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Gustav Friedrich Waagen

Excerpt

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THE
TREASURES OF ART IN GREAT BRITAIN.

LETTER XIII.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE: Flemish and Dutch Schools — French School — English School.—BRIDGEWATER HOUSE: Tuscan School — Roman School — Pictures by Raphael — Lombard School — Venetian School — Bolognese School — French School — Spanish School — Flemish and Dutch Schools — English School — Chandos portrait of Shakspeare — Modern French and German Schools — Drawings by the Carracci — Foley's Ino and Infant Bacchus — Copies of old pictures.—BRITISH INSTITUTION.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

THIS royal residence was originally built for George IV., and has since been greatly extended by the addition of a wing. The apartments in which Her Majesty's entertainments are given are most suitably decorated for such purposes. A large gallery, lighted very favourably from above, contains a fine collection of pictures, chiefly of the Flemish and Dutch schools. The greater portion were purchased by George IV. This monarch had a predilection for pictures of the Dutch and Flemish schools; and, as very few possess the means of gratifying such a taste in so high a degree as a king of England, he succeeded in forming a choice gallery of the rarest and most excellent specimens of this kind in Europe. The Dutch pictures formerly belonging to Sir Thomas Baring constitute a principal part of it. To these are added a number of pictures of the highest class from other celebrated collections, which were purchased, chiefly through the intervention of Lord Farnborough, for truly princely prices.

Since the accession of Queen Victoria many interesting additions have been made to this collection, so that it now forms one of the first galleries of this school of painting in the world. I proceed to describe the pictures separately.

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TITIAN.—This landscape is the only Italian work here. The chief features are taken from the grand and poetic scenery of his native Friuli, and it is a picture which not only shows him as the founder of this style in Italy, but also as one of the greatest masters in it. Heavy thunder-clouds are opposed to a chain of sun-lit Alps. A herd of cattle are in half light in the foreground. Execution and composition are both fine alike.

The FLEMISH SCHOOL is headed by “the highflier Rubens,” as Houbraken cleverly calls him; he is well represented here in all his various forms. As a painter of sacred subjects he appears to great advantage in a careful study for his Assumption of the Virgin, formerly in the Jesuits’ church at Antwerp, and now in the cathedral. The composition is very spirited, the character of the figures unusually noble, the colouring warm and yet subdued, the effect powerful and transparent, and the keeping excellent. On wood, 3 ft. 4 in. high, 2 ft. 1 in. wide.

2. A picture which, from a passage in the catalogue of Rubens’ effects, is said to represent Pythagoras instructing his pupils in the use of fruit, is particularly characteristic of his partly historical, partly allegorical style. But the subject appears to me more probably intended for Numa Pompilius receiving the delegates from the Roman Senate, and accompanied by Egeria, dryads, and two satyrs.* Although the composition is very peculiar, yet there is an energy in the male figures, a delicacy in the female, and a masterly execution in both, as well as in the fruit painted by Snyders, which stamps this picture as one of the most distinguished works by both masters. Formerly in the possession of Lucien Bonaparte, it passed into that of Dr. Stocco, from whom it was purchased for this collection. On canvas, 8 ft. 8 in. high, 12 ft. 6 in. wide.

3. Pan pursuing the nymph Syrinx is a specimen of his mythological pictures. Although the figures are somewhat short and stout, yet there is a vivacity and a rich golden tone in the flesh, a pleasing landscape, and a careful execution, which render this small cabinet picture very attractive.

4 and 5. Rubens’ great powers as a portrait-painter are also seen

* The author might perhaps have reconsidered his opinion as to the subject of this picture, had he observed that the figure of Pythagoras is trampling beans—the vegetable he prohibited—under foot.—TR.

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to great advantage here in two pictures—the one a head of the Bishop of Antwerp, most animatedly conceived and painted in a broad and full tone; the other the portrait of a man with a falcon on his wrist, and a landscape background, in evening light, of an unusually delicate feeling for nature, and of a warm yet subdued tone; broadly but carefully executed. This is on wood, 4 ft. 6 in. high, 3 ft. 5 in. wide.

6. St. George with the dead dragon—conceived in a landscape style. Unfortunately this somewhat gaudy and spotty picture has much darkened. On canvas, 5 ft. 4 in. high, 5 ft. 7 in. wide.

7. Finally, Rubens displays himself as a landscape-painter in his well-known “*Prairie de Lacken*.” The spectator may fancy himself transported to the fertile plains of Brabant, in the neighbourhood of Brussels. The fresh green of the trees and of the luxuriant meadows is glistening in the rays of the sun, which is piercing a light cloud. Among the figures two peasant-girls, one of them carrying a basket with fruit on her head, are especially remarkable. In the careful finish of every portion scarcely any landscape of Rubens equals this, and in truth, transparency, and freshness, very few excel it. It was purchased in Paris, from the Agnard collection, for George IV. On wood, 2 ft. 10 in. high, 4 ft. 1 in. wide.

Finally I must mention a picture here attributed, but I feel erroneously, to Rubens—*Oldenbarneveldt* visited by his son. But the peculiar energy of this great master is wanting. The colouring also is feeble, and, in the figure of the son, heavy.

VANDYCK.—1. *Christ healing the lame*. An early picture, as is evident from the affinity to Rubens in colour and general treatment. The expression of the lame man is very speaking.

2. *The Virgin and Child and St. Catherine*. The conception of the Child shows the influence of Rubens, but the colouring is more subdued.

3. *The Virgin and Child*. Probably painted during his residence in Venice, for, while the somewhat thick and empty figure of the Child shows the influence of Rubens, the Virgin is decidedly Titianesque. The delicate, subdued, golden tone of this picture, and the careful execution, make it very attractive.

4. *Charles I. upon a dun-coloured horse*. Behind him *Sir Thomas Norton, Master of the Horse*. An excellent study for the great picture at Blenheim.

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5. Portrait of a man in black dress ; a book in his left hand. Both the loftiness of the conception and the flesh tones show the powerful and beneficial influence which Titian exercised over Vandyck.

6. A kind of *manège*. Three horsemen, with their horses walking, trotting, and galloping. This is a free and carefully executed copy, on a smaller scale, of a sketch by Rubens, in the Museum at Berlin.

ISAAC MYTENS.—Charles I. with his Queen and one child, in a large apartment. The figures, which are small, are painted in miniature-like style, in a tender silver tone, and testify the ability of this artist, who, before Vandyck came to England, was Charles I.'s favourite painter.

CORNELIUS JANSEN.—Charles I. and personages of his court in the Green Park ; executed in the taste of Lucas van Uden. A pretty and careful picture.

CORNELIUS PÖELENBURG.—The Campo Vaccino enlivened with numerous figures—very tender and harmonious.

FRANK HALS.—Portrait of a man : the left hand holding a glove, the right resting on his hip : to the knees. Vandyck's admiration of this painter is well justified by this specimen ; for the conception is unusually spirited and animated, even for Frank Hals, and agrees in every way with the broad and firm execution. In my opinion the real value of this painter in the history of Dutch art has never been sufficiently appreciated. He was the first who introduced the broad manner of Rubens into Holland, where it was adopted and followed up with the greatest success by Rembrandt, who was born twenty years later.

REMBRANDT.—1. A shipbuilder, occupied in making a drawing of a ship, is interrupted by his wife, who has just come into the room with a letter. Both are dressed in black, with white collars. Inscribed 1633. To the knees, the size of life. This picture, painted in his twenty-seventh year, is justly one of the most celebrated of this master. The momentary nature of the simple action, the truth of the heads, the wonderful clearness of the full bright sunlight, and the careful conscientious execution, render it extremely attractive. Compared with the picture of the Anatomical Lecture painted in 1632, now one of the chief ornaments of the Gallery of the Hague, the tone of the flesh, though still light, has a glow

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which approaches nearer the warmth of his later works. On canvas, 3 ft. 10 in. high, 8 ft. 6 in. wide. In 1810 this picture was sold for 16,500 florins at the sale of the collection of Smeth Van Alpen.

2. The entrance of the sepulchre, within which the two angels are perceived, with Mary Magdalen worshipping Christ, who appears in a white robe, with a straw hat on his head and a spade in his hand, in the figure of a gardener. This composition has, in a high degree, that strange originality which is peculiar to Rembrandt. The dawn of morning has given full scope for his deep chiaroscuro. Very carefully executed, and inscribed with his name and the year 1638. This fine picture, which was purchased in the year 1736, by the Elector of Hesse Cassel, of Madame de Reuver, was taken in 1806 to Malmaison, and brought to England in 1816. On panel, 2 ft. 0½ in. high, 1 ft. 8 in. wide.

3. His own portrait, at the age of about thirty-six. This picture is very advantageously distinguished from most of Rembrandt's portraits of himself by a subdued light golden tone, and delicate careful modelling.

4. The wife of the burgomaster Pancras, in a yellow silk dress and rich ornaments, looking at herself in the glass, and fastening an earring. Her husband, standing by in a hat and feathers, holds a string of pearls. Whole-length figures the size of life. The composition is not interesting, but the clear golden tone in the woman, and the delicate drawing and great animation of the man, are worthy of admiration. Inscribed with his name. On canvas, 5 ft. 1 in. high, 6 ft. 5 in. wide.

5. The portrait of a fair, middle-aged woman, almost a front view. She is standing at a window, in a rich dress. In a delicate full golden tone, most tenderly blended. Inscribed 1641. On canvas, 3 ft. 5½ in. high, 2 ft. 8½ in. wide. This picture was purchased of Lord Charles Townshend for 1000 guineas.

6. The Adoration of the Kings; a rich and very peculiar composition. One of the kings, with two of his attendants, is kneeling before the infant, which is in swaddling-clothes, in the Virgin's lap. The expression of reverence and devotion in the heads of these three figures, though the countenances are commonplace, is very true and natural. The whole group glows in the fullest golden tones, and the impasto is in some places so strong as to approach relief. The effect is increased by the two other kings and their

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attendants, as well as Joseph, being kept in deep shade. The treatment, notwithstanding its breadth, is careful. Inscribed with the name and the date 1657. This masterpiece was bought in for 70,000 francs in the year 1815. On panel, about 4 ft. high, 3 ft. 5 in. wide.

7. The portrait of a Rabbi, in a deep reddish golden tone, but more indistinct and less energetic than usual. On canvas, 3 ft. 2½ in. high, 2 ft. 6 in. wide.

NICHOLAS MAAS.—A girl, with her finger on her lip, stealing softly down a dark staircase. She seems as if intending to listen to, or to surprise, three persons who are seen in another room, with a lantern. A cat is on a chair. It is not possible to describe the naïve and animated expression of the girl. This picture, which is the best known to me of this master, is very nearly equal to Rembrandt in power and warmth of chiaroscuro, and only a little inferior in transparency of tone and spirit of touch. Inscribed, "N. MAES. A. 1665."

GERARD DOW.—1. A pretty girl standing at a bow-window busy scouring a pan. This pleasing little picture, of admirable impasto and full warm harmony, has been engraved by Wille, under the name of "La Ménagère." On panel, 8½ in. high, 5 in. wide.

2. A girl chopping onions in a tub; a boy by her; highly finished in the most tender yet warm tone, with a striking effect of light. Inscribed 1646, and mentioned by Descamps. On panel, 8 in. high, 6½ in. wide.

3. A grocer's wife weighing out raisins to a young girl at a window. On the window-sill are gingerbread, sugar, and other articles. Other figures in the background. On the outside of the window a relief with children. The heads are pleasing and natural; the finish exquisite; the tone very warm, and in this respect preferable to the picture of the same subject in the Louvre. From the Choiseul collection. On panel, 1 ft. 6 in. high, 1 ft. 1 in. wide.

4. An old woman watering a flower in a pot; distinguished for warmth of tone and excellent keeping, in addition to his usual finish.

5. The portrait of an old man, about a fourth the size of life. Both in the warm tone, and in the broad though careful treatment, the pupil of Rembrandt may be recognised.

TERBURG.—1. A slender, fair girl, in a white satin dress, standing reading a letter to her mother, who is seated, and

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dressed in a blue jacket, trimmed with ermine, and seems, by the pen in her hand, about to write an answer. A page approaches the daughter with a gold dish and ewer. In the foreground a spaniel on a chair covered with velvet. One fancies here a scene from some novel in the higher class of society. With the usual naïveté of feeling and elegance which appear in every part, this picture combines a delicacy of drawing, a depth of chiaroscuro, a warmth of tone, a solidity of impasto, and a freedom of treatment, with all the carefulness of execution, which are rarely found in Terburg. It is, besides, in a wonderful state of preservation. On canvas, 2 ft. 7½ in. high, 2 ft. 2½ in. wide.

2. A girl sitting at a table, in a red velvet jacket trimmed with ermine, invited by a gentleman standing near to drink a glass of champagne. Finished with great delicacy, though rather pale in the flesh. Unhappily, many portions are retouched; for instance, the arms of the girl.

METZU.—1. A young female fruit-dealer selling grapes to an old woman who is leaning on the hatch of the house door; pleasing and spirited in the character, and in the warm tone and impasto resembling Gerard Dow. Of the early period of the master. On panel, 1 ft. 6 in. high, 1 ft. 2½ in. wide.

2. A gentleman seated near a harpsichord, playing the violoncello; a lady with a music-book coming down a flight of stairs. Another gentleman is in a corridor. An admirable picture, of the middle period of the master; of a warm tone, great harmony, and, for him, remarkably delicate execution.

3. His own portrait; standing at a bow-window, holding in his left hand pencil, pallet, and maul-stick; in his right a piece of white chalk. On the sill is a plaster head, and a board on which he appears to have been drawing. Also a masterpiece, in the warm, careful manner of his middle period, and of the most charming effect, from the half light in which the head is kept, while the rest of the figure is in the light.

4. A girl drinking champagne, which a cavalier has poured out for her. The colouring of this is subdued, though delicately balanced.

A repetition of the celebrated "Corset Bleu," the original of which is now in the collection of Mr. Neeld, is, in my opinion, not by Metzu.

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A cook before a door, engaged in conversation, promises much, but hangs too high for me to give an opinion upon it.

FRANS VAN MIERIS.—The specimens here of this master are not fortunate; for, of almost all the pictures here called his, there are better examples elsewhere. That which I like best is a boy at a window blowing bubbles, inscribed 1663; for though there are admirable repetitions of it in the Gallery of the Hague and elsewhere, this one is worthy of the master in warmth and clearness of tone and delicacy of touch. This is the case in a less degree with the woman feeding a parrot, of which there are better examples in the Gallery at Munich, and in Sir Robert Peel's collection.

3. A man smoking giving wine to a girl. Better versions of this picture occur, which is here somewhat heavy in the shadows, though well worthy of the master in its solid execution.

SLINGELANDT.—1. A mother with a child at her breast; a little girl by her side blowing a flute; near the fire the cat. A very pleasing picture for the expression of homely but comfortable domestic life, and so warm in tone and light, and so careful in execution, as to be here erroneously ascribed to Gerard Dow. On panel, 1 ft. 4 in. high, 1 ft. 1½ in. wide.

2. Of similar merits is a woman sewing, in a light room, with her child in the cradle. This picture, too, which was formerly in Cassel, and afterwards at Malmaison, was subsequently sold as a Gerard Dow to Maximilian, King of Bavaria; and after his death sold by auction under the same name. On panel, 1 ft. 7 in. high, 1 ft. 2 in. wide.

NETSCHER.—Portrait of William III. of England. Whole-length figure, with all the delicacy and transparency of the master in the head. The dark tone of the rest of the picture indicates his later time.

SCHALKEN.—I do not know any gallery which can show three such masterpieces as this collection.

1. "Le Roi Detroussé," a game in which the person who incurs the forfeit is deprived of his clothes. In a company of four women and three men, one of the latter has incurred the penalty, and is stripped to his shirt. Merriment and bashfulness are here admirably expressed, according to the circumstances, in the several persons. While in delicacy of execution he approaches his master

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Gerard Dow, the tone of the colour is, for him, of remarkable depth, clearness, and warmth. On panel, 2 ft. 1½ in. high, 1 ft. 7½ in. wide. So far back as the year 1803, 390 guineas were paid for this picture.

2. The painter and his family, assembled round a table, form a musical party. He accompanies on the violin the singing of his wife and of a gentleman, while two other gentlemen are listening to the performance. This composition, which is distinguished by happy arrangement, and delicacy and truth of expression, is well known by Wille's masterly engraving. A pure feeling for nature very rare with Schalken, a most careful execution, and warm harmony, contribute to enhance the value of the picture. 1 ft. 11 in. high, 1 ft. 7 in. wide.

3. A pretty young girl, of a cheerful expression, holding a candle in one hand, and drawing aside a curtain with the other. This picture is also of the early period of Schalken; and in body, decision of forms, truth of lighting, and delicacy of execution, it nearly equals a similar subject by Gerard Dow. On panel, 1 ft. 1½ in. high, 10¼ in. wide.

WILLIAM VAN MIERIS.—Three pictures by this master are not among his best works.

EGLON VAN DER NEER.—1. A gentleman and lady performing music. Most delicately treated, but unfortunately very dark.

2. The death of Cleopatra, in the costume of the painter's time, and, like such subjects by Dutch masters, far less attractive than those which lay in their own sphere.

ADRIAN VAN DER WERF.—1. Lot and his daughters. The same composition as in the Museum at Berlin, and of equal merit. On panel, 1 ft. 5 in. high, 1 ft. 3 in. wide.

2. A boy with a guinea-pig, and a girl with a kitten. Inscribed "A. v. DER WERFF, 16 . . f." The last two ciphers are illegible. Such a picture as this, which is unfortunately very rare, proves that this master was in no respect inferior to Netscher in truth and delicacy, and that his talent lay particularly in such subjects. How far more attractive are they to the true lover of art than his usual oversmooth and expressionless forms like figures in ivory, which affect to belong to historical painting!

JAN STEEN.—1. An elegantly dressed girl seated at the side of a bed drawing on a stocking; by her side a spaniel. On a table

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covered with a rich cloth, a casket with pearls, a candle, and a perfume-bottle. Inscribed 1663. The admirable impasto, the spirited execution, which rivals the finest Metzu, the bright and admirably graduated morning light, and the cool harmony of the colours, in which blue and violet prevail, render this one of the choicest pictures of the master. On canvas, 2 ft. 2 in. high, 1 ft. 9 in. wide. This fine picture was not put up in the gallery in 1850. It may have been, on account of the subject, placed in a less frequented room.

2. A party of eleven persons amusing themselves with card-playing and music; Jan Steen himself among them, playing the violin, at the same time looking at a young woman. Very humorous in composition, careful in treatment, but in the tone of the colour, with the exception of a woman, brownish. On canvas, 2 ft. 10 in. high, 2 ft. 3½ in. wide.

3. A number of country people eating, drinking, and dancing in a public-house. Animated and jovial in conception, at the same time painted in a solid body, and delicately finished; only rather dark in the general tone. On canvas, 2 ft. high, 2 ft. 5½ in. wide.

4. Twelfth Night. The attention of seven persons is directed to the king, who is just emptying his glass. A little boy is endeavouring to put out the tapers on the floor. A picture of uncommon humour in this low sphere, but less carefully executed, and rather heavy and brown in the colouring.

5. A party of country people indulging in riotous mirth before a public-house situated on a canal; seven more merry fellows arriving in a boat. A rich composition, carefully executed, but too brown in the general tone. On canvas, 3 ft. 8 in. high, 4 ft. 11 in. wide.

6. A party of four men and one woman, some of them diverting themselves at cards. A well-painted and valuable picture. On canvas, 1 ft. 5½ in. high, 1 ft. 3 in. wide.

JAN MOLENAER.—A peasant woman and a boy in a landscape. This master, who belongs to the best period of the Dutch school of the seventeenth century, appears in such a picture as this so vivid in conception, so warm and transparent in his colouring, as to approach very nearly the masters of the first class.

PETER DE HOOGE.—1. Three gentlemen and a lady, assembled