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Private Galleries, and Remarks on the State of Art: Volume 2

Johann David Passavant

Excerpt

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TOUR
OF
A GERMAN ARTIST,
&c.

BLLENHEIM.

THE princely seat of the Duke of Marlborough, situated about nine miles from Oxford, near the old town of Woodstock; one of the largest palaces in England. It was erected at the national expense, and presented, with extensive parks and lands, to the renowned Duke of Marlborough, as a testimony of the gratitude of the English nation, and in commemoration of the great victory of Blenheim. Sir *John van Brugh*

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was the architect employed, who executed his task in his usual overladen style. The palace seems like an incongruous compilation of different buildings in imitation of the antique, which are here placed side by side, and one over the other, to the total destruction of all unity and grandeur of design.

A remarkable object on the south façade is a colossal bust of Louis XIV., taken by the Duke of Marlborough from the gates of Tournay. Above a Latin inscription, stands the British lion, tearing the Gallic cock. This façade looks upon a richly-ornamented garden, which, with the adjoining park, has been too often and well described to require further mention here.

CATALOGUE OF THE PRINCIPAL PICTURES.

Raphael. The altar piece from the church of St. Fiorenzo, at Perugia. The Virgin, seated upon a throne, which is elevated upon three steps, is holding the infant Jesus upon her lap with her right hand; and in her left a small book, which lies open upon her knee. Over this the child is bending,

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with a lovely, but earnest expression of countenance, as if aware of its solemn relation to himself. John the Baptist, under the figure of a grown man, is standing on the left, pointing with his right hand to the Saviour, and holding in his left a glass crucifix, which reaches to the ground. He is gazing with a look of inspiration upwards. Over his brown fur is a red mantle. On the right, stands a figure of Nicholas de Bari, arrayed in his bishop's robes, seemingly absorbed in the perusal of a volume which he holds open in his left hand: a head of uncommon dignity. In his right hand he holds a golden crosier, and at his feet lie three golden apples. Upon the border of the Virgin's blue mantle, which is hanging over her arm, is the date of the year MDV. The background consists of a landscape enclosed in a richly-ornamented light grey arch, and upon the canopy is the inscription—*SALVE MATER CHRISTI*. The figures are about two-thirds the size of life. In point of treatment, this partakes greatly of the Perugino manner, although the beautiful and more scientific drawing distinctly bespeaks the Florentine school. Raphael's peculiar genius is also very apparent. The picture is in excellent preservation. An attempt to clean it

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has been made at the lower part; but, fortunately, proceeded no further.

It is well known that Raphael painted this picture for the heirs of Filippo di Simone Ansidei, who had bequeathed a considerable sum for the erection of a chapel. Gavino Hamilton purchased it for Lord Robert Spencer, in 1764; and a copy by Nic. Monti was substituted, which still exists in the church of St. Fiorenzo. Lord Spencer afterwards presented the original to his brother, the Duke of Marlborough.

No engraving has ever been made of this exquisite picture; it is much to be desired that some first-rate engraver would undertake it.

Besides several copies of Raphael's Madonnas—for instance, the Madonna with the sleeping infant, like the one at the Marquis of Westminster's—*La belle Jardinière* and the *Madonna del Popolo*, or *di Loreto*, here is also another picture ascribed to him, said to represent the Fornarina, and here called the *Dorotea*.

The head, which is in a three-quarters' view, is turned towards the spectator; her dark hair is surmounted by the narrow edge of a white handkerchief, and over her peach-coloured dress is thrown a

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red velvet mantle, with a border of light-coloured fur, which she is holding at the bosom with her left hand. A small basket of fruit is in her right. Through a window is seen a landscape of a dark brown hue, treated much in the Venetian manner. Generally speaking, it partakes much of the broad manner of this school; although the scientific drawing and beautiful transitions recal the inimitable manner of a Raphael. Certain it is, however, that this picture was never designed, and much less painted, by him. With regard to the name of the Fornarina, it must be owned that it bears some resemblance to the one so designated, painted in 1512, and now in the Tribune at Florence. It was engraved by T. Chambers, in 1765, in the work entitled, "Collection of Engravings from the most capital Paintings in England, by John Boydell: 1765;" and again by P. Pierolei, as a head size, with the following inscription:—" *Retiro ed onesti sono miei pregi.*" This latter engraving may, however, have been taken from the duplicate of this subject in Verona, which is supposed to have belonged to the Cartoni Gallery, where it was seen by F. Scanelli,* and also mentioned by Duke

* F. Scanelli, in his *Microcosmo*, p. 169, gives the following information concerning this picture:—"Pure in Verona nello

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Cosmo III. in the account of his travels. An engraving has been lately taken of it by J. Bernardi, whence it appears that this picture also bears the stamp of the Venetian manner.

Titian. 1. St. Gregory and an Angel; a beautiful specimen of his earlier period.

2. St. Sebastian.

3. Portrait of Philip II.

F. Baroccio. Portrait of a boy as a Knight of St. John. Although this master is generally characterized by a disagreeable manner, yet this picture is alone sufficient to prove how high he might have attained, had he adhered more faithfully to the study of Nature. This is an excellent portrait, both in point of keeping and colour.

Luca Giordano. The death of Seneca; the same remark may be applied to this master as to the foregoing. "*Luca fa Presto*" seems here to

studio del Cartoni, vi è Quadro con mezza figura al naturale, che rappresenta Santa Dorotea (? !), stimata della maggior parte di Raffaello; veramente di suprema bellezza, ed in ordine alla più delicata verità, pare forse all'altre del Maestro superiore, e per ciò furono alcuni indotti à credere, che sia stata dipinta da Paolo da Verona per gusto d'imitare opera particolare di Raffaello, ma sia come si voglia, vero è che l'opera si conosce di così rara bellezza, che si può stimare al pari dell'altre, e forse di vantaggio."

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have been superseded by Luca the industrious and the careful.

Carlo Dolce. By this artist, who is so general a favourite with the English, there are here several pictures, of more or less doubtful character. One, however, a Madonna, looking upwards, with a crown of stars, half the size of life, is genuine, and may be reckoned as belonging to the finest works of the kind.

Murillo. Two pictures of beggar urchins, pursuing their various street avocations; with two figures in the one picture, and three in the other—painted with all the truth and charm of tint so peculiar to this great colourist.

P. P. Rubens. From the numerous specimens preserved at Blenheim, it would appear that the Duke of Marlborough was a great admirer of this renowned artist. Many of these pictures were presented by different Sovereigns or Cities, who wished either to secure the favour of his protection, or to testify their sense of his great deeds.

The following are all originals:—

1. Venus and Adonis. A richly-coloured picture; but severer in design than is usually the case with Rubens. A present from the Emperor.

2. The Three Graces; or, rather, Rubens' three

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Wives, represented in the prime of youth, and ætherially attired, seated beneath a fruit tree: as lovely in form as they are glowing in colour. This is one of Rubens' finest works.

3. Andromeda chained to the rock; rather a vulgar and disagreeable picture.

4. The Rape of Proserpine; a large and rich composition, and unusually strict in drawing.

5. A Roman Charity; whole-length figures.

6. A Bacchanalian piece; a large and somewhat gross composition.

7. A Holy Family.

8. The Adoration of the Magi; large picture, with whole-length figures.

9. Christ blessing the little Children; half-length figures.

10. The Return from Egypt; a beautiful picture, in strict drawing.

11. Lot escaping from Sodom. Presented by the City of Antwerp.

12. Lot and his Daughters.

13. Rubens with his Wife and Child in a Garden; standing figures, the size of life. This splendid picture was a present from the Town of Brussels.

14. Helena Formann, the wife of Rubens; richly attired; bust length.

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15. Catherine de Medici ; bust length.

16. Portrait of Paracelsus ; rather a stout young man ; half-length figure, with a landscape for background, in which is seen the City of Buda.

Besides these are several other Holy Families by Rubens ; a Madonna and Child, &c. ; none of them, however, very remarkable.

Ant. van Dyck. Many fine Portraits by this master occur in this collection ; I will merely particularize the most striking.

1. Charles I., in full armour, upon a sorrel horse, with dark mane ; Sir Thomas Morton at his side, holding the helmet ; on the right, large trees ; and some landscape on the left. This excellent picture was sold, among the rest of King Charles I.'s collection, during the civil war, and found its way to Milan, where it was purchased by the Duke of Marlborough.

2. Portrait of Charles I. ; half-length figure.

3. Portrait of Henrietta Maria, Queen of Charles I.

4. The same.

5. Portrait of Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.

6. The Duchess of Buckingham with her Children ; a very beautiful picture.

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7. Portrait of Lady Chesterfield, in an oval-form.

8. Mary, Duchess of Richmond, with an attendant, handing her a pair of gloves.

9. Portrait of the same individual, alone.

10. Portrait of Lord Stafford and his Secretary, half-length figures; a most excellent picture, good alike in colour and truth of character.

11. Virgin and Child; half-length figures.

12. A Bacchanalian piece.

Rembrandt. Besides several Portraits ascribed to this great master, here is a picture of Isaac giving his blessing to Jacob.

I omit several Portraits by *Sir Peter Lely* and *Sir Godfrey Kneller*, and will only mention a few by *Sir Joshua Reynolds*—

1. The late Duke of Marlborough, with his Duchess and Six Children. The barbarous fashion of the frizzed hair, and the unbecoming dress of those times, detract from this otherwise excellent picture.

2. Another Portrait of the same Duke; and,

3. The Duchess, with a Child.

4. Lady Charlotte Spencer, as a child, telling her little brother's, (Lord H. Spencer) fortune, in the open palm of his hand. A very sweet picture.

5. Lord C. Spencer.