarus."

In the following year he painted "Susannah Surprised by the Elders," which is now in Russia; "The Boat of St. Peter," a powerful conception, showing dark storm-shadows surrounding the sea-tossed bark, with a high light thrown on the nearer mountain-like waves and on the men at the sails; "The Elevation of the Cross," and "The Descent from the Cross," bought by Prince Frederick Henry of Holland, and now in Munich; "The Good Samaritan," now in Sir Richard Wallace's collection; "The Philosophers in Meditation," two delicate pictures, now in the Louvre; "The Master Ship-builder and his Pipe," now at Buckingham Palace, sold for sixteen thousand five hundred francs, in 1810; portraits of Madame Grotius, a youth at Dresden, another in the Pourtales Collection, sold for seven thousand dollars in 1865; and no less than sixteen others, besides many etchings. One of these portraits, that of a young boy, was bought by J. de Rothschild, in 1865, for five thousand dollars; and a portrait of Saskia, now at Cassel, for ten thousand dollars.

Of the picture of Saskia in the Dresden Museum, painted this year, Professor Mollett says: "The



FIRST PORTRAIT OF SASKIA VAN UYLENBURGH, AFTERWARDS  
REMBRANDT'S WIFE.  
Dresden Gallery. Rembrandt.

head in this portrait is slightly inclined, the long chestnut curls are covered by a cherry-colored bonnet ornamented with white feathers. The light falling on the figure from above illuminates the rim of the bonnet and the lower part of the face, while the forehead is covered by the shadow thrown by the hat."

Of the large portrait in the Cassel Gallery, painted the same year, he says: "In this picture Saskia is very richly dressed, and covered with a profusion of pearls and precious stones. The face, a delicate profile of a bright, fresh color, drawn against a dark brown background, is entirely in the light, almost without shadows."

The portrait of her in the late Fesch Gallery, says Sweetser, "displays the maiden's snowy complexion, great deep eyes, rosy lips, and rich auburn hair, adorned with white and green plumes, and wearing pearls on her neck, and a chain of gold on her green silk mantilla."

Who was Saskia? The lovely and beautiful woman whose life was to Rembrandt like the transcendent light he threw into his pictures; whose death left him forever in the shadow of shadows, which he, of all painters, knew best how to paint.

Saskia van Ulenburgh was the orphan daughter of Rombertus Ulenburgh, a Frisian lawyer of high standing, envoy from Friesland to the court of William of Orange. She was wealthy, of lovely character, and attractive in face and in manner.



Her brother-in-law, the painter Nijbrand de Geest, was a man of influence, and her cousin, Hendrik Ulenburgh, was the publisher of Rembrandt's engravings. They therefore naturally met each other. She was young and of distinguished family; the young artist, who fell in love with her, had his genius alone to offer her.

The devoted love of Rembrandt won the happy-hearted, refined Saskia. They were married June 5, 1634, when she was twenty-one and Rembrandt twenty-seven, and went to live in his pleasant home in Amsterdam.

The next eight years were given to arduous work, blessed by the well-nigh omnipotent influence of a seemingly perfect love. In his marriage year he painted "Queen Artemisia," now in Madrid; "The Incredulity of St. Thomas," now at the Hermitage; "Repentance of Peter," "Judas and the Blood Money;" a larger "Descent from the Cross," now at St. Petersburg; "Rev. Mr. Ellison and Wife of the English Church at Amsterdam," sold in London, in 1860, for about nine thousand dollars; several portraits of himself and several of Saskia. In the large "Jewish Wife," in "Bathsheba receiving David's Message," in the long lost "Vertumnus and Pomona," Saskia, the beloved Saskia, is always the model.

At the same time were made five sketches and sixteen engravings, the most notable being "The Annunciation to the Shepherds." "This," says Professor Mollett, "is a night effect, with a mass

of trees on the right hand, and a distance in which a city is seen, with its factories and bridges in a nest of foliage, and fires reflected in water. In the foreground the shepherds and their flocks are alarmed by the sudden appearance of the celestial glory, in the luminous circles of which thousands of cherubim are flying; an angel is advancing, and, with the right hand raised, is announcing the news to the shepherds. The whole composition is wonderful for the energy it displays, and appears as if it had been thrown on the copper with swift, nervous, inspired touches, but always accurate and infallible."

In 1635 a son was born to Rembrandt and Saskia, named Rombertus, after her father, but the child soon died, the first shadow in the famous artist's home. This year he painted "Samson menacing his Father-in-law," now in the Berlin Museum; the "Rape of Ganymede," now at Dresden; "Christ driving out the Money-changers;" "The Martyrdom of St. Stephen;" in all, eight portraits, seven other paintings, nine designs, and twenty-three etchings. One of the most attractive of the pictures about this time is Rembrandt at home, with Saskia, life-size, and full of happiness, seated upon his knee.

Three scenes from the history of Tobias follow. The first, the blind father awaiting his son's return, is in the Berlin Museum; the second contains Tobias and his wife seated in a chamber; the third illustrates Tobias restoring sight to his father.